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LONDON'S GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

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UCL Migration Research Unit
Working Papers

No. 2012/8

Challenging the politics of invisibility

Asylum seekers' political activism in the north-east of Italy.

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This research dissertation is submitted for the MSc in Global Migration at University College London

2012

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Abstract:

The emergence of discourses that depict migratory movements as a source of instability and insecurity has prompted the adoption of a securitised approach to the management of migration which has been translated into highly restrictive border controls and into the ever more frequent use of practices such as detention and deportation. The implementation of such measures has been responsible for fomenting hostile discourses around migration and for criminalising the presence of migrants and asylum seekers. This general hostility and the increasing militarisation of borders have 'pushed' migrants and asylum seekers to be socially invisible and, therefore, have confined them into a condition of vulnerability and exploitation. By adopting the analytical framework of the 'autonomy of migration', namely by conceiving migration as a creative force rather than as merely an object of control, this research aims to investigate how migrants rebel against the 'logic of invisibility' which is imposed upon them by the current border regime and become politically visible by engaging in struggles to demand rights and dignity. By taking the case study of the mobilisation in the Italian city of Trento, organised by the asylum seekers who escaped the Libyan conflict in 2011, this study aims to analyse the dynamics through which asylum seekers have evolved from non-status persons to political subjects. By considering the migrants' support networks in the cities of Trento and Padua, which are politically closely interconnected, it seeks to understand the opportunity-structures which provided the ground for the mobilisation to occur. In order to investigate these issues, the methodology has taken the form of a militant ethnography, which seeks to gain a better understanding of social dynamics by actively engaging in the struggle which is the focus of the research; the information has been collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. This paper finds that the asylum seekers' demands for rights and better living conditions profoundly challenge traditional assumptions which view asylum seekers merely as passive victims in need of protection and which conceive citizenship as an indispensible condition for political belonging. Moreover, it finds that the collaboration between asylum seekers and Italian activists, which was established in preparation for the mobilisation, has brought about a very heterogeneous political group in which the traditional citizens/ non-citizens divide becomes increasingly blurred.

Dissertation Word Count: 15,808

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Joann McGregor for her guidance and support throughout the whole research process. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the people in Trento and in Padua that made my fieldwork possible. A special thank goes to the asylum seekers for sharing their stories with me and for making me part of this enriching experience. I am also very grateful to the activists for their help and patience; I particularly would like to express my gratitude to Franca, who supported my work in Trento, and to Filippo who hosted me while I was in Padua. I am also very grateful to John for proofreading my work and to all my close friends and family who showed interest for my project and invaluably supported me throughout the process. This dissertation was influenced by the work of Sally Hole (2012).

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INTRODUCTION:

Migration has increasingly emerged as a threat to security as the presence of non-citizens has been depicted as a source of instability and insecurity (Bigo 2002; Bigo 2004). Discourses around migration portray the arrival of migrants and asylum seekers as a threat to internal security, to national cultural identity and to the welfare system (Huysmans 2006).The construction of migration into an existential threat has justified the adoption of restrictive migration policies which primarily aim to prevent 'unwanted migrants' and asylum seekers from entering the national territory and, therefore, "sustain a wider process of de-legitimizing the presence of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees" (Huysmans, 2006: 64). As a consequence of the securitisation of migration, practices such as restrictive border controls, detention and deportation have become the cornerstones of current migration regimes (Migreurop 2010). The adoption of such restrictive and exceptional measures (Andrijasevic 2010) has criminalised migrants (Bigo 2004), whose presence has been increasingly associated with violence and disorder (Wacquant 2008), and has casted them into "an ever more dismal horizon of rightlessness" (De Genova, 2009: 445). As a matter of fact, by curtailing the possibility of migrating legally, securitised migration policies are responsible for shedding them into a condition of illegality and, thus, of invisibility and exploitation (Ruggiero 2000; De Genova 2002; Mezzadra 2011; Longhi 2012).

The aim of this research is to investigate how migrants subvert the 'logic of invisibility' which is imposed upon them by engaging in struggles to obtain rights and better living conditions. In order to attain this aim, this paper will focus on the mobilisation which was organised in Trento by the asylum seekers who fled the political turmoil in Libya in 2011 in order to claim their right to remain in Italy. It will analyse this event through the lens of the 'autonomy of migration'. This strand of literature does not view migrants simply as "objects of control" (Anderson *et al,* 2009: 8) but considers them as key political actors who subvert sovereign control, by engaging with strategies to carry out their migratory plans, (Papadopoulos *et al* 2008) and whose claims for rights and justice profoundly challenge the traditional notion of citizenship and produce new sites of political belonging (Isin 2009). In sum, this research aims to explore the way in which the asylum seekers in

Trento constituted themselves from non-status persons into political subjects (Nyers 2010). Moreover, this dissertation will investigate the opportunity-structures and the political framework which enabled the mobilisation to take place. For this reason, the migrant support network in the city of Trento and Padua will be taken into consideration. I decided to focus on both cities, which are politically interconnected, in order to gain a better understanding of the role that migration issue occupy within grassroots movements in the Italian context.

This paper will start by setting out the theoretical framework in which the empirical findings will be grounded. It will, thus, seek to shed light on concepts such as 'securitisation of migration', 'autonomy of migration', 'acts of citizenship' and 'support of migrants' struggles'. It will then outline the methodology that was used in order to attain the data and it will justify the choice of the methods employed, which have consisted of semi-structured interviews and participant observation, and which have been underpinned by a militant ethnography approach (Juris 2007). The empirical findings are divided into three chapters. The first chapter will briefly sketch the circumstances which determined the arrival of the asylum seekers from Libya in Trento and it will then go on to analyse the mechanisms which have forced them into a situation of isolation and invisibility. The second chapter will focus its attention on how the asylum seekers have reversed their situation of invisibility by starting a mobilisation and by actively asserting their "right to claim a right" (Isin, 2009:380). It will, thus, explore the reasons which prompted them to mobilise and it will consider the opportunity-structures which provided the ground for their uprising to occur. In the third chapter, the relation between migrants' struggles and activists of Italian grassroots movements, who have increasingly engaged in upholding migrants' rights, will be investigated. In particular, it will examine the common grounds for struggle that have enabled the political alliance between the asylum seekers and the Italian activists in Trento to occur and it will look more closely at the nature of the dynamics of power between these two different political actors.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

This review starts by looking at how the securitisation of migration in Italy has legitimised the adoption of measures and policies which have criminalised migrants and asylum seekers and have forced them to live in a condition of invisibility and vulnerability. It will then consider the strand of literature which focuses on the 'autonomy of migration' which provides the ground for a conception of migration that takes into account the agency that permeates migratory movements. Within the framework of the 'autonomy of migration' it will then look at how migrants have rebelled against the condition of invisibility which is imposed upon them by engaging in struggles to obtain recognition and better living conditions; it will analyse how these struggle challenge the traditional conception of citizenship and of what it means to 'be political'. This review will conclude by investigating the support that migrants' struggles have received from the grassroots movements of the radical Left in Italy.

Securitization of migration in the Italian context: criminalization and invisibility:

The emergence of migration as a security issue has occurred in a context which is characterized by the deep geopolitical transformations associated with the end of the Cold War and by the social and political changes which have been brought forward by globalization (Huysmans & Squire 2009). The globalisation process has enhanced the transnational movement of capital, people and wealth but whereas the flow of capital and of rich people is seen in positive terms, "migration of the poor and of the people obliged to flee from their own country-that is asylum seekers- is seen as the equivalent of an "invasion", based on the idea that people coming that way, want to settle definitely in the prosperous economies to benefit from the welfare state" (Bigo, 2004: 64). Migration is overwhelmingly perceived through the lens of the national and of the state; this perspective draws a line between citizens and non-citizens, who are deemed not to match national values and norms, and depicts migration as a danger to the homogeneity of the nation (Bigo 2002).

The representation of migration as a threat to internal security, to cultural identity and to welfare provisions (Huysmans 2006; Huysmans & Buonfino 2008) has mobilised "security

rhetoric and institutions" (Huysmans, 2006: 73) in the EU and has legitimised the adoption of highly securitised migration policies which have restricted the freedom of mobility through stricter border controls, detention and deportations (Migreurop 2010).The representation of migration as a threat to security and the emergence of practices of securitisation are "critical to our understanding of the contemporary politics of mobility" (Mezzadra, 2011: 126) and are part of a process which privileges citizens by delegitimizing the presence of migrants (Huysmans 2000).

The securitisation of migration is very evident in the Italian context as its geographical position and its accessibility through the Mediterranean Sea makes it a major entry point into the EU for migrants and asylum seekers (Fasani 2010). The securitised approach of Italy to the management of migration is evident in its external relations with Libya which constitutes one of the main gateways to Europe for many illegal migrants from Sub-Saharan African countries (Boubakri 2004; Hamood 2006; Migreurop 2010). The Italian and the Libyan governments signed a pact in 2008 in which they committed themselves to intensifying cooperation in order to combat illegal immigration; in exchange for considerable financial and logistic support from the Italian government, Libya promised to deploy all means possible in order to stop the departure of irregular migrants from its shores (Migreuop, 2010; HRW 2009a). It is clear that this approach was primarily dictated by security concerns and it has proven to seriously jeopardise the protection of human rights of migrants because of Libya's failure to uphold basic international human rights standards (Amnesty International 2004; HRW 2009a). Italy came under even harsher criticism when in 2009 it intercepted and forcibly returned a boat full of migrants to Libya without assessing whether those people were in need of international protection and, thus, violated important human rights obligations (HRW 2009a).

The current border regime has, therefore, been characterised by a shift from *borderline* to *borderland* (Euskirchen *et al* 2007) and by the 'deterritorialisation' of borders (Rigo 2005; Andrijasevic 2010) as "the clear national *borderline* is both widened and extended *back* into national territory and projected *out* into the territory of foreign states" (Euskirchen *et al*, 2007: 11). Despite its sophistication, the European border regime has not completely stopped migratory flows. According to Mezzadra (2011), the ever more restrictive border controls are not aimed at reducing or stopping completely migratory flows; rather, they are meant to lower the socio and economic expectations of those who migrate and to make

them more vulnerable and exploitable (Ruggiero 2000;Coutin 2005; Euskirchen *et al* 2007; Mezzadra 2011, Longhi 2012).

This view is expanded on by DeGenova (2002) who examines how the concepts of 'illegality' and 'deportability', which forces undocumented migrants to live with the constant fear of being removed, are not legally designed to exclude but to impose a condition on undocumented migrants that "effectively serves to create and sustain a legally vulnerable- and hence, relatively tractable and thus 'cheap'- reserve of labour" (DeGenova, 2002: 440). So, "the process of illegalisation or irregularisation can be defined in its link to exploitation of migrant labour" (Mezzadra, 2011: 131), just as the creation of the conditions for migrants' exploitation must be seen as a response to the need for casual and low-cost workers (Ruggiero 2000).

In the Italian context, the framing of migration as a security concern has legitimized the implementation of measures that have created an aura of criminality around migrants and asylum seekers (Rigo 2011). The arrival of large numbers of illegal migrants and asylum seekers at Italian shores has been represented as an invasion (Migreurop 2010) whose management was deemed to necessitate the adoption of "emergency" measures (Andrijasevic 2010). The construction of migration as a source of instability and disorder legitimized the Italian government's approval of a 'security act' in 2009, legislation which was presented as a response to the security concerns of Italian citizens but which "severely limits the basic rights of migrants present on Italian territory" (Rigo, 2011: 200).

The security act criminalises the presence of undocumented migrants by making illegal migration a criminal offence punishable by a fine of up to 10.000 euro (Melting Pot 2009). Moreover, it increased the maximum length of detention of undocumented migrants from 60 days to 18 months. The legislation also made the act of renting a flat or a house to undocumented migrants a crime punishable by up to three years of prison (La Repubblica 2009). Furthermore, as a consequence of this legislation, medical staff and education officials are required to report the presence of illegal migrants as, according to the criminal code, public officials have the duty to denounce criminal conduct (HRW 2009b). This is particularly dangerous because the fear of being reported to the police might prevent many undocumented migrants from seeking medical care (Melting Pot 2009).

The securitisation of migration in the Italian context has, thus, implied the criminalisation of migrants (HRW 2009). As Coutin (2005b) observes, the construction of undocumented

migration as an illegal practice has resulted in the fact that "the category of 'the criminal' and 'the immigrant' have been converging" (Coutin, 2005b:11).Immigration laws are responsible for situating undocumented migrants outside society and for confining them in a realm of illegality. This process of criminalisation has inevitably forced undocumented migrants and migrants with precarious legal status to live in a condition of invisibility (Ruggiero 2000; Euskirchen *et al.* 2009) and to live a life of 'non-existence' in which, in order to survive, they are obliged to accept poorly paid and dangerous jobs in the informal sectors of the economy, to live in substandard accommodation and with barely any rights or social entitlements (Coutin 2005b). They are, thus, 'pushed' to disappear and "the abolition of dignity is inherent in the pressure towards invisibility to which migrants are submitted" (Ruggiero, 2000: 49).

The autonomy of migration:

In their analysis, mainstream migration theories fail to take into account migrants' agency and subjectivity (Andrijasevic & Anderson 2009); (see Hole 2012). When crossing a border, migrants are not seen as making a political claim but "are represented as destitute and frustrated people driven by economic and/or humanitarian needs in an increasingly globalised society" (Aradau & Huysmans, 2009:586). Despite criticising restrictive border controls and the practices of detention and deportation, migrants-rights advocates tend to represent migrants merely as victims of immigration controls. The employment of a language of protection and harm overlooks migrants' agency and it turns them into "objects of control, rescue and redemption rather than as full human beings" (Anderson *et al,* 2009:8).

Women migrants are especially victimised and presented as passive objects by the discourse of human trafficking (Andrijasevic 2007;Andrijasevic & Anderson 2009), which purports to show a very simplistic picture in which women are the victims of ruthless male traffickers who force them into exploitation. Nonetheless, this account does not consider the fact that women actively choose to migrate and that their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse is primarily caused by the closure of many legal migratory channels which triggers the increase of dangerous and undocumented modes of travelling (Andrijasevic, 2007). Hence, migrants are not understood to be political actors as "the structures of political power act upon the immigrants' mobility as an issue of security, economics or

humanitarianism" (Aradau & Huysmans, 2009: 588), thus reducing them to a cheap and flexible labour force or to victims of migration controls (Rodriguez 1996; Mezzadra 2007).

The autonomy of migration approach perceives migration as a social and political movement, which has the primacy over control and which "has been and continues to be a constituent force in the formation of sovereignty" (Papadopoulos *et al,* 2008: 202). According to this view, mobility precedes the formation of forms of control and border controls develop in reaction to pathways of mobility (Papadopoulos *et al* 2008; Rygel 2011). Migrants are thus active agents who, through their daily practices subvert and escape the border regime (Euskirchen *et al* 2007; Papadopoulos *et al* 2008). They possess a vast knowledge of mobility and they rely on smugglers and social networks in order to reach their chosen destination; through strategies of invisibility and dis-identification, such as burning their documents or changing identity, they circumvent border controls. (Papadopoulos *et al* 2008). Migrant camps are also places in which this agency is enacted (Walters 2008; Rygel 2011).Rygel explores the meaning of migrant camps by taking into consideration the camp at Calais; he opposes the theory put forward by Agamben (1998) who views camps as depoliticised spaces of exception and of exclusion where migrants are forced to live a bare life or a life of mere survival. On the contrary, Rygel, by adopting the approach of the autonomy of migration, views migrants' camps as sites of struggle which are characterised by the existence of social and political relations and in which "migrants assert agency in navigating, negotiating, and resisting border controls" (Rygel 2011: 13).

In order to carry out their migratory plans and to escape border controls, undocumented migrants take routes that are outside the established ones and which are often very dangerous (Coutin 2005a). By choosing to adopt these strategies, undocumented migrants place themselves in a realm which is characterised by the almost complete lack of law, "their bodies become a sort of absent space or vacancy surrounded by law" (Coutin, 2005a: 199). Coutin (2000;2005a) focuses her research on undocumented migrants from El Salvador in the US and she analyses how, although they are physically and socially present on US territory, they occupy spaces of non-existence as they do not possess a legal status. Although they have reached their destination, they left their legality in their country of origin and they became legally non-existent in the US (Coutin 2005a); "thus, in contrast to standard accounts of migration, there are senses in which migration moves territories, reconfiguring scale, and multiples temporalities" (Coutin, 2005a: 200).

Migrants do not just escape social and economic problems and they do not merely move from one point to another; rather, they transform the social space and they create new realities as "both the nomad's body and the space s/he occupies transform equally; co-evolution of body and space: becoming" (Papadopoulos *et al* 2008: 214). 'Becoming' constitutes an inevitable feature of the experience of mobility; by becoming imperceptible and invisible, migrants escape the sovereign control which relies on identification and, thus, they create new forms of political subjectivities (Papadopoulos *et al* 2008).

According to Papadopoulos *et al,* the form of evasion produced by the strategies of invisibility radically differs from the type of resistance created by visibility and by the politics of representation as the latter is not able to profoundly challenge the rules of the current migration regime; viewed in these terms, migration becomes "one of the biggest laboratories for the subversion of post liberal politics today" (Papadopoulos *et al,* 2008: 219). This view is not supported by Euskirchen *et al* (2007) who do not conceive the mere act of illegally crossing a border to be an act of subversion and resistance. According to these authors, an act of resistance is truly enacted only when migrants actively organise themselves and when, by becoming politically visible and by forging alliances with grassroots groups and trade unions, they 'fight' for common struggles and objectives.

Citizenship in flux: enacting acts of citizenship:

Migrants have not always remained passive to the logic underpinning the current border regime which inevitably pushes them into a realm of criminality and invisibility but have also made themselves visible in order to demand legal recognition and improvement of their condition (Ruggiero 2000; Laubenthal 2007), in Ruggiero's words they have engaged in a "fight to reappear" (Ruggiero, 2000: 45). Mainstream migration theories analyze migrants' struggles through the lens of citizenship by asserting that through their protests, migrants want to become citizens. The analysis of migrants' struggles through the lens of the autonomy of migration portrays a very different picture as it starts from the assumption that both documented and undocumented migrants *act* as and *already are* citizens (Mezzadra 2011). Instead of reading migrants' struggles as mere attempts to integrate into the existing political framework, the autonomy of migration approach investigates the extent to which these practices transform and broaden the legal framework of citizenship and the

boundaries of political belonging (Mezzadra 2011; McNevin 2009a). By “mobilising politics” (Squire, 2011: 5), namely by viewing politics as a mobile and dynamic domain, it is possible to investigate how migratory movements challenge and transform the concept of what it means to be political (Squire 2011).

Citizenship is currently the hegemonic means of political belonging (McNevin 2009b) as “since the times of the Athenian democracy and the Roman Republic its core meaning has been a status of membership in a self-governing political community” (Baubock, 2006: 15). Although the concept of citizenship is understood to be intertwined with civic values, “some of the most critical examples of migrants’ political subjectivity take place outside the codified rules of democratic and civic participation” (Rigo, 2011: 200). Despite not being recognised as part of the political community, irregular migrants have increasingly become politically active in the US, in Europe and in Australia; through mobilisations, rallies, petitions, strikes and occupations they have drawn attention to the unfair and extremely precarious condition in which they are forced to live (McNevin 2009a). Through these struggles and by contesting their irregular status, irregular migrants engage with modes of political belonging that go beyond the traditional ones (Bojadzijev & Karakayali 2010) and they “contest the very basis of citizenship itself as the prevailing measure of political belonging” (McNevin,2009b: 73).

In order to conceive the potential transformative impact of migrants’ struggles, an alternative perspective of citizenship is necessary (Isin 2009). Isin refutes the dominant perspective according to which citizenship is equated with membership of a given political community. According to this viewpoint, which considers citizenship as a status which is acquired by birth or through naturalization, citizenship is a static (Isin 2009) and territorially bound (Rigo 2011) concept, whose history has been one of “gradual and linear evolution from the ancient Greek polis as an ever more inclusive basis for political practice” (McNevin, 2009b: 69).

This account overlooks the fact that the very notion of ‘being a citizen’ is reliant on its opposite, namely the one of non-citizen. The traditional concept of citizenship ignores the struggles of those that throughout history have contested their outsider status, such as women, slaves, prostitutes and the homeless, and have succeeded in enlarging the boundaries of political belonging in order to be included in the political community (McNevin 2009b). This observation opens up an alternative analytical framework as it shifts the focus

away from the question *who is the citizen?* to the question *what makes the citizen*? (Andijasevic & Anderson, 2009: 365).It, thus, "shifts our attention from fixed categories by which we have come to understand citizenship to the struggles through which these categories themselves have become stakes" (Isin, 2009: 383).

From this perspective, citizenship becomes a dynamic and fluid concept which has always been a centre of contestation (Isin 2009) and a "site of conflict" (Mezzadra, 2007: 41). The emergence of subjects that, despite being formally excluded from the political community, act *like* citizens and demand their "right to claim rights" (Isin, 2009: 370) produces "acts of citizenship" (Isin, 2008: 16). According to Isin (2008), acts of citizenship are constituted by those deeds and moments through which subjects, regardless of their lack of legal status, constitute and enact themselves as citizens by claiming their right to claim rights. The enactment of acts of citizenship prompts the emergence of activist citizens (Isin 2008). Isin (2008) differentiates between active citizens, who are the already existing citizens who follow already written paths of political belonging, and activist citizens who, by engaging in new practices and creating new scenes of political activism, challenge the traditional boundaries of citizenship and "disrupts already defined orders, practices and statuses" (Isin, 2009: 384).

The struggle of the so-called *Sans-Papiers,* which started in Paris in 1996 when 324 migrants who were working and living in France for a long period of time were made irregular by a change of law, (McNevin 2006) has made a very important contribution to the discussion about migration and citizenship as it is emblematic of how irregular migrants have enacted themselves as citizens (Isin 2009; McNevin 2006; Ruggiero 2000; Mezzadra 2011).As a matter of fact, in order to protest against their irregular status, the *Sans Papiers* occupied a church and they encouraged further occupations, petitions and hunger strikes across France (McNevin 2006; Isin 2009).

Through their protest, the *Sans Papiers* demanded recognition and regularization (McNevin 2006). They based their claims on arguments such as the importance of their economic role as they stressed their integration into the French economy as a legitimizing factor of their presence (McNevin 2006; Isin 2009; Ruggiero 2000). Their colonial past was another argument used to articulate their demands as many of the *Sans Papiers* were from former French African colonies; they argued that they were forced to leave their countries as a

consequence of economic and social problems that were also caused by years of French and European colonial rule (Ruggiero 2000).

As cited by Wright (2003), Balibar (2000) recognizes the importance of the movement of the *Sans Papiers* as it "has made a fundamental challenge to notions of democracy, politics, civil rights and citizenship" (Wright, 2003: 5). The originality of this movement is shown by the fact that they demanded political rights in spite of being formally excluded from the political community, thus, contesting the very basis of the traditional notion of citizenship and of what it means to be political (Isin 2009; Nyers 2010).

Migrants' struggles and the support of the grassroots movement:

Migrants with precarious legal status have, thus, increasingly emerged as important actors in struggles demanding freedom of mobility, right to asylum and labour protections (McNevin 2006; Nyers 2010). Migrants' struggles have not only been supported by humanitarian organisations and migrants' rights groups but also by "activists from the anti-fascist and so called autonomist spectrum of the European radical Left" (Euskirchen *et al,* 2009: 1) who have increasingly promoted campaigns and action in support of immigrants' rights. These struggles have become one of the most active grounds of political action of the radical Left in Europe and have employed innovative and artistic strategies of contestation (Euskirchen *et al* 2009, Alldred 2009).

According to Mezzadra (2004), migration issues have become central to the political action of the so-called 'global movement'. In using this term, Mezzadra refers to the international social movement which began to receive extensive media attention after the protests against the World Trade Organization Summit (WTO) which was held in Seattle in 1999 (Engler 2007). This movement emerged as a critique of neo-liberal economic policies which are deemed responsible for aggravating problems such as global poverty and economic inequalities (Engler 2007). The critique addressed by this movement has particularly taken the form of mobilisations against institutions that symbolise neo-liberalism such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Economic Forum and the Group of Eight (G8) (Mezzadra & Neilson 2003; Engler 2007).

The beginning of the global movement was marked by a critique of neo-liberalism which, nonetheless, did not take into consideration migrants' political subjectivity as it "tended to depict those who suffer the effects of globalisation in the global south as mere victims, denying them a position as protagonists or active social subjects in contemporary processes of global transformation" (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2003: 1). The protests against the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001 proved to be a turning point in this respect as the presence of a large mobilisation led by migrants resulted in the beginning of the collaboration between the global movement and migrants (Mezzadra & Neilson 2003).

Autonomist activists from the radical Left have sought to develop common interests and grounds for protest with other actors such as students, migrants without a legal status and precarious workers (Euskirchen *et al* 2009). The "precarisation of labour" (Euskirchen *et al*, 2009:6), namely the growing flexibility and insecurity which characterise current working conditions (The Frassinato Network 2006), has been one of the themes through which a new field of cooperation between these actors has been created, based on the claim that neo-liberal policies are rendering the life, not only of the of irregular migrants but of the working class as a whole, increasingly precarious (Euskirchen *et al* 2007). Accordingly, collective action is deemed necessary as "neo-liberalism creates a 'sliding scale' of precarisation that affects all groups within the working class, but each to a different extent" (Euskirchen, 2007: 13).

Nonetheless, one of the critiques addressed to these movements has been the lack or the underrepresentation of migrants in the mobilisations, whose protagonists have been mainly activists and migrants' supporters (Chimienti & Solomos 2011). It is important to tackle the issue of representation in order to avoid the formation of new forms of exclusion and marginalisation. This concern has also been highlighted by one of the representatives of the movement of the *Sans Papiers* during a workshop in the European Social Forum held in Paris in 2003 (Rodriguez 2004). With the words "we need your support, but the struggle is primarily ours" (Rodriguez, 2004: 152) he stressed the fact that, despite the workshop being about migration and illegality, all the speakers were activists and academics 'with papers' (Rodriguez 2004).

Although the presence of activists 'with documents' is fundamental in providing support to migrants' mobilisations and in helping them to articulate their demands beyond existential rights to include right to healthcare, to education and working rights, it also risks

overshadowing migrants' own voices and ideas (Chimienti & Solomos 2011). The defence of migrants' rights can easily reproduce a pattern of re-victimisation which supports the view of migrants as mute and powerless victims who need representation in order to voice their claims (Mitropoulos 2006). This stance re-affirms an unequal dynamic of power between citizen and non-citizens as it makes the Left "reserving for itself the semblance and definition of political struggle, movement and representation" (Mitropoulos 2006: 9).

Nevertheless, it must also be considered that migrants' activism and political visibility are hindered by several factors, such as the features of the current border regime whose restrictive character makes it increasingly difficult for undocumented migrants and those with precarious status to become politically visible as the fear of deportation confines them in a situation of invisibility (Euskirchen 2007). Moreover, social exclusion and spatial isolation, which creates the condition for social invisibility, (Euskirchen 2009) and the fact that access to public space and political representation is inevitably skewed in favour of those with the knowledge of the local language and with a higher level of education, are other factors that prevent migrants from being at the forefront of political struggles (Rodriguez 2004).

METHODOLOGY:

The research adopted a qualitative approach and the fieldwork was conducted between the cities of Trento and Padua, in the north-east of Italy. I decided to focus on both because of the developed political network that exists between the two cities. My research has particularly focused its attention on the mobilisation which was organised by the refugees from Libya in Trento. Nonetheless, I considered that the dynamics and the nature of their protest was strongly influenced by the campaign *Welcome, Diritto di scelta* (Welcome, Right to choose) which was launched in Padua by the project Melting Pot.[1] The fact that the campaign was sustained and promoted also in Trento certainly shaped and influenced the mobilisation of asylum seekers there; for this reason I believed that a better understanding of the situation in Padua was necessary in order to understand the political scenario in which the mobilisation took place.

The fieldwork was carried out in Italy during the month of June 2012 and the information was collected thorough semi-structured interviews with 20 participants, informal conversations and participant observation. When entering the field, it was important to consider the way in which my identity would have influenced interaction with the interviewees (Valentine 2005) and the role that power relations would have played in the outcome of the research (Binns 2006). Being Italian, white, female and a student surely played an important role in shaping the interactions with the participants. Although I was initially concerned about being regarded with suspicion and diffidence by the asylum seekers, the fact that I actively engaged in their mobilisation surely helped me to be seen less as an outsider and more as 'one of them'.

One of the methods employed was participant observation which "seeks to understand human groups by having the researcher in the same social space as the participant in the study" (Madden, 2010: 16). This method was adopted as it allows the study of the research subjects in a more natural setting (Van Donge 2006) and it produces rich accounts and

[1] It must be noted that Melting Pot is not an association itself but it is a project which relies on collaboration between lawyers and various activists and academics. Through its website, the project provides information on legal issues related to migration for migrants but also for migrants' support groups. Through the collaboration with association, trade unions and different political actors, it also promotes mobilisations and political action aimed at protecting migrants' rights.

information that it would not be possible to gather through methods such as interviews (Valentine 2005).

Due to the nature and the aims of this project I decided to take a militant ethnography (see Hole 2012) approach which aims to overcome the barrier between research and practice as it "involves a politically engaged and collaborative form of participant observation carried out from within rather than outside grassroots movements" (Juris, 2007: 164). I considered that this type of approach was necessary to gain a greater understanding of the dynamics of migrants struggles as through this method, the researcher is not simply a passive observer but becomes actively engaged with the struggle which is the focus of his/her research (Juris 2007). The adoption of a militant ethnography approach was, thus, dictated by the willingness to avoid what Bourdieu (1977) defines the "limits of objectivism" (Bourdieu, 1977:1). According to Bourdieu, the position of observer and outsider disposes the researcher "to a hermeneutic representation of practice" (Bourdieu 1977: 1) which reduces social life to an object to decode and which, thus, undermines the understanding of the social interactions that are constitutive of social practice.

This method was applied by taking part in the meetings organized by the asylum seekers in Trento in preparation for the demonstration and by actively participating in the demonstration. Another issue to consider was access to the group which is the focus of the research (Cook 2005); nonetheless in my case access was not difficult to obtain as the meetings were open to the public. The meetings, during which migrants and activists met to discuss issues and organize the practicalities of the demonstration, were held in the squatted centre *Centro Sociale Bruno* in Trento. I did not participate simply as an observer but I collaborated with the asylum seekers and the activists in the organization of the demonstration. The forms of collaboration consisted in helping them to give out the leaflets that were distributed to publicize the mobilisation, in translating what was being said during the meetings from Italian to English for the English-speaking asylum seekers and in engaging with debates and discussions.

This method was adopted as it makes it possible to obtain a greater understanding of the dynamics and the relations of power within the group which is being studied (Juris 2007). The active engagement in their struggle gave me a better insight of what were perceived to be the key issues and of the interaction between activists and asylum seekers. Militant ethnography also involves employing the body as a research tool (Parr 2001); being

actively engaged in the preparation process enabled me to understand the sensations of tension, of joy and solidarity which accompanied the development of the mobilisation. During the fieldwork I kept a diary where I annotated my observations of the dynamics which took place during the assemblies and during the demonstration.

The use of semi-structured interviews was another method used to gather information because, unlike surveys, they leave the participants a certain degree of freedom to express their opinions, their feelings and their impressions (Willis 2006). Semi-structured interviews were, thus, the right means of gathering information about how migrants perceived their condition in Italy and about the ideas and motivations that shaped the decision to mobilise. I decided to interview both migrants and migrant support organizations. All the interviews have been audio-recorded and ethical guidelines (Hay 2010) have been followed by explaining the participants the content and the objectives of my research and by obtaining their consent before proceeding to interview them. Moreover, in the analysis, pseudonyms were used in order to protect the identity of the participants and to guarantee the confidentiality of the information which was gathered. I conducted twelve interviews with asylum seekers from Libya and eight interviews with activists of migrants' support groups and militants of the grassroots movement. The interviews with the activists have been conducted both in Trento and in Padua in order to gain a better understanding of how the migrants' support network in the north-east of Italy has developed and how it operates. The interviews with migrants have taken place mainly in Trento as the migrants' mobilisation that occurred there has been the primary focus of my research.

Another important factor to consider was who to interview as the sample plays an extremely important role in the outcome of the interview (Valentine 2001). Both migrants and activists were recruited through a snowballing technique (Willis 2006); all the migrants who were interviewed were male as the overwhelming majority of the asylum seekers who arrived from Libya were men and as there were no female migrants who took part in the mobilisation. The migrant interviewees were mainly from West African countries (only one of the them was Libyan of *tuareg* origins), were all in their twenties or early thirties and were chosen among those who could speak either Italian or English well.

Access to the interviewees in Trento was negotiated thorough one of the activists who was supporting their protest and who introduced me to them; the fact that she knew them well and that they trusted her was certainly a positive factor as it helped me not to be seen in a

threatening way. Nonetheless, some of the migrants felt rather doubtful or not confident enough to be interviewed; others accepted being interviewed at first but then did not show up for the appointment which we agreed upon.

Participating in the meetings which were held in preparation of the demonstration and taking part in events in which the asylum seekers were involved, such as African cultural events and concerts in the squat *Centro Sociale Bruno,* gave me the possibility to gain their confidence and provided me with the means of collecting additional information through informal conversations both with the asylum seekers and the activists. The interviews in Trento have been conducted in an array of different places; some of the interviews took place in the squat and others in public spaces such as the park and cafes.

Access to the interviewees in Padua was achieved through the director of Melting Pot, who was also the first contact I had when planning my fieldwork. The majority of the interviews in Padua took place at a music festival, *Sherwood festival,* as many of the activists that I was interested in interviewing were working in this event, which is organized every year by the grassroots movements of the north-east of Italy.

Table 1. Details of the migrants cited in the analysis.

Name	Country of origin	Age
Ahmed	Libya (Tuareg ethnic group)	25
Amidu	Burkina Faso	20
Arona	Senegal	26
Barassi	Mali	26
Bashir	Somalia	30
Boubacary	Mali	22
Emmanuel	Nigeria	22
Ibrahim	Gambia	28
Yusuf	Sudan	24

Table 2. Details of the activists cited in the analysis.

Name	Involvement in migrants' struggles
Chiara	Italian teacher, activist and supporter of the mobilisation in Trento
Francesca	Activist of the squat *Centro Sociale Bruno* (Trento)
Luca	Activist of the association *Razzismo Stop* (Padua)
Marzio	Activist of the association *Razzismo Stop* (Padua)
Milo	Coordinator of the project *Richiedenti Terra* (Trento)
Nicola	Director of Melting Pot (Padua)
Rolando	Activist of the squat *Centro Sociale Bruno* (Trento)
Sergio	Activist and supporter of the mobilisation in Trento
Valentina	Working at *Cinformi* (migrant information centre in Trento)

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS:

Chapter One: Refugees from Libya in Italy: a situation of invisibility and isolation

By examining the situation in Padua and in Trento, this chapter aims to investigate the processes and mechanisms which led the asylum seekers arrived from Libya to marginalisation and to social invisibility. In order to fully understand the situation of the refugees who arrived in Italy from Libya in 2011 this chapter will begin by giving a brief outline of the circumstances that have led to their arrival in the country and of the measures implemented by the Italian government in order to receive them. It will then go on to examine the way in which the securitised approach to migration in the Italy, which has increasingly associated migration with insecurity and criminality, and hostile public discourses about migration have fomented fear and diffidence towards the asylum seekers arrived from Libya. Finally, it will analyse how these general hostile tendencies and the extreme precariousness and insecurity which characterize their lives have confined them in a situation of marginalisation and invisibility.

Many refugees reached Italian shores as a result of the social and political unrest which broke out in Libya in spring 2011 (Donadio 2011). Nonetheless, the majority of the people who fled Libya were not Libyan citizens but were from various Sub-Saharan African countries, from the Maghreb and also from Asia and the Middle East[2] and had been working in Libya prior to the outbreak of the conflict[3]. Differently from other Maghreb countries such as Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, which have been countries of emigration for a long time, Libya has not been a migrant-producing country; because of its geographical position it has become an important departure point to Europe for many migrants and refugees from the Maghreb, from Sub-Saharan Africa but also from the Middle East and from the Indian Sub-Continent (Boubakri 2004).

[2] The countries of origin of the people who fled the conflict in Libya are Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ivory Coast, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Syria, Somalia and Sudan (information taken from the leaflet of the demonstration).

[3] Informal conversation with Valentina, 06/06/2012.

Nonetheless, Libya did not merely constitute a place of transit but it was also a major immigration country in the Maghreb (Hamood 2006).Foreign nationals from other Maghreb countries and Sub-Saharan African countries, which made up 25 to 30 percent of Libya's total population, were attracted to Libya by its relative wealth, which come from the revenues of its petroleum industry, and by the possibility of finding employment (Andijasevic 2010). Hence, differently from common assumptions, migration to Libya did not exclusively constitute "the source of irregular migratory movements to Europe" (Andrijasevic, 2010: 10) but also had Libya as the country of destination.

The majority of the migrants who were interviewed had been working in Libya for a considerable amount of time before the outbreak of the conflict. They escaped their countries of origin for different reasons such as conflict or social and political problems. Once arrived in Italy, the refugees who fled from the conflict in Libya were given the chance to apply for asylum but in May 2012, after waiting for one year in order to have their applications processed, many of their asylum claims were refused on the grounds that their countries of origin were recognized to be safe[4]. Despite this refusal, all the interviewees stated it would be impossible to return to their country of origin as they felt that their life there would have been at risk. As Arona, aged 26, from Senegal pointed out[5]:

> I have been told that I cannot stay in Italy because I am Senegalese, but if it was possible I would have gone back to my country. In Libya I used to live with other Senegalese people and when the war started they went back home. They could go back home but I simply cannot; that's why I decided to cross the Mediterranean even though I was aware that it was a big risk because our boat could have sank and I could have died.

In Libya, the interviewees were predominantly employed in the construction industry and said that they were rather happy about their life and never planned to go to Europe, even though they had to face several difficulties such as discrimination as, in Arona's words, "Libya is the most racist country in the world[6]". Moreover, the risk of arbitrary detention was very high for migrants in Libya and detainees were victims of ill-treatment and torture (Hamood 2006). Bashir, aged 30, from Somalia was detained for nine months and he recalled his dramatic experience in jail where he was not granted access to medical care or

[4] Informal conversation with Valentina, 06/06/2012.
[5] Interview with Arona, 8/06/2012.
[6] Interview with Arona, 8/06/2012.

legal assistance and where he was sometimes beaten up by the guards and was forced to stay in a dark and overcrowded cell without seeing the sunlight for long periods of time[7].

As the political unrest began in spring 2011, the situation became very dangerous for the migrants who were present on Libyan territory. Emmanuel, aged 22, from Nigeria described the situation of extreme danger he was forced to live in when the conflict broke out in Libya; "the rebels who were fighting against Gaddafi started saying that we, black Africans, were mercenaries of Gaddafi. For this reason they started 'getting rid' of African foreigners. If they saw a black man they would kill him[8]". Yusuf, aged 24, from Sudan told me how, with the outbreak of the conflict, black Africans were regularly robbed, beaten up and sometimes even shot by Libyan citizens. In his opinion, black Africans started being the victims of violence because Libyan people had always been very intolerant towards them and "the war simply provided the ideal setting in which to commit injustices and to vent this hatred"[9].

The majority, thus, decided to cross the Mediterranean in order to escape violence and to seek refuge in Europe. Some of the interviewees, such as Yusuf, were even forced to board on boats from Tripoli to Lampedusa; according to Yusuf, forcibly sending 'unwanted migrants' from Libya to Italy constituted an act of retaliation by Gaddafi towards Italy and Europe as a result of the NATO intervention in Libya[10]. This is also testified by the fact that the number of arrivals particularly increased in March 2011, when the NATO forces intervened in the Libyan conflict (Donadio 2011).

The expected large influx of migrants and asylum seekers from North Africa, which was awaited as a result of the conflict in Libya and of the political unrest in the Maghreb and in Egypt, prompted the Italian government to declare a state of 'humanitarian emergency' (Protezione Civile 2011). In order to cope with this emergency, defined as *Emergenza Nord Africa,* the Italian government implemented a plan for the reception of refugees arriving in Italy from North Africa (Protezione Civile 2011). The reception programme had a capacity of a maximum of 50.000 people, although only about 25.000 people actually reached Italian soil. It instituted a system of equal burden sharing between the different Italian regions.

[7] Interview with Bashir, 23/06/2012.
[8] Interview with Emmanuel, 18/06/2012.
[9] Interview with Yusuf, 23/06/2012.
[10] Interview with Yusuf, 23/06/2012.

The refugees were proportionally distributed among all Italian regions which were responsible for guaranteeing them basic services such as housing, food and access to medical care (Protezione Civile 2011). The region of Trento received around 250 asylum seekers who fled the conflict in Libya[11]and provided them with housing, a monthly allowance for food and transport expenses, access to medical care and Italian language classes which they were obliged to attend[12].Moreover, the local migrant information centre, *Ci Informi,* was given the responsibility of providing them with assistance in lodging their asylum applications and in solving potential legal and bureaucratic issues[13].

As Andrijasevic (2006) observes, the deployment of a language of 'emergency' is very recurrent in the Italian context and depicts the arrival of migrants and asylum seekers as an 'invasion'. Hence, migration becomes "politically embedded within security debates" (Huysmans & Buonfino, 2008: 5) which promote a "politics of exception" (Huysmans & Buonfino, 2008: 5) and justifies the adoption of exceptional measures in order to protect the citizens and the nation from what is perceived to be a threat. Securitisation discourses are moulded by a process of "s*ecuritisation through insecuritisation"* (Bigo, 2004: 65) through which a sense of insecurity and threat is created in order to legitimise a securitised approach to a certain issue (Bigo 2004) and, thanks to which, diverse institutions are able "to affirm their role as providers of protection and security" (Bigo, 2002: 65).

The construction of social unease with respect to the influx of migrants and asylum seekers is obvious in Italy; as underlined by Marzio, from the association *Razzismo Stop* in Padua, discourses around migration in Italy are responsible for fomenting diffidence and intolerance and the measures adopted to cope with the presence of migrants are rooted in the creation of social alarmism and with "the manufacturing of unease" (Bigo, 2004: 65). He stressed that the fact that local authorities decided to place military personnel around the train station in Padua, an area to which a lot of migrants gravitate, is evidence of this phenomenon as the military presence functions as a "fake reassurance" [14] and ,at the same time, helps to create a picture which portrays migrants as criminals and as a threat to social

[11] Informal conversation with Valentina, 6/06/2012.
[12] Interview with Chiara, 21/06/2012.
[13] Interview with Rolando, 15/06/2012.
[14] Interview with Marzio, 25/06.2012.

order (Huysmans 2006).Speaking about the situation in Padua, which is nonetheless quite similar to the rest of Italy, he reflected[15]:

> It is undeniable that many of the migrants who are in Padua are involved in criminal activities such as drug dealing and are often connected to problems such as violence and alcohol abuse. This is an existing problem but I think that these issues are primarily caused by migration policies that generate fear and diffidence towards migrants. This, in turn, is responsible for confining them in a situation of isolation which can easily push them towards social exclusion and criminality. I believe that investing in migration policies that are more oriented towards offering services and integration possibilities rather than towards creating this atmosphere of general fear would help in reducing these problems.

Discourses around migration in Italy are, thus, responsible for fomenting a feeling of hostility and fear towards migrants and asylum seekers as they increasingly equate their presence with urban criminality and unrest (Wacquant, 2008). Ahmed, aged 25, of Libyan Tuareg origins, told me how he experienced the diffidence of local people in his everyday life. He said*:* "If I need to ask for directions to get to a place I feel very nervous because I can see that people are scared because they think that I want to ask them for money or that I want to do something bad to them"[16].The anger of being stigmatized for the mere fact of being an African immigrant was also expressed by Barassi, aged 26, from Mali who affirmed "in Italy all the African people are seen in a negative way no matter what. Italian people think that Africans just get drunk and take drugs, but that is not true. I do not drink, I do not smoke... do you understand?"[17]

Therefore, hostile public discourses around migration (Euskirchen *et al* 2009), which are responsible for creating a barrier between citizens and non-citizens, subjected the asylum seekers in Trento to a "pressure towards invisibility" (Ruggiero, 2000: 49). Chiara, who gave Italian classes to the asylum seekers and who actively supported them in the organization of their mobilisation, explained to me that the reaction of the majority of Italian people to the arrival of the refugees from Libya was characterised either by diffidence or by indifference, as many were unaware of their stories and of the reason why they were in

[15] Interview with Marzio, 26/06/2012.
[16] Interview with Ahmed, 10/06/2012.
[17] Interview with Barassi, 20/ 06/2012.

Italy. This general lack of openness and indifference made it very difficult for the asylum seekers to establish and to develop social relations outside their group and confined them in a condition of isolation[18] and of "social invisibility" (Euskirchen *et al*, 2007: 20).

The theme of social invisibility was further developed by Rolando, an activist of the squat *Centro Sociale Bruno*, who expressed his disapproval for the reception programme introduced in Trento. Although he acknowledged the positivity of the programme as it provided the people arrived from Libya with important services such as housing, food, transport and legal assistance, he criticised the fact that they were not given the opportunity to "take part in social activities and to feel an active part of the society in which they lived"[19]. Despite having their basic necessities satisfied, the impossibility to work or to be in some ways actively part of society, led many of them to 'hang around' typical drug dealing places such as Piazza Dante, a park in the centre of Trento[20].

This critique was also shared by Nicola, director of the project Melting Pot, according to whom refugees' reception programmes in Italy have been characterized by a minimal provision of services. He asserted that instead of investing in developing their capabilities and creativity, the general idea behind these programmes is that "asylum seekers only need food, water and a place to sleep" which, in fact, has "produced a situation of extreme poverty and precariousness for many"[21].

When asked about how they perceived their situation in Italy and how they viewed their future, 'precariousness' and the 'impossibility to plan their future' were two important themes that emerged from the interviews. The informants found themselves in a situation of 'limbo' as their economic and legal instability confined them in a condition of "existential insecurity" (Euskirchen *et al* 2007).When interviewed, the majority of the interviewees had been recently informed that their asylum claims had been rejected. Although they had started the appeal procedures, they expressed deep concern about their future.

One of the interviewees, Ibrahim, aged 28, from Gambia, said he felt very worried and anxious about the fact that the reception project which provides them with housing and accommodation will finish in December 2012 and he said "if you do not have a job or the

[18] Interview with Chiara, 21/06/2012.
[19] Interview with Rolando, 15/06/2012.
[20] Interview with Rolando, 15/06/2012.
[21] Interview with Nicola, 27/06/2012.

documents, we will have to leave the houses where we are staying now....without documents, a house and a job...I really do not know what will happen to me"[22].

This extreme precariousness rendered them very vulnerable and made it impossible for them "to stabilize their life situations and plan for the future", (Euskirchen *et al* 2007). According to Ahmed, many of the people whose asylum claims were refused were now stranded in Italy as they could neither look for protection in other European states nor return to their countries of origin[23]. For many, such as Amidu, aged 20 from Burkina Faso, illegality represented the only possibility for the future as it constituted the only option to remain in Italy or in Europe. He stated: "If I think about my future I think that I have two options; either to remain in Italy and to become illegal or to return to the violence of Africa".[24] Therefore, hostile public discourses around migration and the economic and legal insecurity which characterize their everyday life casted the asylum seekers in Trento into a condition of marginalisation and invisibility which undermined the possibility of advancing political claims (Euskirchen *et al,* 2007).

In this chapter, I attempted to analyse the mechanisms that have subjected the asylum seekers arrived from Libya in 2011 to marginalisation and social exclusion. In taking the examples of the cities of Trento and Padua, I observed how hostile discourses around migration and the intense economic and legal insecurity that is experienced by the asylum seekers locked them in a situation of invisibility which hindered their ability to raise their voices and to progress political claims. In the next chapter, by focusing my attention on the mobilisation organized by the asylum seekers in Trento in order to demand their right to remain in Italy, I will examine how they challenged this logic of invisibility and exclusion by making themselves politically visible.

[22] Interview with Ibrahim, 15/06/2012.
[23] Interview with Ahmed, 10/06/2012.
[24] Interview with Amidu, 10/06/2012.

Chapter Two: Asylum seekers in Trento: enacting acts of citizenship:

Although migrants and asylum seekers are increasingly 'pushed' towards invisibility and marginalization by restrictive border regimes (Euskirchen *et al* 2007) and by public discourses which associate them with violence and disorder (Wacquant 2008), migrants' movements opposing these processes have also emerged (Ruggiero 2000). Irregular migrants and migrants with precarious legal statuses have increasingly become politically active and, by mobilising through rallies, petitions, strikes and occupations, they have engaged in a battle to gain visibility and recognition (Ruggiero 2000; McNevin 2009a). By concentrating its attention on the mobilisation of the asylum seekers from Libya in Trento, this chapter will attempt to examine the ways in which the asylum seekers, despite not being formally recognised as citizens, chose to become politically visible and to act *like* citizens. It will, thus, initially analyse the circumstances and the motivation which led to the uprising and it will show how their demonstration unsettles traditional conceptions of citizenship and political belonging. It will then look at the opportunity-structures which have empowered the asylum seekers and, thus, provided the ground for their uprising.

In recent years, migrants have emerged as important political actors in Italy as they have increasingly rebelled against the condition of vulnerability and precariousness which is forced upon them (Longhi 2012) and they have stood at the forefront of "struggles concerning freedom of movement, social recognition, worker protection and the right of asylum" (Nyers, 2010: 127). Migrants' political activism is, therefore, an emergent phenomenon in Italy as they have played an increasingly central role in action against the construction of detention centres and in struggles for housing, and labour rights (Mezzadra 2004).

In this chapter, attention will be focused on the protest that was started in Trento by the asylum seekers who arrived in Italy from Libya in 2011.The decision to publicly demonstrate their anger about their precarious situation led the asylum seekers to form a political committee, named *Assemblea dei richiedenti asilo,* in May 2012[25]. The mobilisation was peculiar because of the leading role which was assumed by the asylum seekers in its conception and preparation. For the first time in Trento, non-citizens asserted themselves

[25] Leaflet of the demonstration.

as political actors (Nyers, 2010) and became key protagonists of a struggle to claim their right to protection[26].

It must be noted that the mobilisation was certainly influenced by the campaign *Welcome, Diritto di scelta* which was launched in 2011 at national level by the project Melting Pot[27]. The campaign originated as a response to the critical situation which was faced by many of the refugees from Libya in 2011 whose asylum claims were rejected (Melting Pot 2011). The high number of rejections was the result of the fact that the majority of the asylum seekers, despite having escaped from the war in Libya, were originally from countries where they were not considered to be at risk of persecution. As a result, the people who were granted international protection were mainly those whose countries of origin were characterized by extreme political instability and violence, such as Sudan, Somalia and the Ivory Coast[28]. Nonetheless, despite being from countries which were deemed to be safe, all the informants declared that it was impossible for them to return to their countries of origin. Talking about the reasons that triggered the beginning of the campaign, Luca, from the association *Razzismo Stop* in Padua, pointed out[29]:

> The campaign 'Welcome, Diritto di scelta' started when we began to see that many of the asylum seekers claims that were lodged by people who fled Libya in 2011 were being rejected as the Commission did not examine the claims on the basis that they all escaped from the conflict in Libya, but on the grounds of their country of origin. As a result, many people were refused the right to protection. Their lives are now in a complete limbo as many of them can neither go back to Libya nor to their countries of origin; their only possibility is to become illegal.

In Nicola's words, the situation which was being created was similar to a "cluster bomb"[30], which would have inevitably exploded in the near future. He went on to suggest that the end of the reception project *Emergenza Nord Africa* in December 2012 was bound to create "a wave of homeless, jobless and irregular migrants"[31] as the lack of documents was going to force the majority of the asylum seekers into illegality and, thus, exploitation

[26] Interview with Rolando, 15/06/2012.
[27] Interview with Chiara, 21/06/2012.
[28] Informal conversation with Valentina, 6/06/2012.
[29] Interview with Luca, 26/06/2012.
[30] Interview with Nicola ,27/06/2012.
[31] Interview with Nicola, 27/06/2012.

(Ruggiero, 2000; DeGenova,2002; Mezzadra, 2011). Through this campaign, a petition was launched and several demonstrations were promoted in order to demand the Italian government to issue the refugees from Libya a one year permit on humanitarian grounds[32]. This petition was surely an important factor that shaped the mobilisation of the asylum seekers as it motivated different associations and individuals in Trento, such as catholic groups, trade unions and grassroots movements, into gathering signatures and support for the cause. The campaign was, therefore, important for the mobilisation as it helped to raise awareness not only among the local population but also among the asylum seekers themselves, as it made them more conscious of the power of mobilisation[33].

Although various and complex circumstances have shaped the decision to mobilise, the refusal of many asylum claims was the main factor which triggered the start of the protest as the impossibility of remaining in Italy caused extreme anger and frustration among the asylum seekers. A strong sense of injustice was felt as, despite having fled the same conflict, only few were granted protection[34].Arona, who had been living in Libya for ten years prior to the outbreak of the conflict, angrily pointed out "I find it extremely unfair that only some people are being granted asylum because we all escaped from the same conflict"[35]. He went on arguing that their need to flee had also been dictated by the NATO intervention in Libya and he strongly criticised the Italian and the other European governments for not taking full responsibility for the dramatic situation which also emerged as a result of their intervention in Libya[36]. He reflected:

> The NATO forces intervened in Libya just because of their interest and have contributed to create an impossible situation for us. Because of this situation we came to Europe but now European states do not want to recognise our right to remain...we are here and we have been deprived of our right to choose.

The language deployed by the interviewee is embedded with agency and portrays a very different image from the one which depicts migrants as "economically desperate and destitute individuals whose mobility is prompted by economic necessity and humanitarian need" (Andrijasevic & Anderson, 2009: 363).Contrary to this image of passivity, which

[32] Interview with Luca, 26/06/2012.
[33] Interview with Rolando, 25/06/2012.
[34] Interview with Barassi, 20/06/2012.
[35] Interview with Arona, 8/06/2012.
[36] Interview with Arona, 8/06/2012.

reproduces a logic of victimisation (Anderson, Sharma & Wright, 2009) and which automatically places migrants in an inferior position in respect to citizens (Mezzadra 2004), this extract highlights the "elements of subjectivity which permeate migratory movements" (Mezzadra, 2004:270).By claiming his right to remain in Italy and his "right to escape" (Mezzadra 2004), Arona asserts the right to have the control over his mobility (Mezzadra & Neilson 2003). From this perspective, migration constitutes a strategy which, despite being motivated by conflicts, economic inequalities or a desire for better living conditions, is intimately entrenched with choice and agency (Mitropoulos 2006).

The protest was, thus, motivated by a claim for justice (Andrijasevic & Anderson 2009) and a quest for autonomy and independence[37], as the asylum seekers aimed to highlight the extreme precariousness of their condition and to claim the right to "imagine and build [their] future"[38],by demanding the issue of a humanitarian permit. Barassi, one of the initiators of the protest, told me that the sense of discrimination, which was perceived because only people from certain countries were granted protection, led a few of the asylum seekers to discuss their common concerns and to reach the conclusion that starting a protest was the only way to attempt to change their condition. After having spread the word about their idea among the other asylum seekers and after having looked for the support of the activists of the squat *Centro Sociale Bruno,* the first meeting was held[39]on the 8th of May 2012.

These meetings, which started to be held on a weekly basis in the aforementioned squat*,* culminated in the demonstration of the 20th of June 2012[40]. Prior to the demonstration, actions such as leafleting and open-air public speaking were organised by the asylum seekers in order to raise awareness of their condition among the local population and to promote their mobilisation[41]. The meetings, during which issues were discussed and the practicalities of the demonstration were organised, were very interesting to assist at as they consisted of a very rich exchange of ideas between the asylum seekers and the activists[42]. The discussions were translated from Italian into French, English and *Bambara*, a local African language which was understood by a large proportion of the asylum seekers, in

[37] Research diary entry, 20/06/2012.
[38] Interview with Boubacary, 8/06/2012.
[39] Interview with Barassi, 20/06/2012.
[40] The choice of the date is symbolic as it represents the World Refugee Day.
[41] Interview with Chiara, 21/06/2012.
[42] Research diary entry, 9/06/2012.

order to be accessible to everyone[43]. I consider that the discussions were an important moment which embodied the "reappearance" (Ruggiero, 2000:54) of the asylum seekers from a condition of invisibility as, by imposing their views and by bringing their own ideas into the organisation of the demonstration, the asylum seekers emerged as political subjectivities (Isin 2009).

The mobilisation of the asylum seekers in Trento resembles the struggle which was set in motion by the movement of the *Sans Papiers* in France in 1996 (Ruggiero 2000; McNevin 2006; Isin 2008; Isin 2009). In both cases, the occupation of public space signals a refusal of the role of passive victims (Ruggiero 2000). Through their rally, during which the asylum seekers marched through the centre of Trento playing songs of political protest, making interventions with the microphone and carrying slogans with messages such as "*equal rights and justice for all refugees"* and "*right to asylum, right to a future"* [see photos 2-3, appendix, page 58-59], they publicly showed the anger and discontent about their situation. By mobilising in such a way, they did not only claim their right to remain in Italy but they also asserted their right to claim rights (Isin, 2009: 380) and, thus, they enacted themselves as citizens (Isin 2008).

Their demands for rights and better living conditions, despite not being formally recognized as part of the political community, constitute an "appropriation of citizenship" (Bojadzijev & Karakayali, 8: 2010) that challenges traditional assumptions which conceive citizenship status as an indispensible pre-condition for political belonging (McNevin 2009b; Nyers 2010). By contesting their "outsider status" (McNevin, 2009b: 73), the asylum seekers defied the traditional image of refugees as passive and depoliticized objects of mercy (Nyers 2010). By acting *like* citizens, they became what Isin (2008) defines "activist citizens" (Isin, 2009: 38) as they engaged with new and alternative modes of political belonging (McNevin 2009b) and disrupted "already defined orders, practices and statuses" (Isin, 2009: 384). The asylum seekers in Trento constituted themselves as activist citizens and brought to fruition what Isin refers to as "acts of citizenship" (Isin 2008;Isin 2009), namely "those constitutive moments, performances, enactments and events when a new identity, substance or relationship of citizenship is brought into existence" (Walters, 2008: 191).

[43] Research diary entry, 9/06/2012.

Nonetheless, as Mezzadra (2011) observes, it is important to consider the conditions which provided the ground for the insurgence to occur and for the act of citizenship to take place. In other words, it is worth investigating "what are the conditions under which non-status persons can constitute themselves as being political?" (Nyers, 2010: 129). In the next section, I will attempt to answer this question by looking at the conditions and the opportunity-structures which allowed the demonstration of the asylum seekers in Trento to happen.

In investigating this issue, it emerged from my research that the establishment of social relations between the asylum seekers and the Italian activists was a powerful factor that shaped the mobilisation and which provided the ground for its realization. As a matter of fact, although facing hostility and indifference by the majority of Italian people in Trento, the asylum seekers managed to establish friendships with political activists who showed interest in their stories and who proved to be willing to support them[44]. The establishment of "heterogeneous coalitions" (Mezzadra, 2011: 137) between different political actors and "the encounter between the migrants and other subjects in struggle" (Mezzadra, 2011: 137) were two major features that characterized the process which eventually led to the uprising. When asked about the circumstances that favoured this mobilisation, Chiara, who got to know the asylum seekers very well while she was teaching them Italian, identified the existence of social relations between the asylum seekers and Italian activists as an extremely significant aspect which influenced the decision to mobilise. She defined the constitution of the *Assemblea dei richiedenti asilo* as "an incredible experience of intercultural exchange and empowerment"[45] and she stated:

> The relation of friendship which was established between us, activists, and the asylum seekers in Trento gave us the chance to get to know their ideas and their realities; this has produced an incredible exchange of ideas. I believe that the fact that all the Italian people who follow them closely and with whom they have built a more intimate relationship are politically very active, was a powerful determinant of the mobilisation as, by talking to them, we have transmitted to them our idea that you need to mobilise in order to claim and to defend your rights. I do not think that it was an imposition but an exchange of ideas.

[44] Interview with Sergio, 22/06/2012.
[45] Interview with Chiara, 21/06/2012.

This exchange of ideas proved to be fundamental in the development of the demonstration. According to Barassi, having the support of the activists was very important because the majority of the asylum seekers had never had this type of political experience as they came from countries where demonstrations were not allowed or where they were violently repressed by the government. Hence, the activists raised their awareness about the possibility of mobilising and supported them in organising the practicalities of the demonstration[46].

While building relations with activists who were not closely involved with the political activity of the squat *Centro Sociale Bruno,* the asylum seekers also managed to obtain the support of activists within the squat. The latter represented another important actor which facilitated the uprising of the asylum seekers as it technically sustained them throughout the mobilisation[47], providing them with the space to hold their weekly meetings and also helping them to solve bureaucratic and practical issues which arose during the preparation of the demonstration[48].

The collaboration between the asylum seekers and the activists of the squat *Centro Sociale Bruno* began prior to the emergence of the idea to mobilise. Rolando explained to me that becoming aware of the situation of marginalisation and social exclusion in which the asylum seekers from Libya in Trento lived, prompted the activists to involve them in social activities within their space[49]. The asylum seekers were involved in social projects such as an artistic laboratory, which gave them the chance to meet on a weekly basis to draw and design their own pieces of art[50]. Moreover, a gardening project, named *Richiedenti Terra,* was also set up in order to enable people from very different realities and who had an interest for organic produce to share a communal garden. This experience gave the asylum seekers the opportunity to establish social relationships with the people who took part in the project such as students, activists and people who simply had a passion for gardening. Milo, an activist from the squat *Centro Sociale Bruno* and coordinator of the project *Richiedenti Terra,* stated[51]:

[46] Interview with Barassi, 20/06/2012.
[47] Interview with Rolando, 25/06/2012.
[48] Interview with Amidu, 10/06/2012.
[49] Interview with Rolando, 25/06/2012.
[50] Interview with Ibrahim, 15/06/2012.
[51] Interview with Milo, 13/06/2012.

> This project has proved to be very interesting and positive as it has offered an alternative way of being together and of getting to know each other. Being in contact with nature and creating something together has made it possible for us to interact with each other and to create social bonds.

Hence, the space within the *Centro Sociale Bruno* began to be perceived by the asylum seekers as a "space they could access without any problems"[52] and gradually became an important meeting point where asylum seekers could express their concerns and also forge alliances with activists and other political actors. By analysing the conditions which allowed the mobilisation to occur, it emerged that the establishment of political alliances between the asylum seekers and other political actors was fundamental in the building up of the demonstration. As a matter of fact, in order to abandon their condition of invisibility (Ruggiero 2000), the asylum seekers politicised "their practical survival network" (Euskirchen *et al, 2007: 21)* by forging political alliances (Euskirchen *et al* 2007) and by developing common grounds for struggle with activists of the grassroots movement (Mezzadra &Neilson 2003). This determined the emergence of heterogeneous "strong collective actors" (Euskirchen *et al,* 2007:21) which have united their efforts in the preparation of the demonstration.

The mobilisation of the asylum seekers in Trento was, thus, motivated by complex factors and circumstances. The analysis of their uprising is important as it shows how, by engaging with forms of political visibility, non-status migrants and migrants with precarious legal status can profoundly challenge the traditional assumptions which view citizenship as the only way of political belonging. In analysing the pre-conditions that stimulated and made the uprising in Trento possible, the existence of alliances between the asylum seekers and the activists proved to have played a very important role. In the next chapter, I will particularly focus on this latter aspect and I will attempt to examine the nature of the relation between the asylum seekers and the activists of grassroots movements.

[52] Interview with Rolando, 25/06/2012.

Chapter Three: The global movement and migrants' struggles:

As the collaboration between asylum seekers and activists proved to be a very important factor that shaped the mobilisation in Trento, this chapter will further investigate the relationship between them. Firstly, it will look at the role that issues related to migration play within the radical left grassroots movement in the Italian context, particularly focusing on the way in which realities such as the association *Razzismo Stop* in Padua and the *Centro Sociale Bruno* in Trento support migrants and asylum seekers and how they uphold their rights. It will then examine how the cooperation between these two actors has taken place by looking at the common grounds for struggle which have enabled the establishment of an alliance between activists and migrants. It will finally consider the nature of the relationship between the activists and the asylum seekers, specifically analysing the power dynamics which existed between them.

Besides immigrants' rights groups, non-governmental organisations and churches, migrants have also increasingly received support from political activists from grassroots movements who have engaged in struggles to uphold their rights (Euskirchen *et al* 2009). Migration has become a prominent matter within the global justice movement or, as Mezzadra defines it, the 'global movement' (Mezzadra & Neilson 2003). This movement opposes neo-liberal policies and "corporate globalisation" (Engler 2007) by advocating a more participatory form of democracy and an increased popular control over economic and political affairs "in the face of increasingly powerful corporations, unaccountable global financial institutions, and US hegemony" (Engler 2007). Migration issues have gained increasing importance within the global movement in Italy since the demonstrations which were held against the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001.As a matter of fact, this event constituted "the first encounter between the global movement and grassroots migrants organisations" (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2003:) as it was, for the first time, marked by the presence of a large rally coordinated by migrants (Mezzadra &Neilson 2003) and by slogans advocating freedom of movement (Mezzadra 2004).

It is important to stress that the squat *Centro Sociale Bruno* in Trento and the association *Razzismo Stop,* which closely collaborates with the main squatted centre in Padua *Centro*

Sociale Pedro, are part of a broader network whose political action follows the principles underpinning the global movement. These are politically closely interconnected and they often promote and participate in coordinated political action which aims to criticise and oppose institutional politics through mobilisations and also through occupations and other forms of civil disobedience[53]. The experience of the squatted centre *Centro Sociale Bruno* started to emerge following the dramatic events that took place during the demonstrations against the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001, a discussion forum for the governments of the eight most industrialised nations in the world (Amnesty International 2011). The demonstrations were marked by severe human rights violations, which occurred as a result of the excessive use of force by law enforcement officers towards the protesters, and resulted in the death of one of the protesters, Carlo Giuliani, who was shot dead by a police officer during the violent clashes between the police and the activists (Amnesty International 2011).

As a consequence of these tragic events, which were deemed to be unacceptable in a democracy, various activists in Trento decided to occupy a space as a response to the "lack of a truly alternative and autonomous political space in Trento[54]". When I asked Rolando about the role that migration issues play within the political activity of the *Centro Sociale Bruno,* he told me that, in the past, they promoted a project which addressed problems related to migration and integration and which was particularly concerned with opposing 'racist' migration policies both at national and local level, especially focusing its efforts on contesting the proposed dismantlement of local Roma camps. Nonetheless, this project was not able to continue because of a lack of funding and activists who were able to constantly follow these issues. Although there are no specific projects which directly follow issues related to migration within the *Centro Sociale Bruno* at the moment, concepts such anti-racism and freedom of movement continue to be central principles underpinning its political action[55]. He suggested:

> Our rejection of racism is certainly a very important concept within our project...just to give you an idea, not long time ago we were sued by the Northern League party because during a local demonstration we accused them of inciting racism and xenophobia. We had to go to court but fortunately we won the case.

[53] Informal conversation with Francesca, 10/06/2012.
[54] Interview with Rolando, 25/06/2012.
[55] Interview with Rolando, 25/06/2012.

Hence, despite not offering any specific services to migrants and asylum seekers, the *Centro Sociale Bruno* is actively involved in struggles and mobilisations to uphold their rights. The migrants' support network in Padua is certainly more developed than the one in Trento; the association *Razzismo Stop* was created by a network of activists at the beginning of the 1990s in response to the increasing presence of migrants and asylum seekers in the city of Padua. Tracing the events that led to the creation of the association *Razzismo Stop,* Marzio explained to me that the death of an eleven year old Roma boy, who was shot by a police officer while being held in custody on a charge of theft in Padua in 1993, triggered the development of a network of activists who demanded truth and justice about his death. The emergence of this network later led the activists to occupy a public space, which then became the association *Razzismo Stop.*

Besides being the promoter of mobilisations and political action in defence of migrants' rights, the association also offers various support services to migrants and asylum seekers; the main ones being legal advice, which can be freely accessed through weekly drop-in sessions, free Italian classes that are held twice a week, and free access to the internet. In recent years, the association has also built a living space within its premises in order to provide accommodation to homeless immigrants and asylum seekers. Although the space where the association is based has been illegally occupied, public authorities have tolerated its presence as they recognized the usefulness and the importance of the services which the association provides[56].

Therefore, as migration has become a prominent issue within the alter-globalisation movement in the Italian context, it is worth considering the common ground which has united migrants' and activists' struggles. Dissatisfaction with the current political and economic system has certainly provided an important framework for common struggles between migrants and activists to emerge. This is shown by the intervention made by one of the activists during one of the meetings which were held in preparation of the demonstration in Trento. On this occasion, he stressed that the mobilisation of the asylum seekers in Trento represented a common struggle as, besides being an occasion for them to reclaim their right to remain in Italy, it was also a way for both activists and asylum seekers to raise their voices in order "to show their dissatisfaction with the forms of

[56] Interview with Marzio, 25/06/2012.

inequality and exclusion produced by the current political and economic policies and to assert that another world is possible"[57].

Within the movement and its contestation of the current political and economic order, the theme of the "precarisation of labour" (Euskirchen *et al* 2009: 6) has represented an important ground which has enabled different actors, such as students, activists, migrants and precarious workers, to forge alliances and to organise common mobilisations(The Frassinato Network 2006; Euskirchen *et al* 2009).These common mobilisations are, thus, motivated by the belief that neo-liberal policies and the current political and economic system are responsible for rendering the working class as a whole increasingly precarious and exploitable (Euskirchen *et al* 2009). The precarisation of labour is a particularly significant theme for opening up new fields of cooperation between migrants and other political actors as migrant labour's extreme vulnerability to exploitation (DeGenova 2002; Mezzadra 2011; Longhi 2012) is emblematic of the processes of precarisation and depreciation which are imposed by neo-liberal policies on the labour force (The Frassinato Network 2006); in this respect, migrants "manifest in their subjective conditions all the main characteristics which shape modern labour as a whole" (The Frassinato Network 2006).

Hence, the idea that the exploitation and vulnerability to which migrants are subjected is representative of a condition which is common, even though to different extents, to the entire working class has constituted an important unifying framework which has brought "different subjects into an intensified exchange, on a social as well as on a political level" (The Frassinato Network 2006). This process is illustrated by Nicola's point of view; when asked why, in his opinion, it is important to support migrants' struggles he highlighted how he did not see the defence of rights of citizens and non-citizens as two different domains but that he thought that ensuring the defence of migrants' rights and dignity was an indispensible precondition for defending citizens' rights[58]. He stated:

> I think that a society in which there is always someone more vulnerable, it is a society in which we are more vulnerable. Defending migrants' rights means to defend and to promote the rights of everyone, also our rights. In my opinion it is a problem to think about struggles to uphold migrants' rights as 'something' detached from us, especially when it is evident that also our rights as citizens are dangerously shrinking at the moment.

[57] Research diary entry, 19/06/2012.
[58] Interview with Nicola, 27/06/2012.

According to this view, current neo-liberal policies are not only responsible for casting undocumented migrants and migrants with precarious legal status into a condition of extreme vulnerability (Mezzadra 2011) but are also producing an erosion of the rights associated with citizenship which seriously undermines social security and labour protections as they are increasingly dismantling the welfare state (Popelard 2012). This point was raised during the demonstration of the 20th of June in Trento where one of the activists, through an intervention, stressed that struggles for rights concern both citizens and non-citizens as the current economic and financial crisis, which was produced by the world's powerful elites, has justified the adoption of austerity measures which severely curtail the rights of both citizens and non-citizens (Popelard 2012). Thereafter, he underlined the importance of creating alliances and common grounds for struggle in order to affirm that "rights are either for everyone or for no one"[59].

Nonetheless, although coalition-building with other political entities provides "an important mobilising tool" (Chimienti & Solomos, 2011: 353) which can empower migrants by endowing them with help and support to articulate and advance their claims, this collaboration can also re-create an uneven power which risks favouring activists' political agendas and ideas, thus, overshadowing migrants' own voices and necessities (Chimienti & Solomos, 2011). Therefore, it risks perpetuating a pattern of victimisation which presents migrants as depoliticised objects who, "in the very spectacle of this inability to speak or act, invite the observer to assume the task of representation" (Mitropoulos, 2006: 9).

However, it must also be considered that there are many factors that can hinder migrants' ability to become politically visible as the threat of deportation, the fact of not being familiar with the local language and with the local political and legal customs can greatly restrain migrants' and asylum seekers' ability to access the public space and can easily lead to the creation of "new mechanisms of marginalisation and exclusion" (Rodriguez, 2004:155).As outlined by Nicola, the potential emergence of migrants' political activism is also inhibited by a more anthropological aspect as migrating itself is an individual choice and entails a very individual experience. This individualism surely marks migrants' lives and produces a "tendency to 'think about solving your own problem' instead of organising collectively in order to try to tackle the root of the problem"[60].

[59] Research diary entry, 20/06/2012.
[60] Interview with Nicola, 27/06/2012.

In the case of the mobilisation organized in Trento, the collaboration between very different subjects proved to be very important for its development. Nonetheless, I considered it important to analyse the nature of the relation between the asylum seekers and the activists who supported them in order to investigate the existing hierarchies of power within this heterogeneous group. According to Sergio, the position as activists 'with documents' was a very important issue to consider during the organisation of the mobilisation in order to avoid the potential creation of a dynamic of power which would have overshadowed the claims and needs of the asylum seekers. In his opinion, many mobilisations which are organized to uphold migrants' rights are characterised by an "asymmetrical structure of representation" (Rodriguez, 2004: 155) as, even though "they are organised to defend migrants' rights, they are often characterised by the absence of migrants themselves"[61]. He stressed that the awareness about those dynamics made the activists in Trento very mindful of the existing power relation between them and the asylum seekers. He stated:

> I think that you always have to consider what drives you to sustain migrants' struggles. You have to ask yourself if you do it because you want to be the leader of a demonstration or because you are really interested in hearing their stories and their ideas and you want to protest with them for a common cause. This distinction is very important and it has to be clear from the beginning.

The fact that the activists in Trento considered this issue and were very careful not to "unconsciously manipulate the asylum seekers"[62] with their own political ideas was crucial in avoiding the establishment of instrumental forms of collaboration (Chimienti & Solomos 2011) which would have reproduced a form of "patronising politics" (Rodriguez, 2004: 155) and which would have reiterated an image of migrants as 'inferior' subjects needing the political representation of citizens in order to advance their claims (Mitropoulos 2006). Attending the meetings which were held prior to the demonstration gave me an insight into the nature of the power relations between the activists and the asylum seekers. I observed that the activists surely provided practical and logistic support for the preparation of the demonstration, also because the asylum seekers came from very different political realities and they lacked the practical and political experience which was necessary for the organisation of the demonstration.

[61] Interview with Sergio, 22/06/2012.
[62] Interview with Chiara, 21/06/2012.

Nonetheless, I found that this aspect did not reproduce a paternalistic structure of power and did not silence the asylum seekers' own ideas and desires as they played a central role both in the in devising and organising the mobilisation. The meetings which were held prior to the demonstration were characterized by an intense exchange of ideas between the asylum seekers and the activists where the asylum seekers expressed their views and actively stated their dissent for some of the suggestions proposed by the activists[63]. Furthermore, during the demonstration the asylum seekers stood at the front of the rally and made many interventions on the microphone in which they explained their stories and their reasons for mobilising[64]. Therefore, I consider that in the case of the mobilisation in Trento, the support given to the asylum seekers was mainly practical and, although a common ground for struggle was established with Italian activists, the presence of the activists did not entail the silencing of the asylum seekers' own claims and ideas.

Therefore, migration has gradually become a prominent issue within the political action of the global movement whose activists have increasingly engaged in the promotion of mobilisations in support of rights of migrants and asylum seekers. The cooperation between activists of the radical left movement and migrants has been made possible by the establishment of solidarities and common grounds for struggle. One of the major frameworks necessary for this cooperation to emerge has been the theme of the 'precarisation of labour', namely the condition of precariousness and exploitation which is imposed on the labour force by neo-liberal policies. This theme has provided a very good structure for collaboration between migrants and activists as migrants are primarily affected by this process and are the subjects on which it is more manifest. Nonetheless, this type of collaboration can also re-create an uneven dynamic of power skewed in favour of the activists 'with papers' for whom access to public space is easier to achieve as they do not have to face the threat of deportation, and the difficulties associated with lack of knowledge of the local language and of the local political situation. Nonetheless, the research proved that in the case of the mobilisation in Trento, the asylum seekers were able to constitute themselves as political subjects without being overshadowed by the political ideas of the activists.

[63] Research diary entry, 15/06/2012.
[64] Research diary entry, 20/06/2012.

CONCLUSION:

By focusing on the mobilisation of the asylum seekers from Libya in Trento, this paper has sought to explore the process through which the asylum seekers have subverted the condition of invisibility and isolation, imposed upon them by the securitised border regime, and became politically visible by claiming their right to remain in Italy. By adopting the 'autonomy of migration' analytical framework (Papadopoulos *et al* 2008; Bojadzijev & Karakayali 2010; Mezzadra 2011) this research has sought to investigate the circumstances and the factors which have enabled the asylum seekers in Trento to enact themselves as citizens and to emerge as political subjectivities.

In Chapter One, I started by explaining the reasons which determined the arrival of the asylum seekers from Libya in Italy and by outlining the measures which were put into place by the Italian government in order to receive them. It then turned to look at how the extreme diffidence towards them and the legal and economic precariousness which characterize their existence subjected the asylum seekers in Trento to a condition of invisibility and isolation.

Chapter Two assessed how the asylum seekers in Trento reversed their condition of invisibility by choosing to mobilise and to publicly show the dissatisfaction about the precarious condition forced upon them. It, thus, found that the anger and frustration which arose after being refused the right to asylum in Italy was the main factor which prompted the start of the mobilisation. I considered that the decision of the asylum seekers in Trento to claim their right to remain in Italy unsettles traditional assumptions which view citizenship as an indispensible precondition for political belonging (McNevin 2009b). As a matter of fact, despite being considered non-citizens, the asylum seekers in Trento acted *like* citizens and, therefore, defied the traditional boundaries of political belonging from which they are formally excluded. In the last part of the chapter, attention was given to the conditions and the circumstances that have provided the ground for the mobilisation to occur. I found that the establishment of coalitions and common grounds for struggle (Mezzadra 2011) with Italian activists was a very important factor that shaped the mobilisation.

This latter aspect was then further explored in the Chapter Three, which particularly explored the existing relation between migrants' struggles and grassroots movements in

the Italian context. By focusing on the political scenario of Trento and Padua, this study found that migration has become an increasingly important 'terrain' of struggle within the radical Left social movements in Italy (Mezzadra & Neilson 2003; Mezzadra 2004).The theme of the 'precarisation of labour' has constituted an important framework which has enabled the emergence of common grounds for struggle between migrants and activists of the radical Left (The Frassinato Network 2006;Euskirchen *et al* 2009) as migrant labour's extreme vulnerability to exploitation is deemed to be emblematic of a process of depreciation of labour which is imposed by neo-liberal policies on the working class as a whole. Finally, in this last chapter I explored the dynamics of power which took place between the asylum seekers in Trento and the Italian activists; I found that the mobilisation was not characterized by an asymmetrical distribution of power between citizens and non-citizens (Chimienti & Solomos 2011) as the asylum seekers managed to advance their claims and ideas without being overshadowed by the activists' political ideas and affiliation.

By taking into examination the mobilisation in Trento, this research has sought to analyse migratory movements from an alternative angle that the one offered by mainstream migration theories. It has sought to move away from the traditional conception of migrants as passive objects of control or of mercy by understanding them as political subjectivities. By choosing to engage in a struggle to claim their right to have rights (Isin 2009), the asylum seekers in Trento forced a reconsideration of the very foundations upon which the concept of citizenship is based. As the analysis of the mobilisation in Trento has shown, migrants' struggles determine the establishment of heterogeneous political alliances, in which the distinction between citizens and non-citizens becomes increasingly blurred (Mezzadra 2011).

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INITIAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL, 27/02/2012:

Securitisation of migration in the European Union and respect of human rights:

Aims of the research:

- To analyze the phenomenon of securitisation in the European context and to understand how this process has occurred in relation to migration.
- To analyze how this approach has shaped EU migration policies, especially how it has influenced the development of restrictive migration policies.
- To analyze the impact that these policies have on migrants' lives, particularly in respect to their rights.
- To gather evidence and stories from the Port of Venice, that has become a major point of entry into Italy and the EU for many migrants who have transited through Greece.

Research questions:

- Why migration is considered a threat to security and order in the EU?
- How has migration been constructed into a threat to security?
- In which ways has the securitisation of migration affected immigration policies in the European Union?
- In which ways do these policies affect migrants' rights? Do they jeopardize the protection of their fundamental rights?

Literature review:

Huysmans and Squire (2009) assert that "migration emerged as a security issue in a context marked both by the geopolitical dislocation with the end of the Cold War and also by wider social and political shifts associated with globalization" (Huysmans & Squire, 2009: 1). They take into consideration the nature of the migration-security nexus and they analyze how the critical security approach challenges both the strategic and human security approaches. Huysmans (2006) provides a very valuable analysis of the way in which migration has become a security concern. He examines that the shaping of migration into an existential threat is central to the process of securitisation. He identifies three themes that are particularly important in this process, namely the view of migration as a threat to internal security, to cultural identity and to welfare provisions. The play out of these three themes has led to the securitization of migration and has legitimized

the adoption of restrictive migration policies in the EU. According to Geddes (2000), the elimination of internal borders within the EU, which was achieved through the Single European Act, heavily determined the increase of external borders control. These measures primarily aim at preventing immigrants from entering the EU and, as Migreurop (2010) explains, this "war against migrants" (Migreurop) has principally taken the form of controls, detention and deportation. Nonetheless, as it is documented by Migreurop and Human Rights Watch, the adoption of these measures has been extremely detrimental for migrants as they have profoundly jeopardized their rights and freedoms. As Migreurop suggests, the case of Venice is particularly relevant in this respect as its port has become a major entry point to Italy for migrants who have transited through Greece but do not wish to stay there. If caught by the Italian authorities, these migrants are regularly sent back to Greece, in virtue of the Dublin II Regulation, where they face inhuman living conditions and they do not have access to fair and efficient asylum procedures. The death of a fifteen years old Afghan boy, Zaher Rezai, raised important questions about the fairness and the humanity of the framework which underpins the Dublin II Regulation and, more in general, of the EU immigration and asylum policies. As a matter of fact, Zaher was found dead in 2008 near Venice as he was trying to reach Italy from Greece hidden under a lorry that departed from Patras. Zaher travelled in those conditions as he attempted several times to reach Italy by sea but he was returned to Greece.

Methodology:

In order to answer my research questions, I will adopt qualitative methods. My research will undertake a case-study approach as it will focus on the case of the Port of Venice in order to analyze the consequences that the EU migration policies have on migrants. I will carry out in depth, semi-structured interviews with the migrants that are present in the Port of Venice and also with the local organizations that work with them. Interviews will enable me to collect the stories of these people and to understand what they went through in their journey to Europe. Moreover, I will attempt to have focus groups within the migrants' community in order to understand the different perspectives of their journeys and of the conditions they encountered during their stays. Also visual methods will be employed; the collection of photographs and possibly videos will enable me to collect evidence of the stories and the daily lives of these people.

Timetable of proposed research:

April and May (2nd of May)	Background reading Presentation of the project
May	Literature review Organising the practicalities and the schedule of the fieldwork in Italy
June (first three weeks of June)	Fieldwork in Italy: first few days to get to know the people and the environment Interviews and collection of data
End of June- July	Transcription of the collected data Coding and analysis of the data
July – September (10th)	Further reading Writing up of the dissertation

Potential outcomes, rationale and value of the research:

The potential outcome of the research is likely to show how the construction of migration as a security threat in the EU has prompted the adoption of measures and of policies which have caused a decline in the respect of international human rights obligations and in the safeguards of fundamental rights and freedoms of migrants. The research is particularly interested in investigating the link between the phenomenon of securitisation of migration and the impact that this has on the lives and conditions of migrants. Therefore, this research hopes to provide a valuable insight into the causal nexus between the phenomenon of securitisation, which has been extensively explored by Huysmans and other authors, and the rights and living conditions of migrants in the European Union.

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AUTO-CRITIQUE:

The final result of my research substantially differs from my initial proposal. As a matter of fact, my initial plan was to investigate the implications of securitized migration policies on the protection of human rights of migrants and asylum seekers. I wanted to focus my research on analyzing the underlying contradictions between securitized migration policies and the human rights framework in the Italian context and I planned to take the city of Venice as a case study.

However, my project evolved in a completely different direction. After having encountered the strand of literature of the 'autonomy of migration' ,which offered me an alternative reading into the phenomenon of migration, my interest started to be focused less on the politics of control and more on the politics of mobility. I decided to direct my analysis on how migratory movements challenge sovereign control but also traditional notions of citizenship and I chose to concentrate my research particularly on this latter aspect. I initially did not plan to carry out my fieldwork in Trento, which is also my hometown, as I was thinking to focus my attention on the situation in Venice. Nonetheless, once I entered the field I realized that the mobilisation of the asylum seekers in Trento constituted an extraordinary event because of the leading role assumed by the asylum seekers in its preparation. I, thus, decided to research into the mobilisation in Trento as I believed that it would have given me a very good ground in which to explore migrants' agency and political subjectivity. At this point, the decision to investigate into the conditions and opportunity- structures, which enabled the mobilisation to occur, led me to ground my research both in Trento and in Padua in order to gain a better understanding of the relations between migrants' struggle and grassroots movements.

I consider that the transformation that characterized the development of my project has been both the strength and the weakness of my research. On one hand, it proved to be very positive as the decision to focus on the 'politics of mobility' rather than on the 'politics of control' led me to take into account a very different perspective from the one which is offered by mainstream migration theories and, thus, pushed me into a much more interesting and challenging research field. However, all these changes were also rather problematic and stressful at times as they meant that I had to considerably adjust my research questions, my theoretical framework and the organization of the fieldwork in order to suit the new nature and objectives of the project.

APPENDIX:

1. Fieldwork photos
2. Table of all informants
3. Activist interview schedule
4. Migrants interview schedule
5. Interview extract

Fieldwork photos:

Photo 1:

Leaflet advertising the demonstration of the 20th of June 2012 in Trento (photo taken from the blog of the *Assemblea dei richiedenti asilo*). The leaflet reads “a humanitarian permit not to die: demonstration for the issue of a humanitarian permit to the refugees who fled the conflict in Libya.

Photo 2:

At the gathering point, before the start of the rally.

Photo 3:

One of the activists is helping the asylum seekers to set up the banners before the start of the demonstration.

Photo 4:

One of the asylum seekers is making the first intervention on the microphone while waiting for the demonstration to start.

Photo 5:

The asylum seekers preparing to carry their slogans, some of them were written in Italian, some in English and also in French.

Photo 6:

Another banner, this one reads ‘right to asylum, right to a future’.

Photo7:

The asylum seekers playing and dancing songs of political protest during the demonstration.

Photo 8:

At the end of the rally, which ended in the main square of Trento.

Photo 9:

This banner, which reads ‘migrants, citizens: no one is a foreigner’, is particularly significant as it shows the desire to erode the divide between citizens and non-citizens.

Photo 10:

This picture shows the entrance of the association *Razzismo Stop* in Padua.

Photo 11:

The squatted centre *Centro Sociale Bruno* in Trento (picture taken from its Facebook page).

Tables of all informants:

Name	Age	Country of origin
Ahmed	25	Libya (tuareg)
Alfred	31	Nigeria
Amidu	20	Burkina Faso
Arona	26	Senegal
Barassi	26	Mali
Bashir	30	Somalia
Boubacary	22	Mali
Cheickne	21	Mali
Emmanuel	22	Nigeria
Ibrahim	28	Gambia
Soma	20	Mali
Yusuf	24	Sudan

Name	Involvement with migrants' struggles
Chiara	Italian teacher, activist and supporter of the mobilisation in Trento.
Francesca	Activist of the squat *Centro Sociale Bruno* (Trento)
Luca	Activist of the association *Razzismo Stop* (Padua)
Marzio	Activist of the association *Razzismo Stop* (Padua)
Milo	Coordinator of the project *Richiedenti Terra*
Nicola	Director of Melting Pot
Rolando	Activist of the squat *Centro Sociale Bruno* (Trento)
Sergio	Activist and supporter of the mobilisation in Trento
Valentina	Working at *Cinformi* (migrant information centre in Trento)
Vittoria	Activist of the *Razzismo Stop* in Venice

Activist interview schedule:

- Information about the organization
    1. When and why was it founded?
    2. Did the project start as a reaction to a particular event or as response to a perceived need? How did it evolve over time?
    3. Is the organization part of a broader network?
    4. What are the principles which underpin your work?
    5. What type of support do you offer to migrants?
    6. What are perceived to be the key issues or the key needs at the moment? How have these key issues transformed over time?
- Situation in Padua/Trento
    1. How is the presence of migration perceived by the local people? Is there a lot of intolerance and xenophobia or people welcoming towards them?
    2. What impact do Italian migration policies have on the perception of migration? And on the migrants?
- Major campaigns and mobilisation recently brought forward in favour of the promotion and protection of migrants' rights.
    1. How did the campaign Welcome, Diritto di scelta originate? What it is the aim of this campaign?
    2. What strategies and initiatives did you use in order to promote this campaign (demonstrations, petitions, etc.)?
    3. What role do migrants play in these mobilisations? Are they rather passive or are they actively engaged? How would you define your role as activists within these mobilisations?
    4. Why do you think it is important to defend and promote migrants' rights?
- Response of the public
    1. Are many people interested and supportive of the campaigns that you promote? Are they seen in positive or negative terms by the media and by the local population? How was the general response to the recent campaign Welcome?

Migrants interview schedule:

- Brief personal history- country of origin, migration route
    1. Country of origin, when did you move to Libya and reasons for leaving your country of origin.
    2. How was your situation in Libya? Did you work? How many years did you stay in Libya? Did you move there by yourself or did you go there with your family or friends?
    3. When did you arrive in Italy?
    4. Why did you decide to leave Libya and how did you arrive in Italy?
    5. Why is it impossible for you to go back to Libya now?
    6. How was the journey to reach Europe? Was it dangerous and difficult?
    7. When the war in Libya broke out, have you ever thought of going back to your country of origin? Why was it not possible to go back to your country?
- General situation in Italy-
    1. Do you perceive the local people to be welcoming or hostile towards you?
    2. How do you feel about your current situation as you don't know what is going to happen in your future- (anxious, sad, worried, optimistic). What do you do with your time?
    3. Do you feel that your rights are respected and that your needs are taken into considerations?
    4. Do you plan to remain in Italy for a long time? How would you like your life to be in Italy?
- Development of the mobilisation
    1. How did the idea to mobilise originate and how did it develop?
    2. Why did you decide to mobilise? What do you want to obtain through your protest?
    3. Strategies of mobilisation- initiative done to promote the mobilisation?
    4. How would you like the demonstration of the 20th of June to be?
    5. Did you find the city and the local organisations supportive of your struggles? How?

6. Why did you choose to rely on local social movements to organise the demonstration? Do you think you have better chances to be heard if you mobilise with them?
7. Do you think that your campaign has been successful so far and that the public is more attentive to your situation and your problems?

Interview transcript extract:

Tell me a bit about your story: where you come from, why you went to Libya, why you left your country.

I am from Gambia and I left from there in 2006. I left my country because I was working for a place called Directory of National Treasury but my boss was involved in a problem like a coup plot, he wanted to take over the country. When this happened I decided to leave my country because I felt at risk as I was working under my boss...the military went to my boss and said that they wanted to take over the government and because he was in a high post they said that when they took the country they would have selected him as the president. My boss was not in the military but he was in a high post and he decided to accept their offer. Because I was working under my boss, I was aware of their plan...in Africa if you know about a problem and you don't voice it out, it means that you are also part of the problem. It was going to be dangerous for me to stay there because I knew what they wanted to do, so I left my country. I stayed in Senegal for one year and then I decided to go to Mali where I spent six months. After that I went to Nigeria, where I also spent six months. I spent two years on the journey to Libya where I arrived in 2009. I spent three years in Libya, I didn't intend to come to Italy but I came because of the war, when the war broke out they said that black people were mercenaries of Gheddafi because a lot of his soldiers are black.

How was your life in Libya?

Before the problems started I was having a good life in Libya, I was working well and I was earning money but when the problems started it was not possible to be there anymore. I left and I arrived in Italy on August 2011.

How did you arrive in Italy? How was the journey?

I arrived from Tripoli to Lampedusa by boat. The journey was very hard because there were something like 600 people on the boat and it was a small boat...some people died on the boat, two people died on our boat because, you know, some people were scared as they are not familiar with the sea so they throw themselves in the water...it was very serious.

So now would it possible for you to go back to Libya?

No, Libya is still a mess...even though now it is not like when I left, it is still not normal. I am in touch with some of my friends who are still in Libya and they told me that sometimes they just come and take them to the police station without notice, so it's still dangerous.

When the war in Libya broke out, did you think about going back to your country?

It's not possible for me to go back home because the guy who took the power in my country and who asked my boss to take part in the coup is still in power...also because he is a military, he took the power by gun. My boss was the accountant general, so he was the controller of the money of the Gambian government. I knew that if my boss would have become the president after the coup organized by the military I could have become a minister or I could have covered other important posts in the government, this would have indicated that I was part of the plan to overthrow the previous government. That's why I escaped my country because if I didn't leave, they would have held me like they did with my boss. Now I couldn't go back to my country unless the person left the power. I don't know when he'll leave the power because he is a young man; he is 35 so he could stay in power for long time...only God knows.

How do you feel about your situation in Italy?

Well...I really appreciate what Trento is doing for us, I can say this about the Trentino region because I have not experienced any other regions in Italy, only the Trentino region. Since I arrived in Italy, I stayed three days in the camp in Lampedusa and then they decided to take us with the boat to Genova and then they divided us between all the regions in Italy. I was lucky to come to the Trentino region because they are friendly and they welcomed us well, the only difficulty that we are facing is the lack of documents. We applied for asylum but they rejected many of us...and...without the documents it is very hard. There are around 250 people and none of us is working and the majority does not have documents. This is our difficulty in Italy at the moment because without documents you are not able to work, getting the documents is important for our lives. We've been here now for one year without working, just hanging around without doing much...this is not our lifestyle.

So what do you do to fill your time?

If I'm free I call my friends, we hang around Trento, we go to Bruno and we start doing paintings...it's very hard anyway.

Do you feel that the Italian people are hostile or friendly towards you?

Not all of them, but some are friendly...some are friendly and some are not friendly.

How do you feel about your future?

I feel worried and anxious because I don't know what's going to happen with us. We are part of this project that gives us the house, the money to pay for our food but this project will be finished by the end of this year, it will finish in December 2012. They said that when the project finishes, if you don't have a job or the documents we will have to leave the houses where we are staying now. This means that if you don't know anybody here or if you don't have any Italian friends that can help you, your life will become incredibly difficult...without documents, a house or a job, I really don't know what's going to happen.

Do you feel that your rights are respected here in Italy?

I think that right now our life is respected but after I don't know what will happen because at the moment they are taking care of us but when the project will be finished I don't know. This is really worrying us.

How did the idea of mobilizing and of organizing the demonstration originate and how did it develop?

The demonstration that we are organizing aims to show the Italian people the difficulty of our current situation, so everyone can know our problem. The whole thing started from a small group of us, we also had some Italian friends that helped us a lot. We sat down all together and we decided that we should do something about it because many people received negative answers for their asylum applications and we are all very worried about our future. So we joined all together, we went to the *Ci Informi* to talk about it. We had the idea of organizing this demonstration and our Italian friends gave us support and advice on how to do it in a civilised manner.

What do you want to obtain through your protest?

We are doing this demonstration so the Italians can hear our voices and our stories and can also have sympathy for us, so that we can obtain at least the humanitarian protection which is better than being in this country without documents. It's better for everyone if we have the documents because it's not good to be illegal. Italians have to understand us; we are not illegal immigrants, we are refugees because we escaped the war in Libya.

What did you ask the Centro Sociale Bruno to help you?

We asked them because we know that the Centro Sociale Bruno is a social space and it's politically very active, so if you want to do a demonstration it is the right place to ask for help. At the beginning we were going to Bruno because we started an artistic project, which is still running. We were given a room where we could draw and design our pieces of art. There was an African festival in the weekend and we designed and created many of the masks and pieces of art which were there, we were selling our products there. That's how it started because through this project we got to know them and they decided to know more about our condition and they also decided to help us with all the practical aspects of organizing the demonstration; for example they went to ask the police the permission to do the demonstration.

How do you want the demonstration on Wednesday to be?

I want the demonstration to be 'civilised'; I don't want to see problems or violence. I just want it to be in a way so people can listen to us and they can understand our situation...this is our intention, we don't want any problems during the demonstration. We want to express our difficulty but we don't want to break anything or to insult anyone. We are stressing this everyday because creating problems can be very counterproductive in

our situation. Some workers from Morocco who have been here for several years wanted to join us in organizing the demonstration because they have been fired by the company they used to work for. But we opposed this suggestion, firstly because I think that our situation and their situation are completely different. They have been here for many years and it was their choice to come to Europe. We are refugees and it wasn't my intention to come here, I didn't even feel like coming here. Because of the war I came here, otherwise I would have never come here. Secondly Moroccans have a bad reputation, they are usually violent and we don't want to have problems during the demonstration.

Did you find local people to be supportive of your protest?

Hmmm... I think that the majority of people from the Trentino region now know about our condition, we've been giving a lot of leaflets and there was also an article about us on the local newspaper. So I think that they are more attentive now, we are expecting many people to come for the demonstration of the 20th of June.