

Delegitimation and legitimation of the citizenship of migrants in Italy

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The research

These data are based on a research on the lived experience of rights of migrants and local factory workers in the province of Ferrara (Northern Italy), and on their everyday conceptions of citizenship, as opposed to the official

discourse. The research explored how the rights of the two groups changed during the biography of each interviewee, and the opinions of the interviewees on whether and how the Italian law on citizenship should be changed. The local factory workers were clearly in a stronger position, but both the groups had a dominated social status, respectively of class and ethnicity/status. Here are analyzed the ways in which the interviewees delegitimated and/or legitimated the right of migrants to full citizenship when asked what kind of requirements for naturalization would be just.

LOCALS

A minority of the local factory workers delegitimized migrants' presence and their right to becoming citizens. Some thought that the migrants accepted too low pays, ruining the labour market. Others said that Italy did not have resources for the migrants and that the migrants were taking away scarce welfare resources. Still others saw immigration as linked to criminality. Despite this, even interviewees that used xenophobic language rarely called for stricter requirements for naturalization, and most interviewees were sceptic about cultural requirements.

MIGRANTS

Compared to the locals there were more interviewees among the migrants in favour of stricter naturalization criteria. A few migrants saw other migrants as not deserving citizenship because of lack of competence in Italian culture or lack of allegiance. Some called for harder measures against migrant criminals. More frequently, these interviewees acquiesced to the discourse of public authorities, that held the migrants had the duty to integrate. They took upon themselves the duty to know Italian language and culture, or maintained that the State "had the right" of denying them citizenship if they failed at that.

DELEGITIMATION

LEGITIMATION

However, the majority of both the groups, including sometimes the same interviewees who held discriminatory positions, used other argumentations to legitimize full citizenship for migrants. The main argumentation was based on the work done and the taxes paid by the migrants, which are seen as incompatible with exclusion from rights. Others claimed that many migrants were *already* Italian, pointing to an effective social integration, to acculturation, or to a subjective feeling of belonging. This argument was especially used when talking about the second generation. Quasi-ideologies as cosmopolitanism, humanism, humanitarianism and internationalism provided arguments in favour of universal conceptions of rights and against different forms of national preference. Some of the interviewees therefore challenged the idea that "italianness" can be defined, or rejected altogether aspects of the concept of nationality. Some elements of "weakness" of Italian national identity were also helpful, as the image of Italian people as not competent in (national) culture. This image, historically present in public discourse, was used by both locals and migrants to criticize cultural requirements, and to counter nationalistic concepts of "italianness". The cultural identities of migrants were therefore safeguarded through the deconstruction of a presumed majoritarian Italian culture, and through a redefinition of "being italian".

Conclusions

Italian legislation and public discourse has ranged from exclusion to, at best, integration, with multiculturalism hardly being an option. Nevertheless the data here presented show that other lay conceptions of citizenship can be found. Some of the local factory workers delegitimize the citizenship of migrants through classic economic and public order arguments, but even these interviewees are sceptic of exclusionary cultural requirements. Some of the migrants on the other hand are acquiescent to the integration ideology and willing to take upon themselves this kind of requirements. Among the majority of the interviewees one can however find discourses that see culture as something received through the social context rather than passed down from generation to generation, or discourses that criticize the implicit particularisms of the dominant rather than those of the dominated.

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Fields of research: everyday citizenship, imagined nationalities, migration, sociology of work, communication studies.

Main publications:

Europa e media locali [Europe and local media], Bologna, Centro Europe Direct, 2010

"Le identità religiose e il lavoro migrante" [Religious identities and migrant work], In: Spini A., ed. *Il colore della pelle di Dio. Forme del razzismo contemporaneo*, Firenze, Mario Pagliai Editori, 2010

The interviewees

25 local workers from middle to large factories:

- 9 from the (former) Ferrara sugar mill
- 8 from the Chemical Pole of Ferrara
- 8 from a mechanical factory in the province

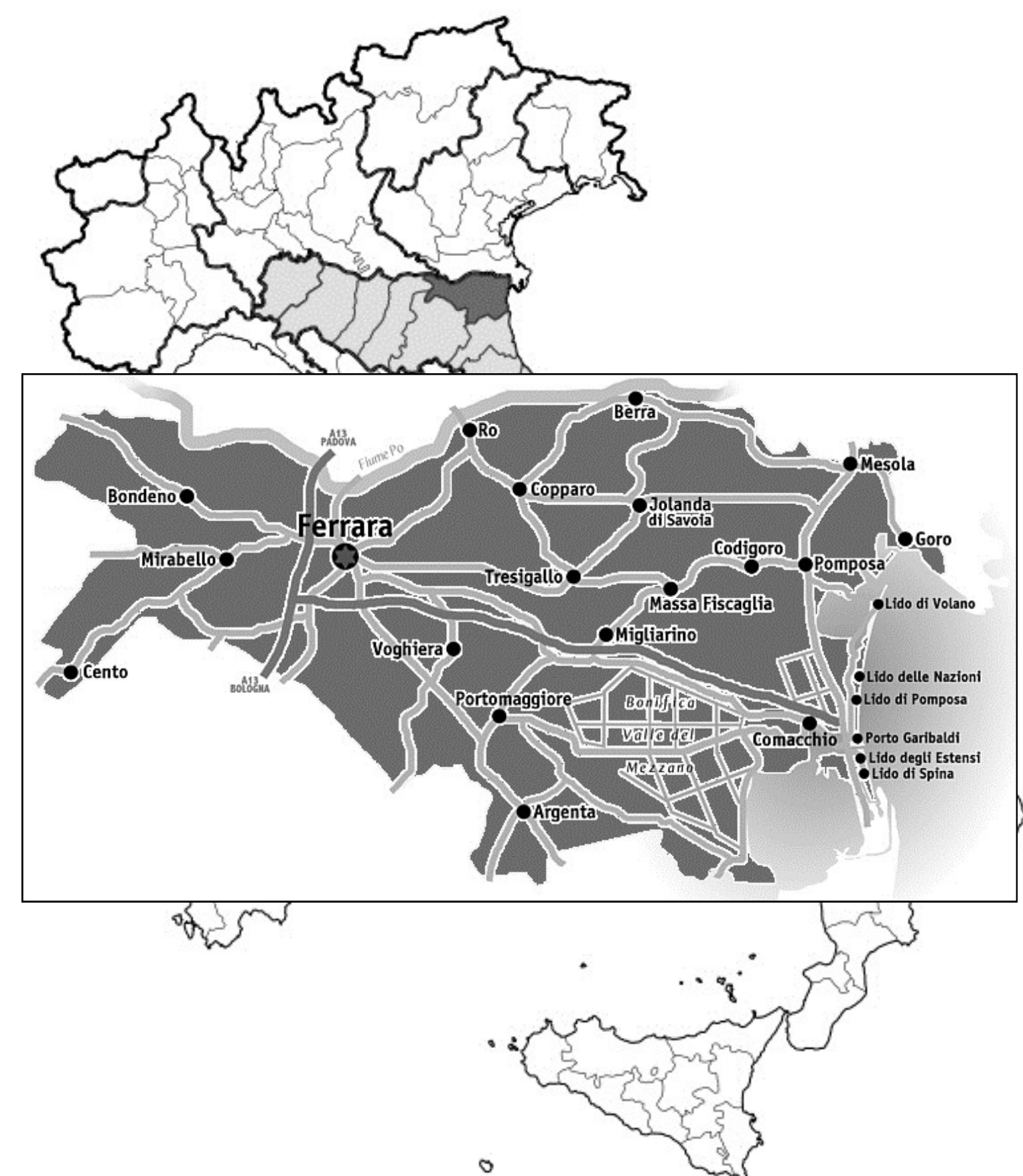
25 first-generation migrants who have lived in Italy for at least 5 years

- 8 born in Morocco
- 8 born in Ukraine
- 6 born in Lebanon
- 3 born in Jordan/Palestine

10 activists of 3 associations working in the field of migration in the area

- 5 locals
- 5 migrants

The area



The interviews were collected in an area with political and economic peculiarities

The Province of Ferrara is part of the so-called "Red area", a region between the southern part of Northern Italy and the northern part of Central Italy historically characterized by electoral support for the Communist Party.

While Northern Italy is the richer part of the country, the Ferrara area has not an economy as strong as the rest of Northern Italy.

The law on citizenship

Italy has one of the highest residence requirements for naturalization in the EU: 10 years of regular presence are needed to start a discretionary naturalization procedure. At the same time Italy has not introduced the language and culture citizenship tests that many EU countries have introduced since the late 90s. Children of non citizens born in Italy can obtain citizenship only when 18, with a rather complex procedure (for example the candidate has to prove to have had residence in Italy for the whole 18 years period).