

# IN AND OUT OF THE GREY ZONE

The production of '(il)legality' through the construction of frames and narratives in Naples  
and Caserta



*“ you wanted labour force, yet received people ”*

Rosemarijn Bakker & Kiki Holle

All photos are taken by the authors in Italy during the fieldwork period in 2018



**Utrecht University**

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and Caserta

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# Map of Italy

Figure 1: Map of Italy, with a demarcation of Naples and Caserta<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> "Map of Italy." Digital image. Map of Italy. Accessed June 25, 2018. <http://www.italymagazine.com/map-of-italy>.

## **Acknowledgments**

In August 2017 we decided that we would write our thesis together. That moment led to us going to Naples and Caserta from February fifth till April sixteenth, 2018. Writing our thesis and doing fieldwork has been a very valuable period of our study Cultural Anthropology at the University of Utrecht.

During our years of studies, we learned many theories regarding anthropology and foremost, what an anthropologist should be like. Especially the words of Geert Mommersteeg stayed with us. During our first year he told us that being an anthropologist is about putting on glasses that allow you to see the world differently. He taught us the valuable lesson that anthropology is not only about what you know, but also about your attitude. During our fieldwork came the time to put our knowledge and attitude to the test.

In order to get us to our fieldwork site there are a few people that we would like to thank. First of all, we would like to thank our thesis supervisor Evi Kostner. With her guidance, motivation and patience we were able to prepare ourselves for our fieldwork as best as we were able to. Upon our return she yet again mentored us towards the finish line.

In the three months we were in Italy we met many people that we would not have been able to do our research without. Therefore, we would like to thank everyone in the field for talking to us, helping us, showing us around and enduring our nagging questions and ignorance. We would like to especially thank Lorenzo and Petro as they invited Rosemarijn to events that else she would not have been able to attend. We would also like to especially thank Violetta and Ibrahim as they took Kiki under their wing.

Last, we would like to thank each other. From the moment we shook hands as we decided to write our thesis together. We have been each other's critical eye, thorn in the eye, but also each other's safe haven and best friend. Our mutual drive pushed each other to our limits and also allowed us to bring out the best qualities in each other, both in the academic sphere, and in the field.

## Introduction

It is a Thursday afternoon and I find myself walking on the main streets of Caserta in Southern Italy. All around me are hundreds of immigrants. We are walking towards Piazza Dante, one of the squares in Caserta. Here we meet activists from other social movements, as the protest will take place here. The political party leader of Lega, Matteo Salvini, is arriving in Caserta today for an electoral campaign meeting that Rosemarijn will be attending later. Matteo Salvini is known for his anti-immigrant statements. Therefore, immigrants and other activists want to show Matteo Salvini, through the protest, that he is not welcome in Caserta. I look around and see hundreds of people gathered on the square, spreading this message. I try get to the centre of the protest. On my way to the centre, I encounter people who are carrying banners, a band, people dancing and people who are video calling their friends and family. As I further make my way through the crowd I hear Yassim shouting ‘Basta Razzismo!’ and other slogans through the microphone. People from all over the square respond to him by repeating what he says. Two hours pass and the protest is still going strong. The music of the band seems to get to everyone, as people are dancing and shouting slogans, including myself.

The sounds of the protest where Kiki is, can be heard in the café where I am sitting at Piazza Dante. When the clock strikes a quarter to seven I decide to get up and head towards the Lega meeting. As I step outside I look over to my left and see a crowd of onlookers watching the protest. There is also a lot of police present on the Piazza and down the street where the meeting will be held due to the protest. It is another electoral campaign meeting that warrants a big police presence as entire streets were barricaded when Casapound held their meeting. Simone di Stefano<sup>2</sup> and Matteo Salvini are both unpopular men among immigrants and people fighting for the immigrant cause as they have clear standpoints against immigration. It is strange for me to go to the meeting while Kiki is on the streets protesting against this very meeting I am going to. For the first time it really feels as if we are on opposing sides, but this is the complementarity that we are aiming for. When I reach the meeting, I see a big group of people standing outside, waiting to get in. There is a guest list to get into the meeting, I suspect because of security measures. After some time, Matteo Salvini arrives to campaign in the hope of winning more votes. Lega’s campaigning is known to be centred around immigration while taking a clear stance against it.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the two main political party leaders of Casapound.

These stories illustrate the opposing settings of our fieldwork. However, this is the first and only time that we were literally on opposing sides as Kiki attended a pro-immigration protest and Rosemarijn attended an electoral campaign meeting regarding restricting immigration. During the elections in Italy on March fourth, 2018, immigration has been a hot topic. Italy currently receives one of the highest numbers of irregular immigrants, this is among other reasons due to its geographical position at the Mediterranean Sea. As a response there has been an increase in laws concerning restrictions on irregular immigration. These laws and restrictions on irregular immigration are being supported and encouraged by a growing number of Italian citizens and right-wing political parties (Politi 2017). During the elections, the perceived problematic aspects of (ir)regular immigration were highlighted. Therefore, the concerns regarding immigration in Italy became more visible. The resulting conditions immigrants have to deal with have led to a rise in protests by (ir)regular immigrants (Oliveri 2012) and other activists. One of the frames that immigrants protest against is their frame of irregularity. This frame of irregularity can cause serious consequences, as all acts of (ir)regular immigrants within this frame can be transformed into something ‘illegal’ (De Genova 2002, 427).

Our research focuses on the production of ‘(il)legality’ through investigating frames and narratives and its contestation. Therefore, our research question is; *How is the ‘(il)legality’ of (ir)regular immigrants framed by voters and members of right-wing political parties and contested by (ir)regular immigrants in Naples and Caserta?* This research is descriptive and complementary. Therefore, our foremost research purpose is to illustrate the production and contestation of ‘(il)legality’ through frames and narratives by showing views of two opposing sides. The second research purpose is to look at the concept of ‘(il)legality’ as a social construction. We follow De Genova (2002, 440) as he argues that by looking at ‘illegality’s’ constructed aspects it offers insights into the origins and consequences of the lived experience of immigrant ‘illegality’ (De Genova 2002, 440; Desjarlais 1997, 25). The third research purpose is to describe the framing processes and the used narratives, in an attempt to create an understanding of how the construction of ‘(il)legality’ is practised and legitimized. We will investigate different aspects of framing such as political framing (Berlet 2006, 121) and blame avoidance (Weaver 1986, 387), to explore how they are used by voters and members of right-wing political parties regarding immigrants. Our fourth research purpose is to describe how (ir)regular immigrants reject dominant frames through civic activism. These forms of civic activism include, the creation of a voice (Isen and Nielsen 2013, 161) and the usage of counter narratives (Isen and Nielsen 2013, 161; Tyler and Marciniak 2013, 152).



## Relevance

With this thesis we first of all want to contribute to the theory of the production of ‘illegality’ (De Genova 2002) by incorporating the practice of framing (Snow and Byrd 2007, 119) as a tool of investigation. We argue that the production of ‘illegality’ can partly be investigated through looking at the frame of ‘illegality’ and how it is constructed within its context. Second, we would like to heed the call of De Genova (De Genova 2002, 439; Bevelander and Petersson 2014, 178) to investigate the perspectives and experiences of irregular migrants themselves. For instance, little research is done about what it means to be irregular and what the implications of it are in their daily lives, especially the obtaining of documents. Doing this kind of research can help to understand how ‘illegality’ is produced (Desjarlais 1997, 25). Last, we would like to build on the work of Oliveri (2012) concerning immigrant struggles. He argues that (ir)regular immigrants, who are not seen as legitimate political entities such as citizens, can open up the political arena by claiming rights just as citizens (Oliveri, 2012, 794). By doing this (ir)regular immigrants are opening up debates around the significance of what ‘illegal’ and a ‘citizen’ is. However, we are more interested in not only looking at citizenship, but also at civic activism itself and its act of contestation. Therefore, we would like to combine the work of Snow and Byrd (2007) and Oliveri (2012), to create a new lens to look at framing processes concerning ‘(il)legality’ and immigrant activism in Naples with an anthropological perspective in immigrant and illegality studies.

The social implications that surround our research are rich. First of all, Italy deals with high numbers of irregular immigrants, a phenomenon that contributes to the rising tensions in the country between immigrants and voters and members of right-wing political parties. Accompanying this is the increasing phenomenon of immigrant labour exploitation in Italy (Oliveri 2012), making it a humanitarian problem that needs investigation as well. Last, we want to address that when looking at processes of framing one should always be aware of the complex relations between local variations, motives, histories and interrelationships. We believe that they tend to disappear behind meta-narratives such as ‘illegal’, ‘immigrant’ and ‘right-wing’. We therefore think that an approach is needed that looks at individuals and their narratives to highlight the human experience of framing and ‘illegality’.

## Methodology

Our fieldwork took place over a period of ten weeks from February fifth till April sixteenth in Naples and Caserta. Our research consists of two different populations. The first population are (ir)regular African immigrants living in and near Naples and Caserta, who are active at organization or join protests<sup>3</sup>. In order to establish a holistic view, we chose informants differing in citizen status and age and included Italians who are also involved immigrant organizations. We got in touch with this population through two organizations; Ex-OPG je – so' pazzo and Ex-Canapificio. The other research population are Italian voters and members of right-wing political parties living in and around Naples and Caserta<sup>4</sup>. Both the research populations turned out to be mainly men. To get in touch with the latter population, Rosemarijn attended electoral campaign meetings. Other ways we used to get in touch with both our research population were Facebook, going to social centres for immigrants, using the snowball method and attending protests.

The main methods we used are participant observation, different forms of interviews, hanging out, small-talk, taking pictures and media-analysis. In total we conducted 24 interviews, including four expert interviews, which we all recorded and transcribed with consent. Due to the difference in our population, we had different methodological approaches. Participant observation turned out to be Kiki's most successful method in the beginning. As Kiki was working with people with a vulnerable status it was very important to establish rapport. She was able to visit legal helpdesks and other activities for immigrants at Ex-Canapificio. Here Kiki obtained data through participant observation and small talk. After five weeks she felt it was possible to start conducting interviews. However, for Rosemarijn participant observation was different as her population was hard to pin down in the city. Therefore, the most productive moments were in the first weeks as the elections were going on and she was able to attend electoral campaign meetings. At these meetings Rosemarijn was able to get in touch with her population, but she mostly lacked further opportunities to conduct participant observation and build rapport. As a consequence, Rosemarijn was not able to meet her population very often. Hence, other methods she relied on more heavily than participant observation were interviews, analysing media content and flyers of political parties.

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<sup>3</sup> We choose active African immigrants because we are interested in immigrants who are actively contesting.

<sup>4</sup> What I have come across during fieldwork is that being part of or a voter of a right-wing political party does not mean that one is against immigration. Therefore, not being part or a voter of a right-wing political party does not mean that one is for immigration. However, to demarcate the research population, I only included voters and members of right-wing political parties.

Language turned out to be an issue during fieldwork. Both of us do not speak Italian and the majority of Rosemarijn her population does not speak English. This had implications for her ability to communicate with her population. However, this could also be used as a tool to engage with participants who did speak English as she could ask for help. Sometimes Rosemarijn also used translators to help her during interviews. Language was less of a problem for Kiki as the majority of her population spoke English as they were from countries where English is one of the spoken languages. However, when communicating with Italian staff members at Ex-Canapificio Kiki encountered the same problem as Rosemarijn. Some immigrants faced these same problems as Kiki as they did not speak Italian. Therefore, they had similar language struggles which they could bond over.

Being an anthropologist means that you are your own research instrument. Therefore, all the choices you make in the field will reflect on your data. Reflecting on this is essential as it influences the course and direction of your research. We prepared ourselves for our fieldwork by following the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association. Therefore, among other things, we used aliases for all our participants in order to maintain anonymity.

However, we still encountered some ethical dilemmas. One of the problems we encountered was Kiki's involvement with the organizations and what this meant for her position as a researcher. During the legal helpdesk it was not always clear what Kiki's role was to the immigrants. This sometimes led immigrants to think that Kiki belonged to the organization which created certain expectations. Expectations she could not always live up to, as she was there as a researcher. Therefore, to evade these situations we strived for transparency about our role as researchers and our motives about participating in events.

Another dilemma we encountered is the use of social media as a method to get in touch with our population. We used this method to first get in touch and then maintain correspondence with informants by befriending them on Facebook. We also 'liked' pages of our population to follow their events. The act of befriending and liking on Facebook might have influenced our position as researchers. However, not much is written about this method, therefore analysing it in terms of ethics makes it more difficult.

In the upcoming chapters we will first elaborate on the theoretical foundation of our research. Here we will enter into a discussion of concepts surrounding the production of immigrant 'illegality,' framing and contesting. In the context we will introduce our research site, Naples and Caserta and several immigrant organizations and right-wing political parties. In the following chapters we will present our research findings. In the first chapter, we will address different views on '(il)legality' followed by a chapter on frames and narratives against

immigration. In the following chapter, we will discuss civic activism of immigrants. In the conclusion we will answer our research question by combining our most important ethnographic findings with our theoretical foundation. This is followed by recommendations for further anthropological research.

## Theoretical Framework

### **The relation between migration, (il)legality and the state**

*By Kiki Holle*

In the past few years, regulation of immigration has increased in Europe (De Genova 2004, 165). Due to the increase of regulation, the term ‘illegal’ immigration got introduced. In this paragraph we will start by investigating the concept ‘illegal’ immigrant. After that, we will discuss De Genova’s (2002) argument concerning the *legal production of migrant ‘illegality’* and Andersson’s (2014) discussion about the *illegality industry*, in order to show how ‘(il)legality’ is produced. Then we will link this to the mechanisms of citizenship as described by Whitley (2017) and Isin and Nielsen (2013). Last, we will discuss the importance of investigating the lived and daily experiences of ‘illegality’.

#### *‘Illegal’ immigration*

The concept of ‘illegal’ immigration is often defined and shaped by specific international legal arrangements (Sigona 2012, 50). Therefore, it is interesting to see how ‘illegal’ immigration is defined by international institutions. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines ‘illegal’ migration as follows:

“Irregular migration is the movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. From the perspective of destination countries, it is entry, stay or work in a country without the necessary authorization or documents required under immigration regulations.” (IOM 2018)

The regulatory norms and procedures may vary through time and per country. For example, in 1970 several European states had regulated irregular immigrants by reshaping legalization procedures: 140.000 were ‘legalized’ in France in 1981 and 44.000 were ‘legalized’ in Spain in 1986 (Soysal 1994, 132).

However, it is important to keep in mind that legalization and illegalization have impact outside the juridical sphere as well, and this impact might not be reflected in the law as it is written. De Genova (2002, 440), for instance, claims that even though the regulatory norms and procedures can change, the ‘illegal’ aspect of ‘illegal’ immigration often is seen as something straightforward. Sassen (1998, 56) too argues that ‘illegal’ immigration cannot be seen as something static, as ‘illegality’ cannot be solely connected to law as the broader social, geographic and political context that made immigrants ‘illegal’ also has to be considered (Sassen 2002). As anthropologists we will focus on the social-political context. Thomas and

Galemba (2013, 213) write about the social context. They argue that ‘illegality’ comes to be represented as an objective concept, as a clear ‘wrong’ as opposed to a ‘right’. This is possible through the authority of law making and this authoritative concept of ‘illegality’ results in the social marginalization of (ir)regular immigrants.

To sum up, the above-mentioned definition of the IOM is focused purely on the legal aspect. However, the law is subject to the broader social, geographical and political context. Therefore, we will follow De Genova (2002), Sigona (2012), Sassen (1998) and Andersson (2014) and go beyond law-focused approaches, by including and investigating the context and the socio-political processes of the illegalization of immigrants.

### *Producing immigrant ‘illegality’*

This section focuses on illegalization, the process through which immigrants become illegalized. In particular we will focus on the socio-political results of this process. We argue that ‘illegality’ is both inclusionary and exclusionary. First, we will look at how immigrants are included in the field of law through the production of ‘illegality’. We take this point even further by looking at acts of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen 2013) as a way for immigrants to claim social inclusion as well. After that we turn to the exclusionary aspects of illegalization where we see that immigrants are structurally denied citizen’s rights. Finally, we show the economic benefits other parties might have of this exclusion by looking at what Andersson (2014) calls the illegality industry and what this means for immigration control and the production and reproduction of ‘illegality’.

It is important to understand ‘illegality’ not just a legal concept, but as a result of a specific set of actions. Sassen (1998) for instance, argues that ‘illegal’ immigration is not an autonomous process that “just happens; it is produced, irregular immigrants are produced.” (Sassen 1998, 56). De Genova (2002, 440) examines how this status is produced by tracing the origin of the status ‘illegal’ immigrant. He argues that irregular immigrants are made ‘illegal’ by law when they get illegalised (de Genova 2002, 424; Heyman and Smart 1999, 1). Therefore, ‘illegal’ immigrants are a product of immigration law (De Genova 2002, 439). Yet by being produced by these laws ‘illegal’ immigrants also become recognizable as a distinct category. Through revising and reformulating laws concerning ‘illegal’ immigrants, an active process of inclusion through ‘illegalization’ takes place (De Genova 2002).

We can get a better understanding of how ‘illegal’ immigrants are included by looking at theories on citizenship. Isin and Nielsen (2013) focuses on the acts one does to claim legal and political forms of access to rights, or recognition (Isin and Saward 2013, 2). Isin and

Saward argue that an act of citizenship is how people constitute themselves as citizens, even when they are originally not seen as citizens (Isin and Saward 2013, 3). It is not about the form of inclusion imposed by the law, per De Genova (2002), but an active form of including yourself through forms of acts of citizenship. We will elaborate further on this point in the next chapter.

Whitley (2017, 5), however, argues that ‘illegality’ can work as a tool of exclusion as well. In a more traditional reading of citizenship, citizenship is about deciding who has the right to have rights (Somers 2008). We see the tool of exclusion (Whitley 2017, 5) as the (not) granting of citizenship, by deciding who has the right to have rights and who does not (Somers 2008). By differentiating who is and who is not entitled to rights, one creates and presents different segments of citizens (Papadopoulos & Tsjanos 2013, 182). In other words, citizenship functions as a mechanism of inclusion (De Genova 2002; Isin and Nielsen 2013) and exclusion (Whitley 2017; Somers 2008; Papadopoulos & Tsjanos 2013, 182).

According to De Genova (2013, 1991) these processes of inclusion and exclusion of citizenship are transferred into a politics of difference. He argues that these politics, which are institutionalized in immigration law, produce immigrant ‘illegality’ (De Genova 2013, 1191). This production of ‘illegality’ goes hand in hand with its often overlooked and undesirable counterparts which is the but vulnerable segment of the labour sector (De Genova 2004, 166). By making undocumented immigrants ‘illegal’, and by criminalizing their labour through law and denying them rights and social entitlements, a legally vulnerable and cheap reserve of labour is created through legal practices of illegalization (De Genova 2002, 440; Andersson 2014, 40). Therefore, De Genova (2002, 429) argues that ‘illegal’ immigrants are not produced to physically exclude them, by keeping them on the other side of the border, but instead, the law socially includes them under imposed conditions of enforced and extensive vulnerability. This process is what de Genova calls the legal production of immigrant ‘illegality’ (de Genova 2002, 440).

There are more economic aspects to this illegalization of immigrants. Andersson (2014, 33) effectively shifts the research focus from the repressive aspects of immigration controls to their productive and economic aspects. In his research he describes what he sees as an illegality industry (Andersson 2014) focussing on all the all the groups who are making money out of ‘illegal’ immigration. He argues that due to failing border and immigration restrictions, immigrant flows continue. Van Houtum (2010) and Düvell (2003, 204) argue that the large number of ‘illegal’ immigrants proves that the regulation of immigration does not work as it will not stop immigrants from coming to Europe. However, by making them ‘illegal’ and

forcing immigrants to use ‘illegal’ ways to come to Europe, states are creating the foundation for the illegality industry with many sectors involved (Andersson 2014, 7-8). One of the sectors are the employees, as legal vulnerability makes ‘illegal’ immigrants vulnerable for labour exploitation (Coutin 2005,196). Another sector is the state, as immigration laws tactically produce ‘illegal’ immigrants without social and welfare costs to the state or employer (Castles 2000, 276) To sum up, Andersson (2014, 33) and van Houtum (2010, 973) state that this entire economic industry behind immigration control produces exactly what it claims it wants to reduce, namely more immigrant ‘illegality’.

### *Lived experience of ‘illegality’*

So far, we have looked at how immigrant ‘illegality’ can be produced and how it can become an economic asset for those who make a living in the illegality industry (Andersson 2014). However, De Genova (2002, 427), argues that all activities for irregular immigrants are at risk of being transformed into criminal acts with drastic consequences. We believe that a real understanding of what ‘illegality’ is, should include the personal perspective of immigrants as well. We argue that the understanding how the contours of ‘illegality’ are embodied and experienced can help to understand lived ‘illegality’.

Little research is done about the perspectives and experiences of irregular immigrants themselves. However, Negrón-Gonzales (2013, 1289) conducted research on the social marginalization of irregular immigrants, as they often feel excluded from society. Sigona (2012, 56) too conducted research focusing on economic marginalization, as illegal’ immigrants often tend to concentrate in low-paid employment. Due to their ‘illegal’ status, immigrants have little resources to contest this marginalization as all their actions have the chance to become ‘illegal’ (De Genova 2002, 427). Therefore, “‘illegality’ can manifests as a palpable gaze of surveillance” (Stephen 2004). Research about language has been conducted as well. Bloch (2002, 10) states that a lack of the local language limits the opportunities of employment and social interaction.

We realize that this literature review is limited but believe this is due to a gap in research where we think this thesis fits in. As we have shown this kind of research is only rarely conducted. While it is exactly this kind of research that can help to shed light on the consequences of how illegality is actually produced (Desjarlais 1997, 25).



## **The production of ‘illegality’ frames in politics and civic activism** *By Rosemarijn Bakker*

To create a comprehensive understanding of the processes that surround the (il)legalization of immigrants the production of frames will be explained linking it to the framing of ‘illegality’. Following, the theories of *scapegoating*, *blame-avoidance* and the *theory of alienation* will be investigated in relation to irregular immigration. Last the concept of civic activism will be explored as an act of contestation and (re)politicization in relation to citizenship.

### *The production of frames*

Further building on the legal production of immigrant ‘illegality’ (de Genova 2002) the following two sections will look at the different processes of framing and link it to the framing of ‘illegality’.

There are a variety of approaches when it comes to framing, yet there are a few principles that can be followed. According to Snow and Byrd (2007, 119) framing is a process of selecting and highlighting certain events, places, ideas and people. Therefore, certain aspects of a group are laid emphasis on while others are ignored which shows the constructed nature of framing (Snow and Byrd 2007, 119). A more political approach to framing is given by Bhatia (2005, 6) who states that framing is about the politics of discourse. This discourse is about the legitimizing of ones’ own acts and ideas while delegitimizing the acts and ideas of the other (Bhatia 2005, 6). Framing lies at the centre of the politics of discourse as frames are used as tools of convincing in a dialogue between groups (Westby 2002, 287). As additionally argued by Westby (2002, 287) the power in this discourse lies in the ability to have the frame accepted and used by an audience. We will follow these principles of framing to keep the mechanisms of framing in mind. In addition, the definition we will use is the one of political framing (Berlet 2006, 118) as it encompasses these principles and also stresses that framing can be used to create opposing groups. It entails that when looking at groups, such as social movements or political parties, they need to build a persuasive ideology by framing core concepts, messages and narratives (Berlet 2006, 118). This is done in such a way that it explains what needs to be done and who stands in the way (Berlet 2006, 118). Therefore, we argue political framing shows that in the process of framing people are mobilized and pointed towards the origin of whichever cause they are mobilized for or against.

To investigate frames and how they are constructed one has to look at the narratives that are told (Nolan 2018, 354). The narratives are the stories that give meaning to the frame

and show how the use of the frame is (de)legitimized (Nolan 2018, 354). Snow and Byrd (2007, 132) show the importance of studying narratives when they argue that one should be careful with accepting frames as something that is a homogenic production of a group as an individual might have their own reasons for supporting a frame. Hence, we argue that it is very important to look at narratives from individuals to uncover the motivation for the framing as they reveal the relation between the ‘framer’ and the framed subject.

### *The frame of ‘illegality’*

According to Bhatia (2005, 5) the danger of framing is that the relation between the framed subject and the frame can become fixed, naturalized and synonymous instead of an ever-changing fluidity of identities. Thus, the framed subject might only be seen within that frame. This frame consequently stigmatizes all the persons behaviour (Bhatia 2005, 5). Therefore, when looking at irregular immigration it is important to realize that the frame of ‘illegality’ is not just about the perception of what people do, but about what people are (Calavita 2005; De Genova 2002). Hence, the very presence and behaviour of an irregular immigrant might become ‘illegal’ when seen within the frame of ‘illegality’ (Calavita 2005; De Genova 2002). Barbero (2015, 251) builds on this and argues that this ‘illegalization’ of irregular immigration criminalizes immigrants because the association with ‘illegal’ brings forward a connotation of criminality. This practise of framing ‘illegality’ takes away the context of the immigrant as their most determining identity becomes a dualistic regular or irregular (Bhatia 2005, 11). Therefore, any measures or repressive actions against irregular immigrants such as deportation becomes legitimized as they should not be ‘there’ thus making irregular immigrants vulnerable (Bhatia 2005, 11). We argued that a possible consequence of the framing of illegality and the ‘legal production of immigrant illegality’ (de Genova 2002) is the unstable and vulnerable immigrant working conditions. Another consequence is that framing irregular immigrants as ‘illegal’ places them outside of categories such as ‘legal’ and ‘legitimate’ which dispositions them to claim working, or any, rights (Bhatia 2005, 11). Bhatia (2005, 11) also argues that this silences irregular immigrants as their right-claiming is delegitimized. I argue this silencing further makes irregular immigrants vulnerable. Therefore, we take the same position as De Genova (2002) and Barbero (2015, 253) who argue that irregular immigrants become vulnerable or ‘disposable’ because of their position within the legal production of immigrant ‘illegality’ (de Genova 2002) and the framing of their ‘illegality’.

### *Framing of 'illegality' in politics*

This section will explore what kind of mechanisms might make right-wing politicians and general voters more inclined to (re)produce and act on the frame of 'illegality'.

According to Berlet (2006, 115) right-wing social movements and their popularity can be analysed using the theory of alienation. It states that citizens who feel displeased with the current state of affairs in a country turn to right-wing political parties (Berlet 2006, 115). Berlet (2006, 122) argues that this frustration of the alienated people is used to pull them into discourses that right-wing political parties use, such as anti-immigrant statements, that give people a sense of promise and reprisal for their frustration. Sentiments of alienation often arise during an economic crisis (Berlet 2006, 122; Barbero 2015, 249). The sense of alienation becomes bigger because of fear among voters of personal economic setbacks such as losing ones' job (Berlet 2006, 122; Barbero 2015, 249). The theory here is that right-wing ideologies make use of the sense of alienation and misdirect it from challenging social and economic problems in the country (Berlet 2006, 118). This is done to prevent the alienated people from tapping into the actual primary sources of their frustration and redirect it to for example immigrants (Berlet 2006, 118).

Another way of preventing voters from tapping into their primary source of frustration is to wrongfully frame a part of the population as being the blame for a certain problem in society (Berlet 2006, 121). Berlet (2006, 118) calls this societal scapegoating. When an audience is convinced by the scapegoat frame Berlet (2006, 118) calls this false consciousness. Ruspini et al. (2000, 7) argue that in the goal to win more votes, politicians are looking for a contentious issue to exploit in their rhetoric to put themselves in the political arena. Barbero (2015, 249) supports this notion by arguing that right-wing political parties make use of the dissatisfaction of the population in their discourse to win their votes.

Another way how politicians try to win more votes is blame-avoidance (Weaver 1986, 387). The theory is that most politicians seek to avoid blame more than they seek credit (Weaver 1986, 372). Blame-avoiding can be taken literally in the sense of the word as for example the aim to avoid getting the blame for a failed policy. One of the main reasons for blame-avoidance Weaver (1986, 377) gives is the objective of politicians to stay in office as long as possible by remaining 'popular'. Weaver (1986, 387) also argues that scapegoating can be seen as a form of blame-avoidance. Therefore, we argue that when linking the theory of alienation (Berlet 2006, 115) with scapegoating (Berlet 2006, 121), blame-avoidance (Weaver 1986, 387) and immigration, irregular immigrants might become the vulnerable population and at the same time the contentious issue to exploit (Ruspini et al. 2007, 7).

Additionally, we argue that scapegoating and framing irregular immigrants as ‘illegal’ further excludes them from ‘legitimate’ right claiming and entering spheres of citizenship (Papadopoulos & Tsjanos 2013, 181). Hence, we think that due to their ‘illegality’ they might be perceived as having less right than ‘legal’ immigrants or citizens to make these claims. A contributing and further excluding factor is that in line with the theory of alienation (Berlet 2006) the part of the population that is unsatisfied might perceive (ir)regular immigrants as threats. When there is the perception that the ‘legal’ citizen is suffering because of another group in society such as irregular immigrants, rights-claiming and competition over resources will arise (Cea D’ancona 2009). Therefore, ‘legal’ citizens might feel that they are more entitled to state resources because they are ‘legitimate’ citizens (Cea D’ancona 2009).

### *Civic activism*

The previous sections explained how frames of ‘illegality’ work and also why they might be used. In this section we aim to elaborate how (ir)regular immigrants claim the political dimension and test the boundaries of citizenship through *civic activism*.

As explained previously, frames of ‘illegality’ try to silence irregular immigrants, but we argue that they can regain their voice through civic activism. Civic activism can be seen as a process of contestation through which a voice is created that challenges dominant structures, frames and narratives in society by using counter-narratives and framing of the self (Isin and Nielsen 2013, 164; Oliveri 2012, 798). Therefore, we think that the creation of the voice is an action of stepping into the stage of political discourse while resisting ascribed frames. Also, civic activism cannot merely be seen as acts of resistance but “as attempts to create a new situation that allows those who have no part – to enter and change the conditions of social existence altogether” (Oliveri 2012). Hence, civic activism also has to do with contesting the ‘regime of exclusion’ (Tyler and Marciniak 2013, 154). In line with this Isin and Nielsen (2013, 163) argue that the activism of immigrants creates a political subjectivity which blurs the lines of who are traditionally regarded as citizens. Therefore, we think that by civic activism such as rights-claiming irregular immigrants make themselves political again as they uncover the space of the political and question what it means to be citizen (Dolar 2006, 105). We see the underlying notion as a group of people who are not expected to speak up or have the ‘right’ to speak up by contesting this through claiming rights that are normally not associated with them.

Another notion on the frame of ‘illegality’ in relation to civic activism is that by having to deal with a powerful frame an opportunity is created to highlight and demonstrate the obscenity of the frame, thereby using the very frame as a counter strategy (Chauvin and

Mascarenas 2014, 422). However, we think that the type of frame should be taken into account as it can be risky to draw attention to oneself as long as the frame holds power. At the same time this *hypervisibility* enables them to open up spheres as they use the obscenity of their situation to draw attention to their problems (Tyler and Marciniak 2013, 152). This while also trying to move away from the decontextualizing frames that are imposed on them such as ‘immigrant’, ‘regular’ or ‘irregular’ (Tyler and Marciniak 2013, 152). Nevertheless, civic activism has the capacity of turning a shadow population into an immigrant owned social movement (Isin and Nielsen 2013, 161).



## Context

### Naples and Caserta

*By Rosemarijn Bakker*

Located in the south of Italy one can find Naples. It is the third biggest city in Italy and the cultural and economic centre of Southern Italy. It is also home to almost one million people (Istat 2017). Concerning is the high unemployment rate of 23,9 percent, with half of the people between eighteen and 29 years old being unemployed (Istat 2017). The main train station, Garibaldi train station, is located in the heart of the city. The station bears the name of its conqueror Giuseppe Garibaldi, who defeated the Kingdom of Naples and handed it over to King Victor Emmanuel for the unification of Italy. Nowadays, the train station is characterized by the many immigrants who are selling goods and foods in front of the station. On the nineteenth of February 2018, Garibaldi station was marked by many police officers who were guarding the electoral campaign meeting of right-wing political party Casapound. Outside a small group of demonstrators were protesting against Casapound with anti-racist and anti-fascist slogans. These are just two stories that come together at Garibaldi station in Naples.

Every ten minutes a train to Caserta departs from this station. Naples and Caserta are both part of the Campania province. The Garibaldi station in Caserta is only a 40-minute train ride away. In Caserta, one can find the Royal Palace, the former residence of the King of Naples. Besides that, one can find the social centre for immigrants, called Ex-Canapificio.

### Immigration laws in Italy

*By Kiki Holle*

Italy used to be a country of emigration but changed to a country of immigration with a growing number of 12.7 percent of influx of immigrants a year since 1980 (Ambrosini 2013, 139). Given the hidden nature of irregular immigration, reliable data about the numbers of irregular immigrants do not exist. However, some numbers estimate that Italy has an estimated of 540,000 irregular immigrants (Ambrosini 2013, 176). Lucht (2011, 24) estimates that overall more than 100,000 'illegal' immigrants enter Italy each year. Since 1980, the beginning of the modern immigration flows to Italy, the immigration system was marked by a strong demand for foreign workers (Sciortino et al. 2000). However, at the same time possibilities for foreign workers to enter the country 'legally' were largely missing (Sciortino et al. 2000, 5). Therefore, a large majority of foreigners in Italy had an 'illegal' status for a period before being legalized<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The first legislative amnesty that legalised 118,349 former 'illegal' immigrants, was in 1986-1998. It offered a legal residence permit to all of those who were employed on an 'illegal' basis (Sciortino et al. 2000, 6).

(Sciortino et al. 2000, 5). When nowadays one takes a closer look at Italy's immigrant labour laws one will still see the discrepancy between policy and reality. The passing of the Bossi-Fini law, in 2002, had major consequences for immigrants in Italy<sup>6</sup>. This law also covers immigrant labour<sup>7</sup>. It established a limited job search visa which means that immigrants had to apply for a visa before entering Italy (Lucht 2011, 24). This law was introduced to limit the number of immigrants working in Italy, but eventually led to a limited amount of 'legal' immigrants as it did not stop the immigration flow.

### **Social centres, legal helpdesks and protests**

*By Kiki Holle*

Around Naples, 'illegal' immigrants often work as fishermen, carpenters, street vendors or in the tomato harvest (Caponio 2007, 932). Especially in the agricultural sector many immigrants face exploitation. In and near Naples there are several organizations that are advocating for better conditions for (ir)regular immigrants. The mayor of Naples, Luigi de Magistris, openly supports those organizations (European Alternatives 2017) and allows them, and other social centres, to take shelter in empty buildings.

Two organizations are especially interesting to mention. The first organization is Ex-Canapificio located in Caserta, close to the Royal Palace and train station. It is established as a squatter house, but since 1980 it also supports (ir)regular immigrants (Filhol 2016, 235). Ex-Canapificio has joined irregular immigrants in the fight against (labour) exploitation and advocates for better living conditions for immigrants (Filhol 2016, 236). Ex-Canapificio works with volunteers and staff, immigrants and Italians. Besides that, there are many immigrants who are in the program<sup>8</sup> of Ex-Canapificio and work as staff too. Nowadays, Ex-Canapificio is mainly known for its legal helpdesk. Ex-Canapificio has daily legal helpdesks, with over 150 visitors every week. With the legal helpdesks they do not only help immigrants with legal procedures, but they also use the helpdesk to gain more knowledge about the immigrant situation and how they can help. Besides the legal helpdesks, Ex-Canapificio offers free health advice, language courses, volunteer work and organizes demonstrations and protests, established a basketball team fighting racism and other social activities.

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<sup>6</sup> The law was originally proposed by members of the National Alliance and members of Lega Nord (Ambrosini 2013, 181) The law introduced criminal sanctions for people who are caught entering the country illegally (Oliveri 2012, 797).

<sup>7</sup> Undocumented immigrants risk deportability when they are unemployed for more than six months. Therefore, immigrants must accept jobs, even under bad working conditions, just to stay legal in the country.

<sup>8</sup> Most of the immigrants who are staff member at Canapificio are in the program of Canapificio. This implies: living in the camp, of which Canapificio is in charge of and actively being involved with the activities of Canapificio. There is a long waiting list for this program, as the camps can only house 200 immigrants.



The second organization is Ex-OPG – Je So' Pazzo in Naples. It is located in an old psychiatric hospital and transformed into a community centre. Ex-OPG - Je So' Pazzo does not exclusively help immigrants but has several activities for all inhabitants of Naples. It is home to healthcare clinics, a kitchen where they offer weekly meals for the homeless and a labour helpdesk. Additionally, they organize activities for children and offer free sports classes. For immigrants there is a helpdesk, where they help immigrants with their legal procedures.

Both organizations actively stand up against racism, fascism and right-wing politicians and organize and participate in many protests. On November 17, 2017 a protest took place on the streets of Naples in which both organizations participated. The protest was for all the people of Naples who felt marginalized and invisible (Ex OPG Je - So' Pazzo 2017).

### **Electoral campaign meetings, coffee and bars**

*By Rosemarijn Bakker*

During the election period all political parties came to Naples and Caserta to campaign. Among the far right are Lega<sup>9</sup>, Forza Italia<sup>10</sup> and Casapound<sup>11</sup> and there is also centre-right Movimento Cinque Stelle<sup>12</sup> (M5S). M5S, Lega and Forza Italia are the three biggest right-wing political parties with a clear agenda that seek to curb or stop the immigration flow (The Guardian 2018). Therefore, people who attended these meetings are assumingly against immigration.

In Italy there is a political discussion about what to do with the ongoing stream of irregular immigrants and the group of irregular immigrants of about 540.000 (Ambrosini 2013, 176) that are stuck in Italy (Giuffrida 2018)). This discourse is reflected in Naples<sup>13</sup> as M5S came out as the biggest political party in the city in the elections (Politi 2018). However, as it turned out Naples is more open-minded towards immigrants than we beforehand thought and has less right-wing political party headquarters or groups<sup>14</sup>. However, Casapound opened a second office during our fieldwork in the northern part of the city showing that they are growing support.

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<sup>9</sup> Lega is a political party that was founded in 1991. Now it is led by Matteo Salvini and known for being a populist political party. Lega started out as a more centre-right party with different factions inside that filled the spectrum from left-wing to right-wing according to Lorenzo.

<sup>10</sup> Forza Italia was founded in 1994 and led Silvio Berlusconi. It is known to be a fascist political party.

<sup>11</sup> Casapound started out as a fascist social movement and became a political party in 2013. It is led by Gianluca Iannone and Simone di Stefano (Ellyatt 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Movimento cinque Stelle started out as an anti-establishment movement but became a political party in 2009. It has been marked in the 2018 elections as being very populist.

<sup>13</sup> M5S suggests a policy to evaluate the right to stay for irregular immigrants and if found negative then to deport them. They also advocate deals with Libya to curb the migration flow to make the migration channels more humane.

<sup>14</sup> Before the elections Naples used to have a left-wing mayor from the Democratic Party. Two other reasons that I encountered during fieldwork are that the city has a more open attitude towards immigrants because of their long past as a harbour city and their 'southern' hospitality.

An analysis by Osservatorio di Pavia<sup>15</sup> in Italy shows that news concerning criminality and violent crimes dominates in Italian media and is much higher in proportion to any other European country (Diamanti 2011). What is interesting is that the accompanying feeling of insecurity is not attributed to the domination of certain regions by the mafia or a reduction of prison sentences, but rather frames of growing immigration and especially ‘illegal’ immigration (Ambrosini 2013, 180). This shows how frames of ‘illegality’ can influence how people perceive security and irregular immigrants (De Genova 2002; Calavita 2005).

Regular ethnographic sites I visited during fieldwork were the electoral campaign meetings<sup>16</sup> held by the right-wing political parties. These meetings generally lasted for three to four hours. Other places I regularly visited were literary cafés where I interviewed informants that I mostly met at these meetings. In the course of the research I was also invited to cocktail bars in the richer area of Vomero or a bar in the poorer part of the Stella area.

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<sup>15</sup> Osservatorio di Pavia is a centrum in Italy that observes and analyses political communication in the mass media.

<sup>16</sup> There were two different types of political meetings. The ones that I attended more regularly were the ones in which the regional candidates of Naples spoke to promote their political party and present themselves for the public. The other meetings were less often as they were the ones in which the main candidate of a political party came to speak.

# Views on illegality



As I make my way to Lega's electoral campaign meeting in Caserta I see a particular group of people outside. They are all wearing distinguishing white shirts and caps with the symbol of Lega on it. Some of them are holding a banner and are posing with it for the cameras. The banner seems to promote the political party for the elections.



*People dressed in white*



*Posters at the meeting*

When inside I enter the room where the meeting will take place. There are already quite some people sitting, at least a hundred. It is a place that would normally function as a cinema, but now I see a raised stand in the front and several posters and banners scattered throughout the space. The right picture above shows four of those posters. From left to right it reads; 'no free asylum', 'more justice', 'stop supply' and 'stop the invasion'. These posters fascinated me as this was one of the few times that I encountered language like this. Neither did I encounter this language in the speeches I attended about immigration. Also, words such as 'invasion' or 'illegal' were rarely used by my informants. Rather, they made the distinction between regular or irregular and linked it to measures of regulation and control.

### *Perceptions of regulation and control*

When I was sitting at the meeting and waiting for Matteo Salvini I took the opportunity to speak to some of the people that were wearing the white shirts. This is how I met Peppe and Carmine who are two friends living in Caserta. Peppe gave me a friendly smile which is why I approached him and Carmine was somewhat tougher looking with two piercings in his eyebrow. Peppe is a middle-aged man aspiring to become a politician for Lega. He and Carmine told me they are members of Cellule con Salvini in Caserta<sup>17</sup>. All the people that wore white shirts are part of this group. Peppe and Carmine support Lega because they are unsatisfied with

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<sup>17</sup> Cellule Con Salvini in Caserta is one of the many cells that support and spread Matteo Salvini's and Lega's ideas in Italy.

the immigration policy and situation right now. As mentioned before my participants rarely used concepts such as ‘illegal’, rather they use regular and irregular. Hence, to underline their terminology I will also use these terms. An idea about the difference between a regular or irregular immigrant was given to me by Peppe;

“Immigration according to me is a big problem for different reasons, they [the immigrants] are not regular. Here it is not being regulated, the immigration is not being controlled, without documents and without country of origin. They [the immigrants] can stay but it needs to be controlled and with documents or everyone goes back to their own house.”

Not only does this simultaneously show what some of Peppe’s concerns are with immigration, but it also shows that the important difference between a regular or irregular immigrant lies in regulation, control and being in the possession of documents. Another factor that Peppe mentioned is that a regular immigrant is also someone who “has a house and a job”. According to him this shows that an immigrant can take care of himself and will therefore not cost the state any money. The notion of lack of regulation and control is supported by Giuseppe who is a potential Lega voter and a student at the university of Caserta. He also attended the electoral campaign meeting. According to him irregular immigrants are potentially dangerous as the lack of control leads to not knowing who the immigrants are. Carmine also made this observation as he argues that irregular immigrants are a breach in security. This is also what Ambrosini (2013, 180) argues as he states that irregular immigration is linked to feelings of insecurity for the people living in the host country.

Antonio also mentioned the need for more control and regulation when it comes to immigration. We were having this conversation during the opening of the second office of Casapound in the northern part of Naples. I had seen Antonio before at the biggest electoral campaign meeting of Casapound in Naples where Simone di Stefano spoke. Antonio was also one of the speakers since he is one of the main candidates for Casapound in Naples. However, he also clearly states that immigrants are not the problem, but immigration is. According to him it is too ‘massive’ for Italy to deal with accordingly. Therefore, he argues there is a need for better regulation and control.

Hence, regulation and control seem to be central elements my informants mention when talking about their views on ‘illegality’. However, there are laws and regulations in place that should tackle these problems my informants point out.

### *Regulating immigration*

The lack of regulation and control that Pepe, Carmine, Giuseppe and Antonio mention are linked to two laws and regulations that informants mentioned. These are the Bossi-Fini law<sup>18</sup> and the Dublin III Regulation<sup>19</sup>.

Interesting enough as the lack of regulation and control was pointed out Pepe and Carmine speak with praise of the Bossi-Fini law as it serves to limit and regulate immigration. Petro is a Forza Italia member who supports this notion. I met him during the first electoral campaign meeting of Forza Italia I went to. He calls himself a “militant” for Forza Italia and does administrative work for them in one of the sectors of Naples. According to him, the Bossi-Fini law is a good initiative but does not represent the reality. He states that “if only ten immigrants would want work and if Italy would have ten working visa’s there would be no problem”. However, he says, “if there are only ten working visa’s and fifty immigrants that want work this law does not stop the immigrants from coming either way”.

There is another informant who spoke critically of the Bossi-Fini law. Lorenzo is one of the founders of M5S and has therefore been with the movement since before it was a political party. Consequently, he refers to himself as a M5S activist. According to him the Bossi-Fini law is a bad solution to immigration because it only creates more irregular immigrants as it does not stop the immigrant flow to Italy, as argued by Düvell (2003, 204) and Van Houtum (2010). To create more perspective, I spoke to Francesca who was the main candidate for left-wing Plus Europe. She also argues that laws such as Bossi-Fini only create more irregular immigrants as it does not stop the immigrants from coming. The Dublin regulation was also criticized by Petro, Carmine and Lorenzo. Over coffee, Stefano expressed what they were all thinking, which is that this regulation made them feel left behind by Europe to deal with the immigration flow alone. Stefano is a random middle-aged man I met while walking through the Chiaia district. A consequence of having to deal with this flow alone is that social structures such as the migration services in Italy are overrun which leads to longer application procedures according to Petro and Stefano.

Therefore, this laws and regulation seem to create more irregular immigration. Also, it seems my informants approach to irregularity is based on laws and regulations. Therefore, Sigona’s (2012, 50) state-based approach on ‘illegal’ immigration as a set of legal

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<sup>18</sup> The Bossi-Fini law determines that only a certain amount of job visas will be given to non-EU immigrants. An immigrant can therefore only regularly enter Italy with a working visa.

<sup>19</sup> The Dublin Regulation entails that refugees can only apply for asylum in the first EU country they come across. Therefore, according to the Dublin Regulation Italy is supposed to deal with all these asylum requests since all the economic immigrants are applying for a refugee asylum.

arrangements seems to fit. Additionally, as De Genova (2002) argues, to question the normalization of immigrant ‘illegality’ an understanding of the views on ‘illegality’ has to be created which in this case seems is a set of immigration laws. Hence, these views on ‘illegality’ as state based have to be included to understand the emic perspective of my informants and to approach the concept of the legal production of immigrant ‘illegality’ (De Genova 2002). The context my informants gave me when talking about irregularity include the issues of documents and work.

### *Having documents*

As mentioned before being in the possession of documents is part of the distinction between a regular and irregular immigrant. These documents can vary from being a working visa or residents permit. Another informant, Guus, has an interesting observation on obtaining documents. He is the Italy correspondent covering the elections for the NRC Handelsblad. He states that receiving a working permit is the regular way of becoming or being ‘regular’ in comparison with what most immigrants do which is applying for a refugee asylum. Therefore, being regular or irregular seems strongly linked to being able to obtain a working visa or being documented as a refugee. This duality of their identity is in line with what Bhatia (2005, 11) argues, which is that the practise of framing ‘illegality’ or ‘irregularity’ takes away the context of the immigrant as their identity becomes dualistic. It is either documented or undocumented. However, what is interesting is that most immigrants who apply for asylum often arrive in the ‘irregular way’ which is unregulated and uncontrolled, by boat. Therefore, defining (ir)regular seems to be dependent on whom I was speaking to as perceived regularity comes forth out of perceived irregularity. Especially since Stefano told me he sees regular immigration as being in the possession of documents, which arriving by boat as a refugee is therefore not. Hence, the concept of ‘illegality’ is contextual and fluid. This is also what De Genova (2002) argues when he says that to understand the production of ‘illegality’ one should take the context in which it is created in account.

### *The informal work sector*

Another issue surrounding the ‘illegality’ of irregular immigrants is work. Being in the possession of documents is closely related to this. Peppe argues that immigrants should only be allowed to work if they have a contract. As Petro, Antonio and Stefano state, the majority of irregular immigrants in Naples end up working in the informal sector as they lack the documents to obtain a regular job. Petro says that when he takes the bike in the morning there

are many ‘black’ women that are waiting for work, which according to him only guarantees work for one day. Christina is a young Neapolitan woman who shares this view with Petro. Her mother is a Forza Italia voter who introduced me to her daughter as she herself did not speak English. Christina is quite open towards immigration but recognizes the issues surrounding it. Over coffee near Piazza Garibaldi she told me that the type of informal work immigrants do, often offers little working rights. However, Christina also stated that many Neapolitans are also working in the informal sector. The informal sector for Neapolitans is even so large that it has become normalized according to her. Stefano also made this observation during one of our talks as he said that around 50 percent of Neapolitans between eighteen and thirty years rely on informal work. He argues this is because there is a big shortage of regular work in the city and the rest of southern Italy. The lack of working rights in the informal sector is thus something that both (ir)regular immigrants and Neapolitans have to deal with as informal work seems to cancel out the ‘right’ to workers’ rights. However, irregular immigrants have to deal with even more precarious working conditions as Christina and Antonio say that immigrants are often paid less than Italians. This illustrates what Andersson (2014) calls the illegality industry as immigrant conditions are created that places them in vulnerable working conditions. De Genova (2002, 440) calls this the undesirable additives of the production of ‘illegality’ because irregular immigrants are working in the informal and vulnerable labour circuit on a large scale. Therefore, the view on ‘(il)legality’ of members and voters of right-wing political parties is state-based, yet also contextual.

### **Living an irregular life**

*by Kiki Holle*

“There are many ways to build a wall: with concrete or with laws.”<sup>20</sup>

It is four PM, I just entered the office of the staff at EX-Canapificio for the first time when Andrea asks me straightforward “so, what exactly is your research topic?”. Andrea has been working at Ex-Canapificio for two years now and is mainly in charge of fundraising. He is also the spokesperson for researchers and journalist who contact Ex-Canapificio. Violetta sits next to him, she oversees the legal helpdesks. His question makes me feel a bit tense, as it was the first time I explain my research topic to a professional. I describe how I want to examine the concept of ‘illegal immigrant’ and the construction of it. Andrea and Violetta seem confused

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<sup>20</sup> The words of Lorenzo Trucco, president of the Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration (Caiffa 2017).



by my choice of words, “‘illegal’ immigrants?” they ask. My explanation of why I use these words, to investigate its aspects, seems to help. Hence, Andrea highlights that ‘illegal immigrants do not exist’. He says, “no one is illegal, one can be irregular, but it does not equal that you are illegal”. Violetta adds that ‘illegality’ is just a categorization created by authorities, she suggests the consequences of this categorization are the topics one should be writing about. When looking at the theory, De Genova (2002, 44) and Sassen (1998, 56) argues that ‘illegality’ often is seen as something obvious and static. These theories are in line with what Violette and Andrea say about ‘illegality’, as they argue that ‘illegality’ does not exist outside the law and suggest research on the consequences of this categorization. At one of the protest I saw a man holding a banner saying, “Fascism is illegal, not me”. This also shows how immigrants reject the frame of ‘illegal’.



*Picture of a man during a protest*

Therefore, in this paragraph I will take a closer look at the views and experiences immigrants and people at the social centres have concerning ‘illegality’. I will examine ‘lived illegality’ in order to get a holistic understanding of ‘illegality’ and as Desjarlais (1997, 25) argues this understanding can reveal how ‘illegality’ is produced. I will do this by first examining the concept of ‘vulnerable documents’. Second, the links between work and ‘illegality’ will be explored. Last, follows an examination of the struggles regarding obtaining documents to see how this is connected to perceptions and productions of ‘illegality’.

### ***Vulnerable documents***

Immigrants at Ex-Canapificio generally refer to themselves as immigrants and only seldom as refugees. For example, many immigrants refer to Ex-Canapificio as the ‘Immigrant

movement<sup>21</sup>. During the fieldwork I have spent most of my time next to Violetta at the legal helpdesks. Most of the people who are visiting the legal helpdesk at Ex-Canapificio are in the process of applying for a refugee permit<sup>22</sup>. Some started with the procedure for documents right when they entered Italy, others show up at the legal helpdesk to start the procedure after many years. Violetta explained that within the process immigrants will be granted a six-month soggiorno (permit), which they can extend if there has not been reached a decision yet. According to the law immigrants are not allowed to work on this six-month soggiorno and must live in one of the camps they are assigned to. The process has four possible outcomes, the first outcome could be rejection<sup>23</sup>. The second outcome could be the granting of a refugee status<sup>24</sup>. The third outcome could be subsidiary protection<sup>25</sup>. The fourth outcome could be humanitarian protection<sup>26</sup>. During an interview with Giovanni, who is involved at Ex-Canapificio since the start and now mainly focuses on protests, he told that these kinds of temporary permits, especially the last two outcomes, are described as “vulnerable documents”. Vulnerable, because the documents are not permanent and due its temporary characteristic people often do not succeed to get out of informal channels and economy. Take for example Safra, she has a refugee permit since last year for her and her daughter. At the legal helpdesk she explained that she could not find a house with a contract, and therefore still lives ‘illegal’ as she sub-rents a room without a contract or registration. Additionally, this makes it hard for Safra to find a job with a contract as she does not have an official address which you need for a job contract.

During the legal helpdesk immigrants often asked, “what do I need to do when the police stops me and asks for identification?”. The answer Violetta gives is that showing the police your soggiorno<sup>27</sup> should be enough. I was surprised by the frequency of this question. Violetta added that immigrants with a refugee permit sometimes even ask this question. I believe that the above shows that on the one hand documents are vulnerable and that having documents does not necessarily make an immigrant less vulnerable. At the same time obtaining documents does not have to change the perceptions immigrants have of themselves as less vulnerable. I argue that even though the temporary aspects of vulnerable documents show the

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<sup>21</sup> I do not wish to continue in a discussion in determining who are refugees and when you are a refugee. Therefore, I will follow the language use of Canapificio by using immigrants. However, I do want to show that due the restrictive Italian immigration laws, the ways for immigrants to enter Italy in a legal way are limited.

<sup>22</sup> Other ways, to stay in Italy ‘legally’, are limited.

<sup>23</sup> When their application gets rejected they can do an appeal.

<sup>24</sup> In this case the immigrant is given a five-year residence permit for Italy, which is renewable.

<sup>25</sup> This is the case when one does not fall under the criteria for a refugee permit but still gets protection.

<sup>26</sup> In this case the authorities believe that the immigrant has serious humanitarian reasons for not returning and will be given a one-year-residence permit, which is renewable, and working is allowed.

<sup>27</sup> Or any other proof they have that shows that they are in the process of getting documents.

fluidity of ‘illegality’ as argued by De Genova (2002, 440) and Sassen (1998, 56) the consequences do not have to be fluid. This is because a shift in documents does not equal a shift in chances, as Safra’s story showed. Additionally, permits can change but immigrants can still feel vulnerable about their status.

### *Work and ‘illegality’*

When asking irregular immigrants how they perceive their irregularity, the matter of work always comes up. I had the chance to meet with Alfredo, one of the founders of SOS Rosarno<sup>28</sup>. From the standpoint of an employer he explained the impossibility to hire irregular immigrants. “We cannot give a job with a contract to someone without a document. It is not valid otherwise and it is a crime.”. This illustrates the strong relation between work and documents. Work and not working is a topic that is often discussed during the weekly meetings at Ex-Canapificio. The weekly meetings are often presented by Mo. Mo is one of the staff members and is one of the immigrants who has been active at Ex-Canapificio since the beginning. During one of the weekly meetings Mo said the following:

“... For all the Africans who did not have the chance, we hope that they are healthy. For the ones who did pass the journey, what is a journey without a job? It is not enough! So, these politicians said that immigrants who are black do not want to work. But yes, we want jobs! [...] We need to work. Or give us a chance to stay and we will change it ourselves.”



*Picture of a weekly meeting at Canapificio*

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<sup>28</sup> SOS Rosarno is an association in Southern Italy where 15 small producers and 35 immigrants work together. SOS Rosarno was established as a response to the protests against immigrants in Rosarno in 2001. Therefore, SOS Rosarno offers fair wages for the farmers and immigrants and works with contracts.

As Alfredo argued immigrants want to have documents, so they can have a work contract and get out of the informal economy and ‘start their life’. The above-mentioned question from Mo, ‘what a journey without a job is?’ refers to this. Immigrants who enter Italy are being located in camps. Most important is that during this time they are not allowed to work, because, as Alfredo explained, without documents it is illegal to get a contract, nor are they allowed to leave the camp for a longer time. Therefore, the whole life of an immigrant can be on ‘pause’.

Ibrahim, an irregular immigrant who is a staff member at Ex-Canapificio, briefly told me about his work experience in Italy. He, as many others, is waiting for the results of his application, so officially he cannot work, but he managed to find a job. He did not reveal much about his job. He only shared that he really struggled to find one, that his working hours and days are uncertain and his payment is low. Due to the long waiting processes for documents immigrants often find work in informal ways and without a contract. This is in line with theories of Sigona (2012, 56) and Coutin (2005, 196) who argue that ‘illegality’ makes immigrants vulnerable to labour exploitation and feeds, what Andersson (2014, 33) calls, the illegality industry. Immigrants officially cannot work but through their conditions immigrants find work in informal sectors with limited rights. This shows, as argued by De Genova (2002, 429) how immigrants are being included in Italy but under imposed conditions. Therefore, I argue, immigrants partly get included, however their irregularity can be framed in terms of exclusion. Being irregular excludes immigrants from formal channels and therefore their rights are limited. This is in line with Somers (2008) argument of the rights to have right as immigrants can not lay claims on things such as citizenship.

### *The struggles of becoming documented*

It is a rainy afternoon in March and hundreds of immigrants are gathered in front of the doors of Ex-Canapificio. They are gathered around the paper with today’s appointments for the legal helpdesk. Almost all of them are male and talking with friends, smoking a cigarette or just silently waiting. I am there, as every Wednesday, for the meeting and to join Violetta during the legal helpdesk. One of the guys who is waiting is Jacob, an irregular immigrant who arrived in Italy more than three years ago. He told me that he is joining today because he has a police problem<sup>29</sup>. It is not the first time he visited Ex-Canapificio. The last month he has joined the meeting every Wednesday, hoping that it would be his turn to visit the legal helpdesk. He

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<sup>29</sup> Every Wednesday there is a special helpdesk for people with police problems at Canapificio. This is because a note from the police makes it almost impossible for immigrants to get documents.

explains me that he once carried a small gas cylinder at the train station, to deliver it to his friend who lives in another city. His friend does not have gas and therefore was unable to cook or use hot water. At the train station, the police stopped him assuming Jacob had other plans in mind for the cylinder. He recalls, “they thought I was a terrorist”. The police took Jacob in custody. Jacob had to prove the cylinder was for his friend. De Genova (2002, 427) and Barbero (2015, 253) argue that all acts of irregular immigrants can be transformed into something criminal, with harsh results. This is what happened to Jacob, as he got police problems because he carried a gas cylinder. Jacob explained that he has a lawyer but lately he is unable to get in touch with his lawyer so now he hopes that the legal helpdesks can help him.

Unfortunately, Jacob’s story is not an uncommon one. Like Jacob, many immigrants come every Wednesday to see the staff from the legal helpdesk, hoping that they can help them with their problems, so that they can obtain documents. Ousmane lost his papers and does not know how his procedure is going. Fatima’s refugee permit got rejected six years ago and she recently got a fine from the police. Abdou found a job, but the employee only hires with a contract. Abdou does not have documents yet, so he is unable to get a contract and asks Ex-Canapificio what he can do. These are just a few of many stories of all the immigrants who visit the legal helpdesk. In the following sections, I want to elaborate on four struggles immigrants often face in Italy when they are trying to become documented in order to get a bigger understanding of what it is to live in Italy without documents.

### *A profitable industry*

The first problem I want to highlight is that neither their camps nor the Questura<sup>30</sup> helps immigrants. This is generally due to profits lawyers and camps make from immigrants. First, I will elaborate on these aspects regarding lawyers. Sofia works at the legal helpdesk at Ex-OPG Je So’ Pazzo and is often in charge of the external communication for the legal helpdesk. We were sitting in a storage room, during the interview, as all the other rooms were taken. She told me that “lawyers frequently try to maximize their profit”, Violetta also informed me about this topic. According to Violetta, immigrants whose application for a refugee permit got rejected have the right to do an appeal. However, as Sofia explained, lawyers often extend the process as long as possible to earn more money. This relates well to Jacob’s story we learned earlier, where he cannot get in touch with his lawyer. Therefore, often during the legal helpdesk Violetta and Sofia spend a lot of time on getting in touch with lawyers.

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<sup>30</sup> The provincial police headquarter.

The second aspect is camps. Camps receive immigrants who are applying for documents and are waiting for the results. According to Violetta immigrants should be in camps for a maximum of six months, but a stay of two years is not an exception. According to Sofia, Violetta and Alfredo the camps on average receive 35 euro per immigrant per day of which 2,50 euro goes directly to the immigrants. The other 32,50 euro is for services<sup>31</sup>. However, there are many immigrants complaining about the living situation in the camps. Jacob told me there are “more people sleeping in one room than allowed”. Therefore employees “bribe the inspectors”, Lamin told me stories about “food poisoning” and Violetta told me how most of the camps are privatized and commercialised, therefore camps earn money for every immigrant who stays at the camp. Ibrahim adds that some camps are “corrupted”. He argues it is beneficial for the camps when more immigrants stay there and for a longer time. Therefore, camps minimize the services, as Jacob, Lamin and Sofia also explained, and maximize the number of immigrants staying in the camp. As we have seen in the theoretical framework, there are several sectors who profit from ‘illegal’ immigrants (Andersson 2014; Coutin 2005; Castles 2000), I argue that lawyers and camps are part of these sectors.

### *Marginalization*

An underaged boy, named Omar, once visited the legal helpdesk because of his police problems. Some time ago he was sick but his camp treated him very bad. He told us how he got upset by this. Violetta stopped him and said she understood and made an appointment with the lawyer. I did not understand, so I asked Violetta for clarity.

“Some immigrants, like Omar, want to stand up for their rights. But this always ends bad because the camps can cause police problems for the immigrants. The employees at a camp can ruin someone’s life.”

Omar his story is a good illustration of the second problem. The camp knows that irregular immigrants have little chances and resources to contest the behaviour of the camp. This is in line with Stephen (2004) who argues that ‘illegality’ acts as surveillance. In this case, surveillance as it prevents immigrants to protest as immigrants have little resources to do so and when they protest there will be consequences.

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<sup>31</sup> Services such as language schools and legal help, healthcare, meals, salaries and furnishing basic necessities.

### *Language*

The third factor is the linguistic factor. At some camps immigrants are able to attend language courses, but this is not always the case. The officials at the Questura generally only speak Italian but many immigrants do not. This makes communication difficult as Bloch (2002, 10) argues that a lack of the local language can limit opportunities. This also becomes visible during the legal helpdesk where immigrants often come in with wrong information or documents. Therefore, a lack of the Italian language can limit and slow down the procedures of getting documents for immigrants.

### *Information*

The last problem I want to point out, is the provision of information. I have seen that for many immigrant's documents and papers are not something obvious. During the legal helpdesk, it regularly occurs that immigrants, who have an appointment, forget to bring their documents. When Violetta asks where their documents are people look surprised, as if it did not occur to them to bring them. Not only do some immigrants not seem aware of the importance of documents, often immigrants do not know about immigration laws and procedures in Italy. However, according to Violetta, Sofia and Ibrahim camps should provide information and help them with their applications but, as described, this is often not the case.

To conclude, in this section I have showed that besides legal restrictions there are multiple other aspects that influence the chances of immigrants to obtain documents. I argue that these struggles can influence how immigrants perceive 'illegality', as for immigrants it is not only a status, it is a status that they actually live and therefore has consequences even when immigrants are not 'illegal' anymore. De Genova (2002, 427) argues that all activities done by irregular immigrants have the chance to become something criminal, as their presence already is 'illegal'. I argue that immigrants are aware of their status, even when they are regular, and try to maximize their opportunities by for example, learning Italian, join social centres and not to argue with camps or lawyers in order to face as little of this 'criminalization' as described by De Genova (2002, 427). However, even immigrants recognize their (ir)regular status this does not mean that they identify themselves as their status. Therefore, I argue that immigrants see 'illegality' in terms of what they can not do. This becomes especially visible when talking about work as you cannot have job contract without documents and therefore irregular immigrants often face work exploitation.





# Frames and motivations against immigration



All the political parties have a standpoint on immigration and what to do with it. I saw this propagated on flyers, websites, speeches, posters etc. The take on immigration that Forza Italia<sup>32</sup>, Lega<sup>33</sup>, M5S<sup>34</sup> and Casapound<sup>35</sup> have differ on its measures but strive for the same outcome which is less immigration and repatriation. One of the electoral campaign meetings I went to was from M5S in Caserta. As I was standing outside in the drizzle I quickly interviewed some potential M5S voters who were waiting to get inside. I asked one of them what he thought about the elections and he told me that the political parties were focusing too much on the immigrant issue while according to him the biggest problem is the economy. The campaign meetings always mentioned economics and immigration. However, the two were often linked to each other by my informants. Therefore, this section will focus on illustrating the frames and motivations against immigration.

### *Italians first*

“For us the state has a duty to deal first with its citizens and only then with the citizens of other nations<sup>36</sup>”

This quote illustrates the first frame of ‘Italians first’ in which Italians are framed as rightfully being the first in line to receive state resources such as work. According to Guus the frame of ‘Italians first’ is fuelled by the economic situation in Italy combined with the threat of immigration. Moreover, all my informants state that the economic situation in Naples and the whole of Italy is bad right now. There is a high unemployment rate which is especially predominant in the south according to, among others, Peppe; “There is no work for us, especially in the south where there is high unemployment”. According to Petro and Christina

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<sup>32</sup> Forza Italia on migration: Silvio Berlusconi promises to deport 600.000 irregular immigrants and wants to work more with Libya to stop the migration flow.

<sup>33</sup> Lega election flyer 2018; “Stop the invasion. To stop the uncontrolled invasion and to say no to the IUS soli it is necessary to impose a precise and common sense limit on the reception and immediately reintroduce the crime of illegal immigration (cancelled with the votes of the PD and the 5Stelle). No to IUS soli, easy citizenship, would provoke another boost to immigration, already at unsustainable levels, increasing the weight on the health system, on social security and employment. Never again a government that grants 280 euros a month for a total disabled and spends over 1000 euros for each immigrant.”.

<sup>34</sup> M5S election flyer 2018; “Stop the business of immigration, international cooperation also aimed at the stipulation of tracts for repatriations, 10,000 new hires in territorial commissions to evaluate, in a month, as in other European countries, if an immigrant has the right to stay in Italy or not.”

<sup>35</sup> Casapound election flyer 2018; “for us the state has a duty to deal first with its citizens and only then with the citizens of other nations. Stop immigration, repatriation. It is necessary to create the conditions in Africa (also with a military intervention in Libya) to prevent other illegal immigrants arriving. all foreigners who do not have their own livelihoods (home, work) must be repatriated. foreigners who are regular or less than a criminal must serve their sentences outside Italy.”.

<sup>36</sup> Casapound election flyer 2018.

people between the ages 18 and 30 and above 50 run a higher risk of being unemployed. This might create the conditions for the theory of alienation from Berlet (2006, 122) as Neapolitans become dissatisfied because of economic struggles. Stefano voiced himself in such a way that many others I spoke to agree with; “If in a country there are no jobs for Italian people, youth, what jobs can immigrants do?”. Hence, first the Italians have to be met in their needs such as the ability to work and then immigrants can be helped. This is in line with what Cea D’ancona (2009) argues. She states that ‘legal’ citizens might feel more entitled to state resources because they are ‘legitimate’ citizens, hence competition over resources and rights-claiming may arise (Cea D’ancona 2009). The sentiment of ‘Italians first’ seems to come from the feeling that because of the immigrants Italians have less work. Therefore, there seems to be a hierarchy which states who should be helped first and second based on a call on citizenship. The immigration and economic situation in Naples thus seems to include a battle over resources and having the right to claim them.

#### *The ‘good’ and ‘bad’ immigration*

This frame has to do with what is deemed as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ immigration. These topics were first introduced to me by Petro. According to him an immigrant is perceived as ‘good’ or as ‘bad’ depending on several factors. Petro argues that the ‘bad’ immigrants are the ones who “rape and steal” and the ‘good’ immigrants are the ones who “have the right papers and work”. What is interesting is that the view of either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ immigrants is highly relational to which ‘type’ of immigrant is discussed in what context. For example, in conversations with Stefano and Petro not one kind of immigrant was ‘good’ as there are simply no jobs according to them. Therefore, they argue every immigrant with a job is ‘stealing’ an Italian job. However, when an immigrant is seen as a refugee the frame shifts anew. The ‘good’ immigrant is the refugee who is forced to come to Italy for asylum and cannot be refused as Italy has to give asylum. Therefore, certain qualities of immigrants are emphasised in order to place them in a certain frame. This is in line with the theory of highlighting and selecting of Snow and Byrd (2007, 119). This is also an illustration of how frames are constructed as their social meaning varies from context to context (Snow and Byrd 2007, 119). However, what is interesting is that Francesca, Antonio and Christina argue that most of the informal work immigrants are doing is work Italians do not want. This notion is shared by Ludovico who is an Italian journalist writing about immigration issues in Italy. Therefore, there should not be any competition over jobs or the perception of it. Regardless, this perception of threat seems to legitimize negative sentiments towards immigrants. This is in line with the politics of discourse (Bhatia 2005, 6)

as ones' own ideas are legitimized while delegitimizing that of the 'other'. The following encounter supports that.

I was having beer with Antonio and Giovanni in the local pub of Casapound when Antonio told me that one of the reasons Italians are not doing the same jobs as immigrants is because immigrants are willing to do the same job for less money. Giovanni is a young member of Casapound that was also at the pub that evening. I argue that this phenomenon might contribute to the feeling that immigrants pose a threat to Italians as they compete over resources. Consequently, I asked Antonio if employers are part of the problem. He stated that they are not as the employers are the "victims of high taxes" and therefore forced to pay their employees less. He went on to argue that Italians could not accept these low wages as they are too low to sustain themselves.

A complete other view on 'good' or 'bad' immigration was given to me by Francesca. Her take is that there is no 'good' or 'bad' immigration as Italy actually needs more immigrants to support the economy. Therefore, immigrants are an economic asset instead of an economic threat. Hence, how this perception of threat came to be is a very interesting question as it might have something to do with the false consciousness Berlet (2006, 118) writes about. It could also be linked to the theory of alienation from Berlet (2006, 115) as the dissatisfaction of Italians with their economy might make them more perceptible to anti-immigrant sentiments.

### *Irregularity as criminality*

The third frame that I encountered has to do with the perceived higher rate of criminality among immigrants and the connotation between irregularity and criminality. Stella in Naples is the quarter we lived in and is known to be one of the least safe quarters in the city due to its, Italian, organized crime. However, Stefano always warned me against walking alone after ten o'clock at night in this quarter for another reason. He stated that after that time there are a lot of immigrants in the streets who might try to rob me. He added that he did not say this "out of racism" but because a lot of immigrants are without jobs and therefore without any legal form of income. So, according to Stefano, they are forced to criminal measures of making money. I argue that the perception that all immigrants might be criminal has to do with the 'illegality' frame and the criminalization of irregular immigrants. As is also argued by Barbero (2015, 251) who argues that the frame of 'illegality' brings with it a connotation of criminality. The perception of criminal behaviour of immigrants is what Calavita (2005) and De Genova (2002) warn about as their perceived irregularity leads to the questioning of their presence and behaviour.

At the time I had this conversation I already had been alone at Piazza Cavour after ten many times. There were many people that looked like African immigrants hanging out there. However, they were not the only ones there as there were also many people who looked like Italians. Therefore, the presence of the immigrants seemed to weigh more in judging safety. I argue that this is a way of looking at the theory of selection and highlighting of Snow and Byrd (2007, 119) as the immigrants in this case are ‘selected and highlighted’. What is interesting is the perception of a higher presence of ‘African immigrants’ and a feeling of unsafeness as there is no possible knowledge of their possible irregularity. This might be what Bhatia (2005, 5) warns against as the danger of framing can be that the frame forms a fixed or naturalized relation to the framed, which in this case could be the perception of criminality.

The perception of immigrants as being criminal also comes from the idea that they are ‘chilling’ according to Stefano. He tells me this as we are sitting in a coffee house in the quarter of Posillipo. What he is referring to is the perceived high number of immigrants in the streets in different areas of Naples supposedly standing around ‘doing nothing’. According to Stefano the immigrants that are standing around are probably the irregular ones that cannot have a job and therefore have to resort to criminal activities for income. He says;

“Crime, this is the problem. There are sites that are very dangerous to walk, Garibaldi is dangerous, 600.000 people [the number of irregular immigrants that are stuck in Italy]. But I think 900.000 or one million people. This [the number of immigrants] is not possible because I ask; what can these people do in Italy without a job? Walking?”.

This quote illustrates the idea that irregular immigrants cannot work and therefore are ‘probably’ forced to other measures of income. Hence, immigrants are ‘chilling’ and therefore must be criminal. This again shows Bhatia’s (2005, 5) argument that the framed sometimes cannot be seen outside of their frame. In this case the irregular immigrants and the frame of ‘illegality’.

What is interesting is that my informants have no personal stories of bad experiences with immigrants. This might also have to do with the false consciousness of Berlet (2006, 121). As the image they have of immigrants might be influenced by what they read and hear in the media. Stefano always mentioned that what he knows is because of what he sees in the streets and reads in the media. As a reaction to the killing of an Italian woman by a Nigerian immigrant in Macerata Petro told me; “Good immigration is no problem for me, it is bad if an immigrant is like a criminal. If it is a bad immigrant they should not get life, but the electric chair”. This notion of punishment was also introduced by Lega, but in a different way. Their campaign flyer

states that they want to reintroduce the crime of “illegal” immigration. Hence, irregular immigrants run the risk of being criminalized and further ‘illegalized’ as irregular immigration goes from being an administrative violation to breaking the law. This illustrates Barbero’s (2015, 251) Calavita’s (2005) and De Genova’s (2002) argument that the presence and behaviour of irregular immigrants is often criminalized. Therefore, irregular immigrants are criminalized.

### *Hard working Italians*

The fourth frame is about the victimizing of Italians. This frame is closely related to the first one. Almost all my informants stressed the importance of being Italian as that is what distinguishes having the right and not having the right to claim rights. Therefore, this distinguishing mainly rests on recognized citizenship. This is in line with what Cea D’ancona (2009) argues, which is that ‘legal’ citizens might feel more entitled to state resources and consequently claim this right. Italians are dealing with the economic problem which is leaving many people unemployed as mentioned previously. Therefore, they see themselves as the victims of economic policy but also of the stream of immigrants that come to Italy seeking a job. The theory of alienation (Berlet 2006, 122) could be applicable as the economic stress and the resulting battle over resources might pose Italians against immigrants.

A video that I saw during the electoral campaign meeting of Lega in Caserta not only illustrated the frame of the hardworking Italians as victims, but also showed framing in ‘action’. I was able to record this video as it was shown repeatedly before the speeches began.



The two pictures above translate from left to right; “The Italians did their jobs [...] as in the sugar cane fields” and “Italians were employed in heavy industry and construction”.



These two pictures are accompanied by the same statement “They worked in tunnels, railways and suffered from hunger and bad living conditions”.



The above images translate from left to right; “We are making sacrifices, so many sacrifices!” and “It is not good, the food, it is not good!”. These images supposedly show how immigrants are complaining that they have to sacrifice a lot while comparing it to complaining about the food.



The two images above translate from left to right; “Racist! Racist! Italian racist!”.

One of the messages the video seems to be trying to convey is that the Italian ancestors have worked hard under harsh conditions as immigrants. They compare these frames to the idea that immigrants are unwilling to work hard and are ‘greedy’ and ‘ungrateful’ for what Italians have to offer. Therefore, they are taking ‘advantage’ of hard working Italians. I argue

that this perspective effectively victimizes Italians. These fragments also suggest Italians are racist and unwilling to give immigrant what they want. What is interesting is how Lega selected footage and placed it within a context and specific order in which it is played for an audience, hereby trying to convince the audience of the message they are trying to convey. This video illustrates the process of selection and highlighting and the constructed nature of framing Snow and Byrd mention (2007, 119). It also illustrates that framing is used as a tool of convincing the audience of the message one wants to convey (Westby 2002, 287).

In conclusion, as argued by possible M5S voter Francesco, immigration is very highlighted in the 2018 elections while it seems that the economic situation is more pressing. It is interesting to combine this notion with the lack of personal stories of my informants and the perceived battle over jobs. This might mean that Berlet's (2006, 118) theory of false consciousness might be applicable as immigration and its negative aspects are highlighted in the elections. Another mechanism that might be in play is that the political parties are trying to win votes by tapping into the current dissatisfaction around immigration. This illustrates the theories of Ruspini et al. (2007, 7) and Barbero (2015, 249) who state that politicians often tap into 'high profile' issues to win more votes. While the dissatisfaction of Neapolitans might be, among other things, because of a faltering economy there is a possibility that this dissatisfaction is being shifted away from the economic policy by politicians and turned on immigration. This is in line with what Berlet (2006, 118) argues which is that the attention of the unsatisfied population is turned away in an attempt to prevent them from tapping into their primary sources of dissatisfaction. This might be an attempt at blame-avoidance by politicians for bad policy and corruption. Therefore, this might be an illustration of what Weaver (1986, 372) calls blame-avoidance.

### **Thoughts on anti-immigrant framing**

*by Kiki Holle*

Immigrants were a much-debated topic in the last elections in Italy and immigrants seem aware of the rhetoric's used by right-wing parties. This could be because at Ex-Canapificio two weekly meetings were completely devoted to the elections and the campaigns from right-wing parties. The main frame Ex-Canapificio addresses, is how immigrants are being used as 'scapegoats' during the elections. At the meeting they explained scapegoating as, "to hide the real problems and to blame immigrants" instead of looking at "the real, more structural problems". This is in line with Berlet's (2006, 121) definition of scapegoating.



When talking with immigrants about right-wing parties and their framing of immigrants there are several views; Ibrahim thinks right-wing parties are “using immigrants to win votes” because “immigrants are an easy enemy”. Zakira, who I met at several protests and who follows an Italian language course at Ex OPG Je so’ Pazzo, argues that immigrants are “an easy enemy” because “immigrants cannot vote”. Jacob says it is “easy to blame people who do not belong to your society”. These arguments show how immigrants are being used in politics to avoid blame and to win votes, this corresponds to the theory of blame-avoidance of Weaver (1986, 387).

When asking for their thoughts on why right-wing parties frame the immigrants in this way, several answers are given. First of all, Ibrahim thinks it is because those people have an interest in the matter and want to keep things the same, so they are blaming immigrants. Second, Ibrahim, Alfredo and Zakira argue that right-wing parties do not want to talk about the “real problems” and therefore right-wing politicians blame immigrants. Additionally, Alfredo understands this as a way to create a “war between poor people”, where the right-wing government will not be held responsible. Interestingly this also corresponds with Weaver’s (1986, 387) theory of blame-avoidance.

Often immigrants describe how immigrants and some Italians are facing the same problems; being marginalized, being unemployed and facing poverty. Right-wing parties argue that immigration is involved with these problems. However, immigrants argue that those political parties are blaming immigrants so that Italians do not see the real problems. Ibrahim and Zakira see the real problems as unemployment and corruption, according to Ibrahim “people are not aware”, as “Italians do not travel, they do not even speak English!”. Therefore, Ibrahim sees ignorance as a big problem. This means that immigrants must fight harder to make people more aware that they are fighting the same fight, so they can fight together. During an interview Giovanni explained to me that one of the long-term goals of Ex-Canapificio is to “combine the movement with the movements of Italians, since they are fighting for the same things”.

Immigrants describe the framing of immigrants by right-wing political parties as an attempt to blame and exclude immigrants. As immigrants cannot vote and according to right-wing political parties, immigrants are not part of the society. I believe this is an attempt to create different segments of citizens as argued by (Papadopoulos & Tsjanos 2013, 182). This could be a vicious circle as immigrants do not have the same rights as Italians, such as voting, therefore immigrants are an ‘easy victim’. However, immigrants try to end this vicious circle as Ex-Canapificio reaches out to Italians to collaborate. I argue that this could be seen as an act

of citizenship (Isin and Saward 2013, 3), as it is a way for immigrants to manifest themselves as citizens by making other citizens aware and by helping other citizens.

# Civic activism



In this section several ways of immigrant activism will be discussed and how this is an act of citizenship. First, I will discuss reasons immigrants have for joining Ex-Canapificio and how joining Ex-Canapificio and playing basketball is a form of immigrant activism. Second, I will discuss how protesting is an act of citizenship as immigrants describe protesting as their way of voting.

### *Joining Ex-Canapificio*

I regret not taking my winter coat to Italy. As my Italian roommates told me the weather in March is crazy and unpredictable (Marzo pazzello). This March, it snowed, the sun has shined and it has rained. Today it is extremely cold. On my way from Garibaldi station to Ex-Canapificio I use my rain jacket as an extra layer, to keep myself warm. I see the woman who is always selling African food outside Ex-Canapificio packing her stuff and leave. This means I am late, so I hurry to the weekly meeting, which already started. I try to find a seat, but all the seats are taken. It is busy as usual. This weekly meeting discusses the protest that will take place in May. At the weekly meetings all kinds of topics are discussed, from politics to recent events to protests. You could argue that at the weekly meetings the persuasive ideology, as mentioned by Berlet (2006, 118), of Ex-Canapificio gets announced. The meetings are a way to get everybody together, so they can inform immigrants about the recent updates. I believe it is where the core concepts of Ex-Canapificio are being discussed in order to motivate and mobilize immigrants. After the weekly meetings the helpdesks are open where free legal advice or healthcare is offered. This is one of the reasons why, on such a cold day, over two hundred immigrants congregate at Ex-Canapificio. The second reason is that people feel safe and at home at Ex-Canapificio. Jacob told me he likes to visit Ex-Canapificio because there are people who speak your language, Zakira especially likes the food they are selling outside, Ibrahim likes that it is a movement for and by immigrants and that he can help others and Yassim likes the aspect that he can see his friends. Giovanni combined those arguments as he said;

“I think immigrants also come because it is like going to church, it is a place where you can meet many friends. You know that from this place the truth comes out, about the elections, last time they talked about elections. Even when immigrants cannot vote, they are interested. Because as we saw in this election immigrants are the heart of this election campaign. Immigrants want to be involved. Immigrants

cannot vote so their vote is protesting, to go on the street. But they also come here because they see African food. They feel at home. “

According to Ibrahim, one of the reasons immigrants join is to educate themselves, as “you know they say the truth”. It is a place where immigrants can hear stories, narratives and about how to mobilize yourself as argued by Berlet (2006, 118). Another reason is to feel a sense of unity and belonging, to have a space in which they feel at home and safe. However, to maintain this feeling of home, everyone needs to contribute. Therefore, Ex-Canapificio implemented the registration at the protests. The registration is introduced by immigrants themselves, with two reasons. The first reason, as Ibrahim told me, is that everything gets registered, including the expiration date of the documents. The second and most important reason, is according to Giovanni;

“it is not right that a person who sacrifices by coming to the protest and leaving the job, family, daily salary for a good protest, has the same positive results from the protest as people who do not come. It is not right. Everybody who wants to take benefit from the protest, must take part.”

Therefore, Violetta asks every client at the legal helpdesk if they joined the protest in 2017. Sometimes when the answer is no, Violetta tells them to join the protest in May and to make a new appointment then. The reason for this is to stimulate people to participate in the protests. So, as Ibrahim said, that everyone who wants to benefit also takes part.

Another form of activism is through basketball. Ex-Canapificio has a basketball team called ‘Stella del Sud’. It is a mixed team of Italians and immigrants. Besides basketball the team also has a political message, namely fighting racism and prejudices. Giovanni was the first one who told me about the team. He told me;

“The idea is that through sport you can destroy some ideological wall about the refugees, about blacks. So, when the team goes to play in several cities, through the sport, they can see the blacks and the refugees in a different way. It does not matter when you are playing if you’re black, you are playing for the same goal, that is to win the match and to have a good game. But it is also a political message that we always try to give. For every game we use banners that speak about the immigrant problem.”



*Picture of Stella del Sud, picture from their Facebook page*

Yassim and I chat every Wednesday, as he helps at Ex-Canapificio every Wednesday. One Wednesday he told me that he was cheering for the match last night, he told me that the vibes were good, “many people saw the banner. This is good, the team goes to many places, so more people can see it”. I believe basketball can function as a counter narrative as argued by Isin and Nielsen (2013, 161) and Oliveri (2012, 798), where immigrants use their voice to contest. You could argue that the success of the basketball team, as Giovanni and Yassim describe, is due to the hypervisibility (Tyler and Marciniak 2013, 152) of immigrants in politics, especially during the last election. Immigrants use their hypervisibility to contest the depersonalizing frames in order to highlight how immigrants have the same goal as everyone else namely “to have a good game and win the match”.

*“Protesting is our vote”*

“Buongiorno” I say while I enter the office. Adeeb is the first person I see, he is a staff member at Ex-Canapificio and helps Violetta at the legal helpdesk. He mostly assists with translating. He is, as far as I know, the only staff member at Ex-Canapificio who speaks Urdu and Italian. Due to my inability to speak Italian or Urdu, our conversations tend to be short. I continue my way to the office, where Violetta is preparing for the legal helpdesk. Keba, Yassim and Marco, who are all staff members, are standing in the office, chatting with Violetta. Keba is originally from Senegal, at Ex-Canapificio he helps Violetta by for example translating during the Legal helpdesk. He hands Violetta the list of people who have an appointment for today. Violetta takes the list and informs me about today. She explains that the people on the list need to extend their soggiorno. Violetta called them three months before their soggiorno expires, to make an appointment at Ex-Canapificio, to ensure a successful extension. I ask her how she knows the

expire dates from the soggiornos. Violetta shows me an excel sheet with over three thousand rows, “when people join the protest, we register them here. We register their name, phone number and the expiration date of their soggiorno, so we can call them for an appointment to arrange everything on time for the extension”. I look at the excel sheet and see that they got registered at last years’ protest. During my stay at Ex-Canapificio, people often told me about the annual protest organised by Ex-Canapificio, Ibrahim told me “thousands of people join us in Caserta, from all over Italy, all to protest and fight racism”. Ibrahim added that even people who are not active at Ex-Canapificio join the protest. The protests are where people unite and fight racism. Furthermore, the protests also function as a method to achieve legal arrangements.



*The office of the Legal Helpdesk*

One of Yassims’ activities is to join immigrants to their appointments at the Questura. Violetta explained that in the past immigrants went alone and without an appointment. This often led to immigrants waiting for hours or not receiving help at all. Therefore, Ex-Canapificio decided to join immigrants to the Questura. However, as she explains, this was not sufficient, as immigrants still faced the same problems. Violetta describes that due one of the annual protests, Ex-Canapificio managed to arrange daily appointments at the Questura for immigrants. Another legal achievement of the protests is the special commission. Violetta explained one special commission; “When people apply for documents they are doing a commission. The special commission is for people who have been here for many years already, without papers. They are now able to get papers through this special commission”. The argument Violetta makes is as following; “The questura did not manage to send them away and now they have been here for many years, so it is better to give them papers, so they can move out of informal circuits.” This agreement is partly made possible through the protests. Violetta

explained that some people managed to get papers through the special commission. One Thursday morning I was able to meet some of those people. Yassim made six appointments for people who just got their positive results from the special commission back. One of them was John, he managed to get a two-year humanitarian permit. John told me that he had been in Italy for over five years and is happy that he finally has a permit. Violetta congratulates him and quickly gets back to business, “it is important to keep investing in yourself and take courses at school. If you continue like that, it would be possible to get a permit on which you can work and then, after some years, even an Italian passport.”

The protests have several goals and topics. As I described, one of the goals is to achieve legal arrangements. Another one is to fight racism and to inform people about the current immigration situation in Italy. On a more personal level, joining protests and the social movement can create a sense of unity and belonging. Most immigrants arrive in Italy all alone. Zakira told me that he does not have any friends in Naples. When we met each other one day in the centre Naples, I invited him for a coffee and a card game. He told me that when he was in Southern-Italy he heard from many immigrants that he could trust the people at Ex-Canapificio and Ex-OPG Je so’ Pazzo, so he decided to join and to join the protests. Ibrahim also likes the protest, as he once told me after one.

“I really like the protest. Yeah, because you are all fighting for something that you can benefit from tomorrow. Even if I do not benefit from it, other people can benefit from it. But when you keep quiet, the problem will not solve at all, or it will be very difficult.”

Ibrahim describes protesting can give you a focus for the future. This focus, according to Ibrahim; “Lets you help other people and this makes you forget about your own problems sometimes”. This can be linked to what Oliveri (2012) describes as an attempt to create a new situation, as people try to change the conditions of their life. Thousands of people come together, all fighting for the same purpose and this gives them power. It is as, Isin and Nielsen (2013, 161) argue, turning a shadow population into an immigrant owned social movement. Ibrahim once described protesting as “their way of voting”, as irregular immigrants are not allowed to vote. Therefore, protesting is their way of announcing what they stand for. Additionally, with protesting you can make other people aware. Ibrahim argues, “you need to make people aware of the situation we are facing. So that the society can see it, they have to balance it and see [their situation].”

In this section I have examined several forms of immigrant activism such as joining social centres, basketball and protesting. Immigrants have several reasons for joining social



centres and protesting. Hence, I argue that this contesting can be seen as, what Isin and Nielsen (2013) calls, an act of citizenship. Immigrants challenge dominant frames by using counter-narratives, where immigrants claim rights and make themselves visible as citizens (Isin and Nielsen 2013, 161). An example of this is how immigrants describe protesting as their way of voting, thereby immigrants act like citizens, as citizens can vote, and make themselves political. Additionally, I consider that in this act of citizenship, immigrants place themselves central and try to recreate the picture of immigrants as showed with basketball. This is, as argued by Tyler and Marciniak (2013, 152), to generate positive forms of immigrant representation that can counter mainstream frames.

**“Immigrants can only walk”<sup>37</sup>**

*by Rosemarijn Bakker*

I am sitting in the car with Petro as the traffic light turns red and the car slowly comes to a stop. He sees a supposed ‘immigrant’ standing between the cars offering washing services to drivers. “This is what immigration brings us” says Petro as he points out to the man. He says this because he thinks that immigrants add no value to the Italian economy. I look at the supposed immigrant and ask if he thinks that all immigrants are doing work like that. He says that there is not much else they can do since there is no work. Stefano thinks within these same lines as he says that immigrant activism is a “futile” matter because there is no one to listen to them. He states;

“If I ask, who will listen to me? I immigrate, walk, protest, who listens to us? My friend from Holland, this is the situation. This is the bad reality. I saw this immigration protest, but I thought, who can help the immigrants? Italians cannot help Italians.”

What Stefano means is that nothing can be done for immigrants as nothing can be done for Italians. Therefore, protesting can make no difference. Once I asked Petro what he thought about immigrants protesting for workers’ rights and his reaction was laughter. Hence, even if immigrants protest, my informants think it would make no difference. Therefore, civic activism could create a voice as Isin and Nielsen (2013, 161) argue, but since the problem seems to be a lack of resources, it would make no difference.

Another argument that immigrants cannot be helped is because Italians are dealing with the same conditions. When I asked Stefano if he thought that immigrants

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<sup>37</sup> Stefano, Semi-structured interview 06/03/2018

were dealing with bad working conditions he said; “Sure, I think so, because in the past years, in the 50s and 60s it was the Italian job. It was always a hard job, now Italians do not want it, younger Italians do not want it”. Ludovico also made this same statement. Therefore, the (working) conditions that immigrants have to deal with are acknowledged but also linked to the Italian conditions to underline that immigrants do not necessarily have it worse and that the overall situation in Italy is bad right now.

According to Petro, another argument why immigrant activism is futile is that since they are irregular no one will listen. Therefore, their irregularity is framed as the core of their problem as they are not seen as legitimate political entities such as citizens. This partly illustrates the argument of Isin and Nielsen (2013, 163) concerning how political subjectivity and citizenship are related. However, as Petro illustrates immigrants are not seen as legitimate political entities. Hence, the lines of who are traditionally seen as citizens are not blurred as Isin and Nielsen (2013, 163) claim in their theory. In conclusion, the frame of irregularity excludes immigrants from claiming rights that are not associated with them. However, immigrant activism does show us that immigrants are not just “walking” and are thus not helpless in their situation.

## Conclusion

For our conclusion we turn to our main research question: *how is the '(il)legality' of (ir)regular immigrants framed by voters and members of right-wing political parties and contested by (ir)regular immigrants in Naples and Caserta?* To answer this question, we will first elaborate on the main differences and similarities of the three central concepts of our research; 'illegality', framing and contesting. Then we will conclude on our research question followed by a discussion and recommendations.

### *"Illegality"*

When discussing 'illegality' we would like to start with an observation we stumbled upon early in the field. In our theoretical foundation many authors discuss '(il)legal' immigrants. However, in the field we encountered that this terminology of 'illegal' is hardly used except for during immigrant protest. The theory of Chauvin and Mascarenas (2014, 422) argues that the obscenity of the frame 'illegal' can be used to contest a situation. This became visible during immigrant protests as we argue the term 'illegal' was used to contest this frame.

Voters and members of right-wing political parties use the terms of regular and irregular immigrants. Immigrants and members of Ex-Canapificio do recognize the difference but they do not seem to make a distinction between categories of immigrants such as regular or irregular at all. This contradicts Bhatia's (2005, 11) argument where the identity of immigrants is reduced to a dualistic nature which takes away a person's context by focusing on the (ir)regularity of a person. However, this does seem to happen in the categorizing of voters and members of right-wing political parties. The difference between a regular and irregular immigrant according to some voters and members of right-wing political parties lies in control and regulation. When an immigrant comes to Italy while abiding laws and regulation the immigrant is seen as regular. However, when an immigrant crosses the border without control or knowledge over who this person is the immigrant is seen as irregular. This distinction is closely linked to how Sigona (2012, 5) describes the concept of 'illegal' which is a set of legal arrangements. Immigrants view their irregularity in terms of what they cannot do, such as they are not able to work with a contract. Due to their irregularity most immigrants cannot claim rights such as a work contract. Somers (2008) argues that this is linked to citizenship and the right to have rights.

The second point on 'illegality' that presented itself in the field is its fluidity. Being irregular is a status that can change and is therefore fluid. For example, vulnerable documents are a type of document that temporarily grant regularity. Laws and regulations surrounding immigration such as the Bossi-Fini law make it harder for immigrants to be regular as there is a quota on how many working visas are distributed each year. As the law does not curb the immigration flow more immigrants become irregular. Consequently, they have to await some form of legalization. Immigrants are therefore being shifted in and out of the grey zone of being regular or irregular. This illustrates De Genova's (2002, 440) argument of the legal production of immigrant 'illegality' in which 'illegality' is produced through a set of legal arrangements. It also shows that the concept of 'illegality' is not something static (Sassen 1998, 56). However, what might remain static is the vulnerability of immigrants or the perceived vulnerability that immigrants have of themselves.

A common phenomenon in Naples is the prominent informal labour sector. About 50 percent of Neapolitan youth are working in the informal sector. Therefore, for Neapolitans the informal sector is a downside of Italian economics which has merged with daily life. This is also the case for (ir)regular immigrants. Not having documents means that immigrants cannot work with a contract, therefore they end up in the informal sector. This mechanism is what Andersson (2014) calls the illegality industry. Being in the informal sector diminishes having working rights which makes immigrants more vulnerable. However, this vulnerability is also something Italians have to deal with. As discussed, 'Italians first' is one of the most prominent frames when it comes to rights claiming. It entails that Italians think they are more entitled to jobs than immigrants as they are Italian. If there would be enough jobs then immigrants would be welcome. Therefore, this argument is based on a call on citizenship (Cea D'ancona 2009). Hence, Italians and immigrants seem to be in a perceived battle over resources.

The last point surrounding the concept of 'illegality' is the criminalization of irregular immigration. One of Lega's items on their list is to reintroduce the crime of irregular immigration. Another criminalizing aspect is the connotation immigrants have with criminal activities. The perceived chilling of immigrants brings with it the idea that they are not working. Hence, some voters and members think that in order to earn money they must be involved in criminal activities such as selling drugs and stealing. This criminalization 'illegalizes' the presence of immigrants as well as their behaviour which is also what De Genova (2002) and Barbero (2015, 251) argue. This frame can have serious consequences for immigrants as the story of Jacob showed. When an immigrant has a 'police problem' it becomes even harder to obtain documents.

### *Framing*

It can be argued that the four frames that were discussed are all in relation to the negative influence immigration has on Italians. Therefore, the dissatisfaction of some Italians might be part of why and how these frames are constructed and reproduced. The theory of alienation also argues that a dissatisfied population might be more perceptible to anti-immigrant ideas (Berlet 2006, 121). However, what remains interesting is to investigate what the mutual relation between frames and the people that use them is as none of the members or voters from right-wing political parties in our research were without jobs or had any negative experiences with immigrants. Therefore, it is interesting to think where these frames come from as it might have to do with the theory of Berlet (2006, 118) of false consciousness.

When combining the lack of personal stories with the theory of false consciousness (Berlet 2006, 118) a mechanism comes to mind. Immigration and its negative aspects have been highlighted in the elections which might be a mechanism that political parties use to win votes by tapping into the current dissatisfaction around immigration. This might illustrate the theories of Ruspini et al. (2007, 7) and Barbero (2015, 249) who state that politicians often tap into 'high profile' issues to win more votes. By putting the focus on immigration problems politicians are taking away the focus from other societal and structural problems as illustrated by the theory of Berlet (2006, 118). Therefore, we argue that immigrants might be used as a tool of blame-avoidance which illustrates the theory of Weaver (1986, 387) of blame-avoidance. Immigrants argue that they are used because they are "an easy enemy" as they are a vulnerable part of the population.

### *Contestation*

We want to address two topics regarding immigrant contestation. The first one is about joining Ex-Canapificio. We have seen that immigrants have different reasons to join Ex-Canapificio. However, it is evident that many come for the free legal helpdesks. Others come for the sense of belonging and unity, to educate themselves and to hear the 'truth'. The last two aspects are realized through the weekly meetings. At these meetings an ideology is created and shared which resembles the persuasive ideology of Berlet (2006, 118). It is the place where immigrants are informed about politics and events and are being motivated and mobilized to unite and protest. Therefore, at Ex-Canapificio (ir)regular immigrants who often tend to be a shadow population are turned into, what Isin and Nielsen (2013, 161) call a, strong immigrant owned movement.

Another way of contesting we encountered is protesting. At the protests immigrants create a voice in which they use their hypervisibility to illustrate the obscurity of the frames used against them and with it draw attention to their situation. This is in line with the theory of Chauvin and Mascarenas (2014, 422) who argue that counternarratives can be based on the obscurity of the frame. Additionally, these counter narratives are used to reshape the ascribed frame in their favour. To sum up, immigrants use their voice to make themselves seen, heard and to create awareness to change their situation.

As we have seen (ir)regular immigration has been an essential topic in the recent elections. However, irregular immigrants, some regular immigrants too, are excluded from the elections as they do not have the right to vote. Therefore, immigrants refer to the protests as ‘their way of voting’. We argue, that immigrants make themselves political through this contesting which Dolar (2006, 105) also describes. Firstly, because immigrants are contesting the regimes of exclusion (Tyler and Marciniak 2013, 154). Second, this is way of voting Isin and Saward (2013, 2) call an act of citizenship where immigrants try to claim rights and recognition through protesting. However, we have seen that no matter what immigrants do voters and members of right-wing parties still view immigrants within their frame of irregularity. Additionally, voters and members of right-wing political parties argue that not much can be done for immigrants, which we have seen is not the case as protests can lead to legal achievements. Their argument is that Italians cannot help Italians. Hence, they argue that if something could be done, Italians should be helped first. Therefore, we argue that in this case protesting does not successfully uncover the political space and what it means to be a citizen as argued by Oliveri (2012, 794) and Dolar (2006, 105). As Oliveri (2012) and Dolar (2006, 105) argue that contestation leads to a renewal of the concept of citizenship. This is because, as we showed, members and voters of right-wing political parties do not recognize this. Therefore, we would like to add to the theory that for a successful renewal of the concept of citizenship, which opens up the political arena, it not only has to be created but also has to be recognized by others.

Concluding our answer regarding our research question, the three concepts of ‘(il)legality’, framing and contesting have to be placed within the broader context of the economic situation in Italy. Sassen (1998) and De Genova (2002) argue that research on ‘illegality’ should involve more than the law alone. Therefore, we conducted research on how ‘illegality’ is produced and experienced. This illustrates that even besides legal restrictions there are other factors that make it hard for immigrants to become documented, and even when an immigrant has received a ‘legal’ status they still encounter consequences of their previous

‘illegal’ frame. Such as Andersson (2014) theorised approach of the illegality industry. The production of ‘illegality’ cannot be seen apart from the right to work. Being an (ir)regular immigrant or an Italian makes a big difference on the ability to claim this right. As some Italians bring forward their Italian citizenship, (ir)regular immigrants are constricted by the production of the frame of their irregularity. According to some voters and members of right-wing political parties (ir)regularity is determined by laws and regulations. These very laws and regulations determine if an immigrant should receive the documents to stay and work. Immigrant irregularity is also framed by the undesired additives that their irregularity supposedly brings with it such as a perceived battle over jobs or feelings of unsafeness because of supposed immigrant criminality. We have discussed that immigrants contest those frames, by creating a voice where they use counter narratives of themselves as argued by Chauvin and Mascarenas (2014, 422), Isin and Nielsen (2013, 161) and Oliveri (2012, 798) and through the usage of their hypervisibility. We argue that the argument of “protesting as our vote” can be characterized as immigrants making themselves political. This is in line with what Dolar (2006, 105) argues. We argue that this is an illustration of an act of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen 2013). However, we did not see that this contestation led to a recognized renewal of the concept of citizenship, as stated by Oliveri (2012) and Dolar (2006, 105). Therefore, immigrant contestation is not truly being acknowledged through members and voters of right-wing parties as the way how they perceive immigrants becomes fixed in their irregular frame, this is something Bhatia (2005, 5) also stresses.

## **Discussion**

After concluding how processes of framing and contesting influence immigrant ‘illegality’ we want to elaborate on some suggestions for further research. Both our population recognize the hardship and struggle of the other population. We have showed how Ex-Canapificio tries to include Italians. This is done by awareness raising at protests, offering help desks for Italians and protesting with several Italian organizations. The argument of Ex-Canapificio is that they are all fighting the same fight, as they are all suffering, they should join forces. However, instead of joining forces the reaction of members and voters of right-wing political parties is to prioritize Italians as we showed with the frame “Italians first”. Arguments from this population is that if Italy cannot take care of its ‘own’ citizens, then it definitely cannot and should not take care of immigrants. Thus, they see opportunities in deporting immigrants, as Lega wants to criminalize all irregular immigration. Therefore, we see an opportunity in further research

that focuses on how to bring those parties together and what is keeping them apart. Ex-Canapificio is already striving to do this, so we see possibilities for further research in collaborating with Ex-Canapificio.

Furthermore, we want to address the point made by Andersson (2014). Andersson claims there are several sectors that make a profit in the illegality industry (2016, 1066). In the empirical chapters we have briefly elaborated on some topics that were suggested by our informants. Additionally, an expert interview stated that the proposed solutions by M5S and Lega will only create more irregular immigration. Therefore, it would be interesting and important to conduct further research on this topic, to examine what kinds of sectors make profit in what way and how those sectors are planning to increase their profits at the expenses of immigrants.

Due to the short duration of our fieldwork it was hard to establish rapport. Additionally, we both underestimated the influence of language. We think that those two factors have a great influence on the data we gathered, especially with Rosemarijn her population. For example, Kiki her population argues that racism is a big problem in Italy. Rosemarijn her population, the ones that immigrants designate as the people who are racist, argue that they are not racist. However, as we only heard these arguments in interviews and they therefore might be socially desirable answers, we did not have the chance to test this knowledge. We argue that when being able to speak Italian and to follow both parties more in their daily lives a method triangulation could be achieved, as you are able to analyse their statements through observations. Therefore, we suggest further research with a longer duration, more daily life interaction and done by someone who speaks Italian.



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