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The battleground of asylum and immigration policies: a conceptual inquiry

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ABSTRACT
Scholarship has sought to develop theoretical frameworks to set order on the rather muddled web of actors, interactions and tensions involved in asylum and immigration policies. The article considers three of them: the "venue shopping approach", the "multi-level governance approach" and critical humanitarian studies.

The purpose is to contribute to this debate by elaborating the concept of "battleground" of asylum (and immigration) policies. With this concept, I mean that they are a contentious field in which different actors interact, cooperating or conflicting. Different levels of public responsibility are involved but also non-public actors play a role. They encompass various pro-migrant supporters but also xenophobic movements. The article will analyse the crucial actors involved, with a focus on the local level: pro-refugee civil society; coalitions of diverse pro-refugee actors; opponents to refugee reception; local governments acting for and against refugee and migrant reception and asylum seekers and irregular immigrants themselves.

Asylum issues and policies have represented a contentious argument in recent years, both in Europe and in the USA, and the object of a burgeoning body of scholarship (see, among many others: Schmoll, Thiollet, and Wihtol de Wenden 2015; De Haas, Castles, and Miller 2020). Public powers at different levels and various actors are involved: political parties, social movements, mass media and different subjects from civil society, ranging from pro-refugee mobilizations to xenophobic and Islamophobic movements, groups and individual militants. On both sides of the Atlantic, in particular, the electorates of several countries have substantially rewarded anti-immigrant

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parties, including the far-right, and their claims. Brexit in the UK, the election of President Donald Trump in the United States, the success of xenophobic discourse in Hungary and Poland, the advancement of Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, the electoral victory of anti-establishment parties in Italy in 2018, are among the better-known expressions of this trend. Mediatization and politicization have constructed a "refugee crisis" (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, and Wodak 2018), giving an alarmistic connotation to the debate.

Against this backdrop, a widespread perception is that the governance of asylum has become more complex and even chaotic, even if its outcomes appear generally to fall very short of a coherent respect for human rights and international conventions in Western affluent countries (Faist 2017).

Scholarship has sought to develop theoretical frameworks to set order on the rather muddled web of actors, interactions and tensions involved in this issue. Among them, I can cite the "venue shopping approach" and the "multi-level governance approach". A different but related stream of literature refers to so-called "humanitarianism", especially in the version adopted by critical humanitarian studies (Ticktin 2014).

In this article, my purpose is to contribute to this debate by elaborating the concept of "battleground" of asylum (and immigration) policies.

Even if my main focus is on asylum policies, scholarship and public debate often refer also to immigrants with unclear or irregular legal status or to immigration policies more in general: categories overlap, especially since the beginning of the European "refugee reception crisis" (Della Porta 2018a; Rea et al. 2019). Consequently, I will consider both these related fields of policy.

The article is organized as follows. In the first section, I will present the three approaches to asylum (and immigration) policies that I intend to discuss. In the second section, I will introduce the concept of "battleground". Thereafter, I will analyze the crucial actors on the battleground: pro-refugee civil society (Civil society and de-bordering solidarity); coalitions of diverse pro-refugee actors, and opponents to refugee reception (Coalitions and oppositions); local governments acting for and against refugee and migrant reception (Cities of refuge, cities of exclusion); and asylum seekers and irregular immigrants (Refugees' and migrants' voice). The last section will summarize the results and suggest some directions for future research.

Three approaches to asylum and immigration policies

In order to introduce and discuss the concept of battleground, I start by presenting the three approaches mentioned above.

Firstly, the venue shopping approach brilliantly highlighted how border control and related decisions are shifting from the national level in three directions: "upward to intergovernmental fora, downward to elected local authorities, and outward to private actors such as airline carriers, shipping companies, employers, and private security agencies" (Guiraudon and Lahav 2000, 164). Guiraudon (2000, 252) emphasized, in particular, the internationalization of control, arguing

> Political actors seek policy venues where the balance of forces is tipped in their favour. Law and order officials responsible for migration control gain from operating in international venues in three ways. Firstly, they are not under the same judicial constraints as is the case at the national level. Secondly, they contend with less opposition from other ministries, parliamentarians, or migrant aid groups than arises in the national framework. Thirdly, they have enlisted "sheriff's deputies" […] in these venues, in particular transit and sending countries.

The last aspect has been further elaborated, following the developments of migration policies, and highlighting "a growing emphasis on extraterritorial control" (Lavenex 2006, 252). This means essentially the externalization (or outsourcing) of border controls, establishing agreements to engage countries of origin and transit to control the flows of migrants and asylum seekers (Faist 2017). Fears about what is conceived as "uncontrolled immigration" and its connection with other security threats, such as terrorism or Islamic fundamentalism have produced a strategic displacement of attention towards the external dimension of borders controls. In these processes, national governments have not lost power, but they have strengthened their autonomy, because their action at the intergovernmental level has become more independent from the pluralistic domestic arena (Lavenex 2006, 331).

A rich body of scholarship on borders enforcement has complemented this process. National borders have been invested by a new saliency, responding to an increasing demand for security and defence against external threats (Newman 2006).

National borders are a site in which the sovereign power of States is politically highlighted, and immigration policies are clearly connected to this meaning of borders (Geddes 2005). Furthermore, governments emphasize the function of borders as "regulatory mobility filters" (Ribas-Mateos 2015, 159), and consequently enact a border management "selective and targeted" (Rumford 2006, 164). Loss of control of financial flows and goods' exchange is (symbolically and ideologically) compensated by stricter control on human mobility (De Genova 2015) when it concerns people coming from the global South and not belonging to economic elites (De Haas, Natter, and Vezzoli 2018). Apparently, there is currently a trend to reinstitute national sovereignty with an absolute value, but it actually occurs against the enforcement of universal human rights and far less against economic forces and

upper social classes. Portes (2020) has spoken of the "end of compassion", with reference to US immigration policies, highlighting a "bifurcation" in the treatment of prospective immigrants along socio-economic lines.

Thereafter, scholarship in recent years has emphasized the formation of a "fluctuating landscape of frontiers" (Agier 2014), with the establishment of various types of walls and fences (Balibar 2012). This implies the growing recourse to sophisticated technologies (Dijstelbloem and Broeders 2015; Andersson 2016) and to forms of control at a distance (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010). At the borders and within the EU, this process is closely interwoven with the management of the so-called "refugee crisis".

The "venue shopping" approach, consequently, is centred on the role of public authorities, and especially on the link between the national and the international policy (Guiraudon 2000). When it considers private actors, it views them essentially as executors of immigration policies, and also local powers occupy a secondary place in this framework.

Here the MLG approach enters the scene to take better account of the construction of immigration and asylum policies as a complex process in which diverse institutional and also non-institutional subjects play a role (Scholten et al. 2018). It has highlighted the passage "from government to governance", showing that political processes and decisions depend on interactions and negotiations among multiple levels of policy-making.

More than the "venue shopping" approach, it reveals that the central role of nation-states has been challenged not only by processes of supra-nationalization but also by crucial processes of sub-nationalization, i.e. the growing role of local institutions and elected authorities (Hepburn and Zapata Barrero 2014). At the same time, also non-governmental actors have acquired more space. The first line of interaction (supra-national, national and sub-national public powers) is termed the "vertical dimension" of MLG, and it has been more widely analysed. The second line (public versus non-public actors) represents the "horizontal dimension", and to date, it has remained rather neglected, as interactions between the vertical and the horizontal levels (Caponio and Jones-Correa 2018). Multilevel governance is usually conceived as a structure of relations which involve some forms of coordinated actions and where the frames of migration policies are similar or at least congruent between levels (Scholten 2013; Campomori and Ambrosini 2020). Even if tensions and divergences between levels and actors have been considered, ultimately most scholarship tends to see MLG as a "negotiated order" (Alcantara and Nelles 2014). When local and national authorities have different opinions and attitudes, a "decoupling strategy" is envisioned (Scholten et al. 2018). Open conflict is rarely analysed (among the exceptions: Spencer 2018). Also in this case, however, the contrast is developed on the vertical dimension, i.e. between central and local authorities, not on the horizontal dimension. As the author admits, joining Caponio and Jones-Correa

(2018), "the key role of civil society is […], a further, underexplored factor to be assessed" (Spencer 2018, 2048).

The MLG approach is shared by several scholars in migration studies, but it is also the target of criticisms. Noted, among other aspects is the lack of focus on actors, on networks and on conflict (Pettrachin 2020). A more thorough analysis of the horizontal dimension of governance, of divergences between public and non-public actors, of the role of civil society with its various subjects, should be integrated into the discussion of asylum and immigration policies.

From this perspective, critical humanitarian studies have filled a gap by considering NGOs as key actors in response to crises endangering huge numbers of human beings. To be noted is the different background of this scholarship. While the venue shopping approach has been developed by political scientists, and the MLG approach is shared by political scientists and political sociologists, critical humanitarian studies have been conducted mainly by anthropologists, sociologists, researchers in the fields of development and post-colonial studies. They stem from research on humanitarian interventions in developing countries, especially when involved in armed conflicts, persecutions of minorities, forced displacements of populations but also projects of development.

In this regard, Ticktin (2014) has highlighted the shift from a first period of alliance between scholars and the moral project of humanitarianism, to a second period, starting in the 2000s, of prevailing criticism of humanitarianism and of its unintended consequences: "critiques that often suggested that humanitarianism should be entirely abandoned or dismantled" (277). More recent studies do not substantially change this attitude (e.g. Sözer 2020). This approach, different from the previous ones, focuses the attention on non-public actors but sees them essentially as accomplices of border closures and co-opted into the hegemonic neo-liberal project. They bear the task of "managing the indesirables" (Agier 2011) or at best of softening the harshest consequences of migration policies, mixing a bit of compassion with the dominant frame of repression (Fassin 2005, 2012).

What is relevant to my analysis is the fact that this approach has been applied by many scholars also in consideration of grassroots initiatives of solidarity towards refugees in the European Union and elsewhere (Pries 2018).

At the beginning, scholarship displayed a more sympathetic vision, focusing especially on No-Borders movements and seeing a counter-hegemonic meaning in their protests (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen 2019). More recent studies, instead, have denounced the primacy of emotions and victimization of refugees (Karakayali 2017); the infiltration of personal and selfish interests (Malkki 2015), like the search for gratitude (Moulin 2012) or for personal gratification in the form of "narcissistic samaritanism" (Kapoor 2005);

the reproduction of inequalities and hierarchies (Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017); the exercise of a "mental motherhood" and attitudes of superiority (Braun 2017). Often denounced has been also the lack or shortage of political engagement (Kleres 2017; Sinatti 2019). Squire (2014, 17) summarizes various criticisms, observing "both an understatement and an overstatement of migrant subjectivities" in humanitarian interventions: or romanticizing their struggles, or reducing them "to a humanity which is denied" (Squire 2014, 17).

Also authors discussing "subversive humanitarianism" (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen 2019) insist on its "ambiguities": "vertical relations" between aid providers and recipients, the creation of specific subject categories based on vulnerability, legal status or deservingness, and substitution for failing government policies. Overall, in many respects, they assimilate grass-roots mobilization with depoliticized humanitarianism.

The concept of battleground

Drawing on these streams of literature but also intending to respond to some of their shortcomings, I shall now introduce the concept of "battleground" to grasp the dynamics of asylum and migration policies better.

With this concept, I mean that they are a contentious field in which different actors interact, sometimes cooperating and in other cases conflicting. Different levels of public responsibility are involved but also non-public actors play a role. They encompass various pro-migrant supporters but also xenophobic movements. Both sides can establish alliances and coalitions and try to mould public policies.

Several authors have already introduced the concept of "border struggles" in regard to migrants' movements and protests (De Genova 2015; Oliveri 2016) or to humanitarian mobilisations (Squire 2014). The concept of battleground extends beyond these issues to encompass the various actors, actions and interactions which shape migration and asylum governance. These factors operate not only at the national borders and at the moment of entrance, and not only through migrants' movements; they also do so in different locations and through different actors who assume a role in migrants' inclusion in receiving societies.

While De Genova (2015, 3) has recalled "the proliferation of sites of border enforcement far removed from physical borders at the territorial margins of nation-states", at the same time, these sites become fields of confrontation among different stakeholders in migration policies.

The battleground concept can be applied at the international level, considering NGOs boats which rescue human beings despite governmental and judicial opposition (Stierl 2016); or "cities of refuge" establishing Transnational Municipal Networks with the aim of influencing national and international policies (Oomen 2019a); or activists and volunteers helping asylum

seekers to cross national borders, despite police controls and legal actions (Giliberti and Queirolo Palmas 2020).

The dynamics of the battleground, however, become more visible at the local level. Local authorities can align with central governments or adopt a different approach, more open to asylum seekers and to migrants, or more hostile to their reception. They interact with civil society actors in different ways, cooperating, tolerating or conflicting. Immigrants and refugees, in turn, can organize, trying to make their voices heard in the political debate. Activists can support their struggles.

Furthermore, activities of support by local actors can curb the effectiveness of restrictions, as occurs in the typical cases of rejected asylum seekers and unauthorized immigrants. On the other side, activities of both reception and local integration, in labour and housing markets, can be endangered by the spread of xenophobic attitudes.

In conclusion, the outcome of asylum governance is often different from what is imagined and pursued by national governments. Competing visions and political divides shape international, national and local policies, but their outcome is also influenced by political mobilisations, movements of protest, informal practices and various forms of practical help, provided both by institutional and non-institutional actors, as well as by street-level bureaucracies. Social and political actors define their identity taking part in this "battleground", in relation, and also in contrast with the positions of other actors.

The concept of battleground, in sum, is intended to make sense of the perception that in contemporary Europe

> what emerges is a fractured political and social landscape where several actors – public and private, national and international, politically organized or individual citizens, volunteers, activists, social workers, researchers – are involved in the redefinition of European borders in a historic time of changes and increasing social conflicts. (Fontanari and Borri 2017, 33)

I will now analyse some crucial subjects on the battleground: civil society actors; local authorities; anti-refugee movements; coalitions among actors; refugees, irregular migrants and their movements.

Civil society and de-bordering solidarity

Critical humanitarian studies tend to see "humanitarianism" as a unitary subject, without internal distinctions, and consider it as an ally of national governments and supra-national agencies in shaping a migration regime of selective mobility and substantial closure to South–North flows. I contend that (humanitarian) civil society is an extensive and multiform network of subjects, with different levels of structural organization, economic endowment and professional capacity. I identify four types of subjects:

(a) NGOs and other Third Sector Organizations (TSOs), funded with public money or private donations, endowed essentially with a professional staff, which undertake complex activities, ranging from Search and Rescue operations to the management of reception centres;
(b) Other civil society organizations, such as associations, trade unions, religious institutions, which mix waged workers with volunteers in various combinations; they are often not specialized but supply services or give help to asylum seekers among other activities, and in general do not like to distinguish regular and irregular immigrants among their beneficiaries;
(c) Social movements, which have a base of activists but not a waged staff, and have started to supply services to migrants as a complement to their protest against the political and economic system: for instance accommodation in squatted buildings, but also food, language classes, bureaucratic assistance;
(d) Common citizens, without any political, associational or religious affiliation, who have spontaneously mobilized for the reception of asylum seekers (Rea et al. 2019; Pries 2018 for Germany) and to support immigrants in difficult circumstances.

Furthermore, to be noted is that also NGOs, the main target of criticism can take initiatives which go against public policies, as in the case of vessels saving lives in the Mediterranean against the firm opposition of the Italian government and accusations by the judiciary. Padoan (2017) has analysed in detail the conflict between European and Italian authorities provoked by Frontex and NGOs rescuing lives in the Mediterranean. In Italy, the second Security Decree (Law 77 of 2019), issued by Matteo Salvini, Home Affairs Minister of the first Conte government, has managed to stop their operations by threatening huge fines and criminal charges.

Volunteers' activities certainly have limitations and flaws, such as instability and dependence on emotions, but in any case, they have to be appreciated against a backdrop of polarization of public opinion and increasing hostility towards asylum seekers in many countries. As Castañeda (2013, 228) observes in regard to medical aid to unauthorized immigrants in Berlin, this activity disrupts

> the meaning of citizenship through acts of citizens on behalf of noncitizens. These acts of citizenship are also acts, or protests, against citizenship, utilizing medical aid as a powerful form of dissent. As a "protest against citizenship" […], these citizens express solidarity with migrants beyond the traditional bounds of political community.

For this reason, "volunteer humanitarianism" (Sandri 2018) can be considered, in my view, as a form of "active citizenship": a notion which emphasizes the practice of citizenship beyond its legal dimension. I maintain that active

citizenship is not performed only by engaging in political militancy and protests but also through "mundane" acts of citizenship, beyond the formulation given by Isin and Nielsen (2008), such as providing food or shelter, teaching language, organizing entertainment for people in need.

These expressions of active citizenship produce what I term "de-bordering solidarity". With their actions of help, activists and volunteers contest policies of asylum and borders in practice, even without aiming to achieve profound political changes and without sharing the ideology and rules of conduct of big humanitarian agencies. For this reason, de-bordering solidarity can also expand the support to asylum seekers, involving other citizens not eager to engage in political struggles, even if it can be connected in various ways to more explicit political claims. In conclusion, it re-writes the script of citizenship, enriching it with new ideas about entitlements and belongings.

Coalitions and oppositions

I identified different types of actors from civil society; but a significant aspect of the battleground of migration policies is the formation of alliances and networks, in this case by very different actors. They range from the radical left to religious institutions; they can include trade unions and immigrants' associations but also sometimes employers (Chimienti 2011). They build what in political science are usually termed "advocacy coalitions", i.e. groups of actors who share core policy beliefs and try to translate their beliefs into policies (Pierce 2017).

Several years ago, when discussing US immigration policies, Zolberg (2006) called them "strange bedfellows" highlighting the diversity of political beliefs and interests of actors who supported the reform of such policies. The same metaphor can be employed in order to show the convergence between different stakeholders in favour of migrants and asylum seekers.

In Italy, Zincone pointed out the crucial role played by the advocacy coalition in favour of immigrants, calling it "a strong lobby for the weaker strata" (2011, 259), which focused on the categories of immigrants in the most disadvantaged conditions, repeatedly demanding regularizations for third-country nationals without proper documents.

Convergence among different actors in pro-immigrant coalitions, however, should not be taken for granted. In France, Nicholls (2013a), on examining the relational dynamics of the immigrant rights movement, found a network made up of different groups of immigrants and well-established rights organizations. Beyond tensions between immigrants and their more powerful native supporters (see below), networks tend to be selective, preferring to accept and make visible the support obtained from recognized subjects and institutions of the receiving society, rather than support from more disputed actors, such as mosques or Muslim associations.

On the battleground of refugee reception, also the other front deserves attention, i.e. anti-immigrant mobilizations and social movements. Their main arguments are well-known: fear of invasion and even population's substitution; threat of Islamist terrorism and fundamentalism; defence of national sovereignty; preservation of cultural traditions, usually defined as European and Christian; blame of powerful external actors, such as the Soros Foundation, indicated as the organizers of an international plot against the nation. What is interesting, in particular, is what Castelli Gattinara (2017) called the invasion of "the linguistic territory of their opponents" (Castelli Gattinara 2017, 87), when for instance they claim their solidarity with the local poor, against the reception of foreign refugees, or assert that a better solution of the problem should be helping them in their own country. In the same vein, Fassin (2010) observed that nationalist discourse often claims to defend liberal values, such as women's rights, triggering a "sexual clash of civilizations".

Consequently, in Italy, and in other countries, such as Germany, far-right movements have found a new political space through the opposition against asylum seekers and reception centres. They demonstrated in the streets together with local residents, and sometimes also with local authorities, included mayors belonging to centre-left parties. They organized traffic blocks and local riots, finding visibility and new supporters (Castelli Gattinara 2017).

Rea et al. (2019) make another relevant point by underlining that, differently from pro-refugees solidarity, the socio-cultural beliefs embedded in these mobilizations are directly represented by formal political parties (27). This means that they can more easily achieve an institutional legitimization. Crucial on the battleground is the effort to win the hearts and minds of public opinion, making their own language, representation, diagnosis the prevailing frame to evaluate the issue and to respond to it. Pro-refugees actors have often inadvertently adopted their opponents' views in this regard: the overlapping of immigrants and asylum seekers; the image of huge flows of refugees; the fact that immigrants are mainly young Muslim males coming from Africa; the idea that Europe is the main hosting region of these flows (for a deconstruction of the dominant discourse on forced migrations: Faist 2017).

Cities of refuge, cities of exclusion

The battleground of reception policies involves not only national governments and civil society but also local authorities, whose role is often decisive: a "local turn" in migration studies and in migration policies has been detected for several years (Penninx, Berger, and Kraal 2006). Immigrants and refugees, after all, are settled in specific places, they interact with local institutions, they search for employment, accommodation and services in local societies, they

meet local residents and their children attend local schools (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2009).

Attitudes of local governments can vary and also their relations with civil society's actors. A study conducted in Italy identified four different configurations of relations between municipalities and non-public actors: (a) closure by local governments versus civil society activism: in this case, municipalities not only reject asylum seekers' reception, but contrast private solidarity as well; (b) tolerance, when municipalities do not accept to host asylum seekers, but implicitly admit that pro-refugees actors establish support services outside the public domain and without receiving public funds; (c) institutional activism (by local governments) versus anti-immigrant mobilizations, when municipalities agree to engage in asylum seekers' reception together with civil society but have to face demonstrations and protests by far-right movements and local residents; (d) cooperation, when a framework of acceptance is established, and public authorities work with NGOs and volunteers without encountering strong opposition (Campomori and Ambrosini 2020).

On both sides of the Atlantic, something more has been detected: an engagement by city governments which goes beyond national policies and often contrasts with them (Dimitriadis et al. 2020). This is the case of "cities of refuge" (Oomen 2019a) or, according to another definition, "sanctuary cities" (Bauder 2017), where "local authorities, civic groups, and activists challenge national immigration laws, policies, and practices" (174).

This definition makes clear three aspects: municipal governments declare their will to protect asylum seekers and unauthorized immigrants; they do so also in contrast with national governments; and they establish alliances and forms of cooperation with pro-immigrant actors from civil society. These cities present themselves as "sites of pragmatic politics and hotbeds of inclusion", and at the same time, they claim "a de facto sovereignty over what was once a clear national competence" (Oomen 2019a, 121).

Furthermore, in Europe, they have established international networks of cities, serving practical but also symbolic, cultural and political purposes: they aim to develop narratives about migration that counter (national) restrictive discourses and try to influence the global legal framework as was the case with the Global Compact on Refugees and Migrants. They not only contest present migration policies but also they aspire to improve global migration governance (Oomen 2019b). In the USA, the number of Sanctuary Cities and the political conflict around them grew dramatically after the election of President Donald Trump (Lasch et al. 2018), with a series of court cases in general unsuccessful for the Trump administration.

In Europe, examples of this municipal activism encompass Barcelona, with the "Ciutat Refugi Plan" (Agustín and Jørgensen 2019; Garcés-Mascareñas and Gebhardt 2020); the British "City of Sanctuary" movement (Darling and Squire 2013); the Dutch municipalities which have developed local solutions to cope

with exclusionary national asylum policies (Kos, Maussen, and Doomernik 2015).

Other local governments, on the contrary, have enacted exclusionary policies. Some US States, Canada and Italy have provided striking examples. In such cases, local powers are actively committed to combating irregular immigration with more determination than the federal government (Chand and Schreckhise 2014). They can use several tools at their disposal, such as local land-use ordinances and ordinances that prevent certain behaviours in the public spaces of the city, to constrain circulation, access and opportunities for unauthorized immigrants (Varsanyi 2008). From Canada, Gilbert (2009) echoed this trend, observing that small-town governments enforced local controls on the presence and conduct of newcomers on their territories.

In Italy, local "policies of exclusion" are conceived as

> those measures, adopted by local authorities, which aim to ostracize migrants, to separate them, in term of rights, from the citizen component of the population by establishing specific prohibitions against them, and which set up special screening procedures or limit their access to benefits and local social policy resources. (Ambrosini 2020, 7)

Beyond contents, their meaning is particularly significant because they can be defined as "institutionalized forms of intolerance" (Ambrosini 2020, 7). Since 2014 these policies have been redirected especially against asylum seekers. Many local governments have protested against and tried to resist the settlement of refugees on their territory (Marchetti 2020): sometimes only verbally, in other cases inviting citizens to demonstrate in the streets against the establishment of reception centres, or issuing ordinances which forbid landowners to rent out flats or buildings to host asylum seekers, or preventing volunteers from giving food or other goods to migrants in transit.

To deepen the discursive dimension of the battleground, arguments used by mayors deserve attention (Ambrosini 2019; 2020). A first argument is a claim for local autonomy against the imposition of reception facilities by the national government: "a frame of contrast between overbearing central powers and peaceful local communities, which are obliged to host unknown and dangerous aliens" (Campomori and Ambrosini 2020, 10).

Connected to this is the "victim complex" (Campomori and Ambrosini 2020, 10): in explaining their reasons, local authorities have often presented themselves as the "victims" of an "invasion", constructing an opposition between "us", the local community, and "them", the "aliens", who invade the territory.

Local authorities not only contrast the settlement of asylum seekers. They exacerbate also a differential access to local welfare services, increasing a "civic stratification" between different categories of residents already established at the national level (Morris 2002; Kraler and Bonizzoni 2010; Anderson 2013).

In enforcing an opposition between historical residents and (alien) newcomers, anti-immigrant local forces have gained political consensus. A process that sees the creation of a paranoid sense of community marked by the perception of invasion and threat. In this way, native residents also find an explanation for their problems, such as reduction of public services, economic decline of territory, poor prospects for new generations, feelings of a growing insecurity, by shifting the responsibility to newcomers. All these issues are indeed connected with the arrival of asylum seekers (or of migrants more in general) and to the decisions by national authorities to welcome them, providing resources that in this view would be withheld from local citizens.

In sum, local authorities can establish alliances with civil society actors in enhancing the protection of refugees' and migrants' rights. Or they can retreat from direct engagement in this field and give way to autonomous initiatives by civil-society actors, or even oppose their activity, according to a trend of "criminalization of solidarity" (Campomori and Ambrosini 2020).

Refugees' and migrants' voice

Last but not least, other relevant actors on the battleground of asylum policies are refugees, asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers and other immigrants in a weak legal condition. On the one hand, their practices of daily resistance, and on the other, their more explicit claims, political protests and struggles have been the object of a wide stream of research, also as a reaction against "victimization" of refugees (and irregular immigrants) and against denial of their capacity for social and political agency (Anderson 2008).

The first dimension of irregular migrants' and asylum seekers' agency regards their efforts to settle, access resources and earn a living, despite legal impediments. The basic form of opposition against policies of restriction is survival. Exploiting uncertainty, contradictions and ambiguities of legal rules (Bommes and Sciortino 2011), liberal constraints of Western legislations and judiciary systems (Hollifield, Martin, and Orrenius 2014), local policies of refuge, as already seen (Oomen 2019b), networks of compatriots (Engbersen, van San, and Leerkes 2006), support from groups of local activists and civil society's actors (Fontanari 2017), migrants find ways to remain (Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter 2014), resist removal (Ellermann 2010), claim deservingness and acceptance (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014) and wait for windows of regularization (Ambrosini 2016).

Chimienti (2018) talks of "weak agency": even if not demanding deep structural changes, refugees (and unauthorized migrants) at the same time challenge the social order by their mere presence. Their agency is necessarily

ambivalent, because in the precarious conditions in which they live, their claims are essentially existential: aspirations and actions of an instrumental and individualistic nature. Moulin and Thomaz (2016) go further by pointing out the "imperceptible tactical politics" (600) deployed by Haitian refugees in Brazil, to move, stay, work, live and survive, fighting implicitly against the restrictions imposed by reception policies.

Immigrants at the margins of, or outside, the legal system have also enacted, however, overt political actions. Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl (2016) talk of "connected and global struggles for and of movement" (528) and "global enactments of citizenship" (529).

These struggles have often taken radical forms, such as the occupation of churches or cranes, hunger strikes, lip-sewing, settlements in public spaces of the city centres (Cappiali 2016; Fontanari 2017). In particular, "refugees employ spatial strategies to create visibility […] By moving to geographically and socially central spaces, refugees literally leave behind their excluded position" (Ataç 2016, 632). Self-inflicted suffering, moreover, shows how in extreme cases refugees are capable of turning their body "into a tool of resistance" (Ataç 2016, 640).

Marches are another well-known form of protest, performed in various forms and in many countries (Monforte and Dufour 2013). They acquire a performative character, as moments of rupture that empower and create possibilities: they become opportunities for participants to regain power over their own lives (Della Porta 2018b). Marches

> express a transformation of the presence of undocumented migrants within the territory: in contrast to the institutional definition of their presence as a legal "anomaly", this form of collective action entails a politicization of their presence in the public space. (Monforte and Dufour 2013, 85)

Critical citizenship studies have stimulated research on this issue: people deprived of legal rights can perform "acts of citizenship" (Isin and Nielsen 2008), asserting their presence and affirming "the right to have rights", according to Arendt's ([1951] 1994) famous formulation, especially through actions of protest: practices of citizenship, in which a substantive citizenship is exercised beyond the legal framework. In this way, also marginal subjects can become able to organize and to claim respect, dignity and rights, in forms of "citizenship from below" (Shinozaki 2015; Paret 2017). They can perform what Isin and Saward (2013) call "activist citizenship", centred on claims that in various ways challenge existing institutional orders and frameworks of legal citizenship (Oliveri 2018).

Refugees' movements have been likened to "poor peoples" movements, when these marginal subjects are able to create common frames of interpretation of the reality, to bind together diverse groups and issues and to challenge established rules, practices and social roles (Della Porta 2018b).

Border crossings at critical points of the European Union frontiers, such as Calais or Ventimiglia-Val Roja, Lesvos, the Mexican-US border are sites in which asylum claims merge with struggles for recognition (Giliberti and Queirolo Palmas 2020).

Refugees and irregular migrants' movements, however, often need support from native actors. According to Nicholls (2013a, 2013b), supporters furnish two important resources: first, they help to increase the number of participants; and second, they "generate the levels of cultural and symbolic capital needed to cleanse stigma attached to foreigners and transform them into sympathetic and rights-deserving beings" (2013a, 92).

Nicholls shows also the reverse side of this support: native activists tend to shape claims and campaigns, speaking on behalf of migrants and leaving their direct voice at the margins (Nicholls 2013a). Or they can have their own agendas, purposes and priorities, and these may not coincide with migrants' interests and objectives (Nicholls 2013b), which are often more pragmatic and limited.

To conclude on this point, studies have highlighted the multiple and not always simple connections between migrants' (and refugees') movements and (mainly) native civil-society actors. The battleground of migration policies appears increasingly polarized, but tensions, divergences and inequalities are not rare also on the side of migrants' rights defenders.

Conclusion: the battleground of asylum and immigration policies in times of pandemic

This article has elaborated the concept of battleground in order to deepen the dynamics and actors involved in the governance of asylum and immigration policies at various levels. This "lens" gives greater visibility to the interaction between the actors involved: national governments, international institutions and NGOs, city authorities acting in favour or against refugee reception, pro-refugee civil society with its various components, xenophobic movements and asylum seekers, refugees and irregular immigrants themselves.

The notion of battleground contributes to grasping some aspects of the issue, which do not appear to have been taken sufficiently into account by the present scholarship, namely, by the venue shopping approach, the multi-level governance approach and critical humanitarian studies, as explained in "Three approaches to asylum and immigration policies". I would mention the horizontal dimension of governance, and, in particular, the articulation of civil society into various subjects, beyond categories such as "humanitarianism" or externalization of public services; the conflictual dimension of the interactions between public and non-public actors and between different levels of government; the social identities, frames of reference and motivations of

the actors, including the opponents of reception; the establishment of coalitions on both sides between the actors involved.

Questioning the criticism against humanitarianism and volunteerism in favour of newcomers, I introduced the concept of "de-bordering solidarity" to highlight the meaning and outcomes of pro-refugee mobilizations and their political implications. Tensions and ambiguities exist, however, for instance between advocacy groups and refugees' movements.

Directions for future research involve the transformations and functioning of international, national and local battlegrounds in the present context: flows of new refugees have hugely decreased in the EU and they have been stopped before reaching the US-Mexican border; Western national governments by and large have substantially succeeded in reducing new arrivals; they have also become more decisive, in many cases, in impeding access to public services and the labour market; spontaneous volunteers have largely shut down, or in some cases, they have created new NGOs (Rea et al. 2019); refugees movements appear weaker and less successful than in the 1990s and in the first decade of this century.

Furthermore, the present pandemic appears to further reinforce the trend of securitizing borders, but "perhaps bears within it the seeds also of transnational solidarity and the transcendence of national borders" (Triandafyllidou 2020, 1). In the USA, the Trump administration has limited the importation of foreign labour and suspended various foreign work-visa programs, arousing the opposition of many employers (Chamie 2020). This highlights that anti-immigrant policies often do not correspond to internal economic interests.

At the same time, nativist leaders, in Europe and elsewhere, blame immigrants for the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as does Orban in Hungary (Chamie 2020, 8). On the other side, the pandemic has induced the Portuguese and Italian governments to open a window of regularization for irregular immigrants and rejected asylum seekers. In Italy, despite many restrictions and procedural complications, the amnesty has collected about 207,000 applications. In sum, health concerns have pushed towards harsher closures of national borders but also to some new opportunities of insertion for unauthorized sojourners: they are giving a new impetus to the battleground of immigration policies.

At the same time, the permanence of irregular immigrants on the territory, thanks to the support they receive from various sources, has endangered the effectiveness of restrictions, while the pandemic has stopped deportations. In the end, the outcome of the battleground remains often different from the objectives of official policies.

A crucial site for future research will be the relation between national governments, local authorities and civil society's different actors, in this

completely new and unexpected context. Configurations of cooperation, tolerance, conflict; conditions and factors which favour different outcomes would be a fruitful ground for new studies.

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