SENSE OF BELONGING AND
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

A qualitative case study connecting migrants’ sense of belonging and political participation in Brescia, Italy

Master Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis explores the connections between sense of belonging and political participation among the migrants in Brescia, Italy. It is a qualitative case study that analyses and discusses the migrants’ interpretations, feelings, understandings and experiences of belonging and political participation at the formal and informal levels. Drawing on theories of belonging and participation, the many relationships governing the two are brought to light. A key finding emerges from the research: sense of belonging and political participation continuously influence and reinforce each other. This is translated into the development of social and political change at a variety of scales, from the local to the transnational, with migrants undergoing a constant process of maturation and recognition of the self within the community they are situated in. By discussing how migrants rework and make sense of political structures, this study contributes to advance knowledge in the field of political geography: it represents a modern analysis of one of the aspects of contemporary migration in Western Europe.
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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of abbreviations</td>
<td>VIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of figures</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of tables</td>
<td>XI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Aim of the research and research questions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 What are belonging and political participation? And why do they matter?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Personal interest for the topic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Structure of the thesis</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Migrants in Italy (and Brescia)</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 The context of immigration to Italy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 The context of Brescia</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 The &quot;struggle of the crane&quot;</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Voting rights in Italy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 The process of naturalisation in Italy</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Summary</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Methodology

3.1 The case for a qualitative method

3.2 Fieldwork and sample

3.2.1 The site

3.2.2 The interviewees

3.3 Sampling process

3.3.1 Pre-fieldwork contact: selecting my entry-points

3.3.2 Reflections on the initial contacts and their implications

3.3.3 Snowball-sampling

3.3.4 Walking in the field

3.4 The interview

3.4.1 Interview structure: Part 1 – Belonging

3.4.2 Interview structure: Part 2 – Political participation

3.4.3 Interview structure: Part 3 – Personal Information and final questions

3.4.4 Interview structure: Part 4 – Information on migrant organisations

3.5 Analysis

3.5.1 Transcription and translation

3.5.2 Coding

3.6 Secondary data

3.7 Ethics

3.7.1 Influencing the interviews: locations and researcher’s role in the conversation

3.8 Summary

4 Theory

4.1 Belonging

4.1.1 Definitions of belonging

4.1.2 Personal dimensions of belonging

4.1.3 Political dimensions of belonging

4.1.4 Bringing the personal and the political dimensions together

4.1.5 Migrants’ identities, home and "homing"
4.2 Political participation .................................................. 57
    4.2.1 Formal and informal political participation ................. 59
    4.2.2 More-than-representational political geographies .......... 60
4.3 Belonging and political participation: theoretical links .......... 61
    4.3.1 Political incorporation ........................................... 62
    4.3.2 "Belonging and the politics of belonging" ................. 65
    4.3.3 Citizenship and the "ordinary" ................................. 67
    4.3.4 A theoretical framework to understand belonging and political participation ......................... 68
4.4 Summary ................................................................ 70
5 Sense of belonging ....................................................... 72
    5.1 What is sense of belonging? ........................................ 72
    5.2 Belonging where? ..................................................... 75
    5.3 Identities ............................................................... 77
        5.3.1 Two ends of the spectrum: from fully Italian to not Italian . 80
    5.4 "Returning" home or "staying" at home? ......................... 81
    5.5 Integration ............................................................ 85
    5.6 Summary ................................................................ 86
6 Political Participation .................................................... 88
    6.1 Why and how do migrants want to get politically involved? 88
    6.2 Formal political participation ....................................... 90
        6.2.1 Voting as a right, voting as a duty ......................... 91
        6.2.2 Voting in the country of origin .............................. 94
        6.2.3 Participation in political parties ......................... 97
        6.2.4 The case for a migrants’ list and the issue of representation .... 99
        6.2.5 Migrant candidates in the city ............................ 102
    6.3 Informal political participation ..................................... 108
        6.3.1 The role of migrant associations in Brescia ............. 109
        6.3.2 Trade unionism ................................................. 113
    6.4 Summary ................................................................ 115

VI
7 Sense of belonging and political participation: what are the relationships?

7.1 Relations to Brescia .............................................. 117
7.1.1 The role of the cultural mediator ............................... 121
7.2 Naturalisation ......................................................... 122
7.3 Sense of belonging and the right to vote ......................... 125
7.4 Exclusion from suffrage: implications for belonging? ........ 127
7.5 Summary ............................................................... 130

8 Conclusion ............................................................... 132
8.1 Answering the research questions ................................. 132
8.2 Concluding remarks and the wider context .................... 136

Bibliography ............................................................... 138

A The interview guide (English) ..................................... 148
B The interview guide (Italian) ....................................... 151
C The consent form (English) ......................................... 154
D The consent form (Italian) ........................................... 157
List of abbreviations

Abbreviations are grouped by theme:

*Countries:*
ITA: Italy
SEN: Senegal
ANG: Angola
UKR: Ukraine
TUN: Tunisia
MOL: Moldova
ROM: Romania
CIV: Côte d’Ivoire
JOR: Jordan
SYR: Syria
CAM: Cameroon
ESA: El Salvador
BFA: Burkina Faso
GUI: Guinea
GHA: Ghana
SWI: Switzerland
PAK: Pakistan
ETH: Ethiopia
IND: India
USA: United States of America
UK: United Kingdom
BNG: Bangladesh
BNN: Benin
MOR: Morocco
YUG: Yugoslavia
CUB: Cuba
KAZ: Kazakhstan
ALB: Albania
LEB: Lebanon
BRA: Brazil
NLD: Netherlands
COL: Colombia
ARG: Argentina

Associations and organisations (in italic the English translation):
ANCi: Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani – National Association of the Italian Communes
UIL: Unione Italiana del Lavoro – Italian Labour Union
CGIL: Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro – Italian General Confederation of Labour
CISL: Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori – Italian Confederation of Trade Unions
CoBas: Confederazione dei Comitati di Base – Confederation of the Base Unions
NSD: Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata
FABI: Federation of the Brescian Associations for Immigration, Federazione delle Associazioni Bresciane per l’Immigrazione

Political parties (in italic the English translation):
PCI: Partito Comunista Italiano – Italian Communist Party
PaP: Potere al Popolo – Power to the People
PD: Partito Democratico – Democratic Party
PSI: Partito Socialista Italiano – Italian Socialist Party
UDi: Unione Disabili Italiani – Italian Disabled Union
UDC: Unione Di Centro – Centre Union
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>The North of Italy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The Province of Brescia</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Electoral lists to the 10\textsuperscript{th} June 2018 local elections in Brescia</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Electoral lists to the 10\textsuperscript{th} June 2018 local elections in Brescia</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Electoral lists to the 10\textsuperscript{th} June 2018 local elections in Brescia</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>A circular model connecting political participation, social and political change and sense of belonging</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Candidates to the neighbourhood councils 2018 elections</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Candidates to the neighbourhood councils 2018 elections</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

3.1 The interviewees’ demographics ............................................. 23
3.2 Foreign population in selected Italian provincial capitals ........ 25
3.3 Foreign population in selected Italian provinces .................... 26

6.1 Candidates in the Brescia 2018 local elections with a migrant background ................................................................. 107
Chapter 1

Introduction

"And so in order to save a little, I decided to stay a few months, to save a few crumbs for my daughter’s birth, that was the aim. And then they called me up for a job, [...] to assist an old lady with Alzheimer’s, and so... Then the 1998 amnesty, when I got my residence permit and my daughter gave birth, I decided to stay a few more years. Afterwards my relatives changed their minds, they decided to stay with me where there is a salary, where work is paid, and so one by one they came: my daughters, my husband, then we also got our granddaughters, my oldest daughter’s son, the youngest gave me two extraordinary grandchildren, so... we have taken root here" (Anna)

Many migrants will probably recognise themselves in Anna’s story: she came to Brescia, Italy, in 1997, when she was looking for a job and a means to provide for her family back home in Ukraine. A short-term solution that slowly turned into a permanent solution - and the whole family slowly moved after her. Their home, their roots are now in Brescia. Over the course of the next chapters I will present and discuss the stories of 26 migrants living today in the city of Brescia and its surroundings.

All through the thesis pseudonyms will be used: refer to Table 3.1 for their demographics. The quotes are directly translated from Italian to English: refer to Section 3.5.1 for more information.
Often considered a country of recent immigration, Italy has in fact been a country of net immigration since 1973 (Antonsich, 2018). Over the past five decades, thousands of migrants have come to Italy from all over the world, settling down, creating new communities and becoming a fundamental element in the fabric of the Italian society. The arrival of Albanian refugees on the Italian Eastern coast in the early 1990s constituted a watershed moment for the country, defining for the years to come the political, social, and cultural relations between Italy and the migrants arriving in the land (Colucci, 2018).

Today more than five million non-nationals are resident in Italy (ISTAT, 2018). One of the places in the country that hosts the highest proportion of migrants is the city of Brescia and its vast province, traditionally known for its industries. And it is exactly in the peculiar context of Brescia that migrants have been vocal and active actors, organising themselves politically and socially sometimes with (and sometimes without) the help of other well-established social actors in the city, such as the Catholic Church, trade unions and the far-left countercultural movement.

1.1 Aim of the research and research questions

Starting from the lived experiences of people with migrant background in the province of Brescia, the aim of the research is to discuss the connections between sense of belonging and political participation, their mutual interrelationships, and how these multiple relationships are made sense of and (re)produced by migrants. I will answer three research questions:

1: How do migrants articulate their sense of belonging in Brescia?

2: What does political participation mean for migrants and how do they enact those meanings?
3: What are the implications of the relationships between sense of belonging and political participation?

Over the next chapters I will discuss the many relations that shape (and are shaped by) the migrants’ being in Brescia and how they connect with the rest of the community, including both other migrants and the Italian population.

I contribute to the literature by bridging the work on political participation and sense of belonging, expanding political participation beyond the artificial formal/informal dichotomy - they represent in fact a continuum. This work constitutes an empirical contribution developed from a process of in-depth interviewing with migrants who described and interpreted meanings, acts, feelings, experiences and reflections about belonging and political participation. By avoiding to both artificially separate the different forms of political participation between formal and informal and indicate any form of causality and dependency, I seek instead to reflect on the many directions and the interconnectedness that govern the "sense of belonging-political participation" nexus. To reflect the original order of the questions asked to the interviewees and, by consequence, to keep as close as possible to their original thought process, the Theory and Analysis chapters will keep a mirroring structure in which the theme of belonging is discussed first, followed by political participation and, eventually, the relationships between the two.

All through the thesis I will be referring to the country where interviewees and migrants come from as "country of origin", instead of using the alternative "home country": the reason for doing so is that, as it will be explained in the Theory chapter, the concept of "home" is subjective, contested and its meanings are often multiple and contradictory, while "origin" implies a more geographical objectivity.
1.2 What are belonging and political participation? And why do they matter?

The first theme to be analysed is sense of belonging. This is an intrinsically geographical term, as spatiality constitutes a central element of its conceptualisation (Trudeau, 2006): one belongs to a place (or more), or to a geographically placed community (or more). Yet, it is interesting to notice that such a geographical concept lacks thorough theorisation, as Antonsich (2010) highlights, to the point that even the 2009 edition of The Dictionary of Human Geography lacks a belonging entry. The concept of belonging is usually made dependent on other concepts such as identity and citizenship, binding its theoretical scope to other elements. Belonging takes up in fact many forms of attachment (at different scales and in different spheres): belonging is both personal and political, as it will be argued in the course of the thesis. Belonging is therefore an overlapping yet distinct concept from identity, citizenship and other related phenomena and terms.

In regard to political participation, one of the main contributions of this study is that my focus is not solely on political participation with the “big P” (as opposed to “small p”), to refer to Flint’s words (2003: 618). To clarify, my intention in writing this thesis is not to provide an analysis of how the interplay between political participation and sense of belonging among migrant communities is shaped solely by the role of state and how its legal and “big-P political” structures affect the direct participation of migrants within formal politics (e.g. voting in elections, standing as a candidate, representing one’s own community of reference). Nor is my intent to simply focus on the realm of “small-p politics”, i.e. informal, non-traditional spaces that allow migrants’ agency, unconstrained by State-imposed limitations and participation boundaries. On the contrary, I try with my work to bridge the gap between these two elements: in an increasingly mobile world it is necessary to understand and acknowledge the multi-layeredness of political geography, and how different actors move across its different levels, in accordance to given “opportunities and constraints” (Flint, 2003: 619).

Exploring the relationships between the two can help identifying how migrants
utilise their agency to shape political and social change which, in a circular fashion, can reinforce sense of belonging and the will to directly participate in the political realm. The transnational implications of this "sense of belonging-political participation" nexus are also not to be overlooked.

1.3 Personal interest for the topic

My interest for the topic is first and foremost personal. I was born and grew up in the city of Brescia until I left at the age of 19, which means that I have spent almost a third of my life as a migrant. I chose to go back to Brescia for this study not only because of the peculiarity of the Italian and the Brescian contexts, but also because I am more familiar with the city than other places in Italy (or at least I thought I would be): I got in fact the opportunity to learn about and confront many previously unknown aspects of the reality I grew up in I did not know before the study.

Having been a political activist has always been one of the most important aspects of my life. As a migrant, I have been involved in both formal and informal politics: I have been a member of various steering committees in a political party when I was living in England and I also stood as a candidate for my local council. Simultaneously I have been active in informal politics, in NGOs, associations and in the British student movement. I believe that my sense of attachment and belonging to a place is intrinsically linked to the various forms of political activism I have undertaken: my own life story has provided me the greatest inspiration for this research. I will reflect more on my positionality in the Methodology Section 3.7.1.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1, the Introduction, has provided a first insight into the concepts that will be discussed and analysed over the course of the thesis (i.e. "sense of belonging" and "political participation"): by answering three research questions, the aim
of the research is to explore the multiple relationships connecting the two concepts and how they influence each other within the context of migration. I am trying to fill the current knowledge gap by bridging and bringing together the different dimensions of sense of belonging and political participation, highlighting that there are a multitude of complex relations governing these dynamics.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to background information on immigration in Italy and in Brescia, specifically. Since becoming a country of net immigration in the 1970s, Italy has mainly dealt with immigration on ad hoc measures and amnesties. Brescia represents a particular example in the Italian context, as it is home to a big community of migrants who have been very active social actors in the city since the 1990s, determining social and political change both at local and national level. The last two sections delineate voting rights in the country and the process of naturalisation to become Italian citizens.

Chapter 3, Methodology, makes the case for the choice of a qualitative research method. The field site and the sample will be presented, together with the sampling process. The structure of the interview will be presented and the way the analysis process was carried out. Considerations on ethics and positionality will close the chapter.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Theory, mirrors the structure of the three Analysis chapters (Chapter 5, 6 and 7). The chapter will discuss the theoretical concepts of belonging first, followed by political participation after. In regard to the former, it will be argued that belonging is made up of personal and political dimensions which are in constant communication with each other, while a reference to the concepts of "home" and "identity" will be made, too. In regard to the latter, Political participation is divided into formal and informal, expanding the assumption that political participation only pertains to the realm of formal politics. The last section of the Chapter will bring the two concepts together, proposing an organic theoretical framework encompassing all the mentioned elements.
Chapter 5, 6 and 7 constitute the Analysis section. In order to mirror the Theory, the Chapter 5 deals with the interviewees’ understandings and interpretations of sense of belonging, including the issues of identity, home and integration. Chapter 6 discusses forms of migrants’ political participation, including the reasons for desiring to get involved both in the country of residence and in that of origin. Examples of migrants’ direct participation in formal elections in Brescia will also be presented. The last section of the chapter deals with participation in the informal realm of politics, including cultural and ethnic associations and trade unions. Eventually, Chapter 7 discusses the relations between sense of belonging and political participation, analysing how migrants make sense of the two and enact them in Brescia.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter in which I will present how I answered each research question and how this research can advance the knowledge on the topic. One of the key findings is that sense of belonging and political participation influence each other in a multitude of ways for which there is no direct causality: the effects of their interconnectedness have the power to bring about social and political change. Eventually, limitations on my study will be presented.
Chapter 2

Migrants in Italy (and Brescia)

Before turning to the research I carried out, it is necessary to outline the political, legal and social context in which the research took place. The aim of this chapter is to provide some background information, anticipating what is presented in more detail in the Methodology section 3.2.1. Brescia makes a particularly poignant case for my study on the relationship between sense of belonging and political participation for a number of reasons, including the local context in which migrants have been living and working since the 1970s. This chapter opens with a contextualisation of modern immigration to Italy, followed by the specific case of Brescia. Given that political participation is one of the pillars of this research, the last two sections discuss the voting rights in Italy and the process of naturalisation in the country.

2.1 The context of immigration to Italy

This section explores recent political, social and cultural developments in relation to immigration to the country, while delineating the present context of the thesis.

In spite of the commonly held notion that Italy is a country of "recent" immigration, it must be noted that, after decades of mass emigration, the country became a country of net immigration for the first time already in 1973 (Antonsich, 2018). The process continued to intensify in the decades to follow (Cappiali, 2016; Olivieri,
The number of foreign residents in the 1981 census was 210,937 over a total population of around 57 million, equivalent to 0.4% (Colombo and Sciortino, 2004). On 1 January 2018 the number of foreigners resident in Italy was 5,144,440 over a total population of around 60 million, equivalent to 8.5% (ISTAT, 2018). The arrival of migrants (often undocumented) over the past four decades has been fuelled by the demand for low-skilled labour both in the industrial districts of the centre-north of the country (where most of the migrant population resides), and the agricultural districts of the centre-south: in addition, the lack of universal public care for the elderly and the disabled and a rapidly ageing population have been catalysts for the recent immigration to the country, given the strong demand for labour in the care sector (Olivieri, 2012).

One of the most striking facts about the relationship between Italy and immigration is that the country has always lacked a national strategy, relying instead on ad hoc migration laws, which have always been followed by amnesties for the regularisation of undocumented migrants (Colucci, 2018): the first law regulating immigration came in 1986, followed by amnesties in 1990, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2009. Over 1.5 million people are estimated to have gone through the processes of amnesty since the first took place, two thirds of which in 2002 and 2009 alone (Colombo, 2012). This confirms that amnesties have been the successive governments’ preferred mode of action for dealing with immigration (Colucci, 2018). Against this background, public opinion in Italy has remained particularly hostile across the decades (Antonsich, 2018), with the hostility intensifying towards the end of the 2010s, fuelled by the prolonged post-2008 economic crisis. This has been matched by the adoption of increasingly punitive, restrictive (and often extreme) laws and regulations, both at the national and at the local level: many cases exist but a particularly harsh example of such hostility dates back from 2000 where the mayor of a town near Brescia issued an order banning non-Christians from walking within 15 metres of the town’s churches - the order has since been revoked (Bonerandi, 2000).
2.2 The context of Brescia

This section on the contemporary context of Brescia provides some background information that will help identifying the elements that make the city and its territory a unique case in the Italian context. Brescia is also a particularly interesting example of how migrants, who have become embedded in the fabric of the city over the past forty years, relate to the city and articulate their sense of belonging and political participation in the local environment. Brescia constitutes a an exceptionally relevant case for the study of the relationships between sense of belonging and political participation due to the modern history of immigration to the city and the many ways migrants have become politically active over the past thirty years.

The province of Brescia (see Fig. 2.1) is the industrial district producing the highest industrial value in Europe, estimated in 2011 at more than €10 billion, led by a particularly strong iron and steel industry and a network of specialised industries such as automotive and weapons (Fondazione Edison e Confindustria, 2016). The number of people employed in the industrial and the agricultural sector is in both cases around 50% higher than the Italian average, while the tourism sector (mainly located on Lake Garda and Lake Iseo) is responsible for hosting circa a quarter of the tourist presences in the Lombardy region (Camera di Commercio di Brescia, 2017): these numbers are important, as the presence of migrants employed in all these sectors is significant.
From a political perspective, since the introduction of the mayor’s direct election in 1994 the Commune of Brescia has been governed mainly by centre-left administrations, with the exception of the 2008-2013 term, when the city was governed by a centre-right coalition. This coincided with a particularly hostile environment for immigrants at the national level, and, unusually for the city this was even more marked in the local context of Brescia (Cappiali, 2016): the overt institutional discrimination of the then administration increased the frustration and the radicalisation of the migrant population in the city, which exploded in the 2010 Struggle of the Crane, as it will be explained later in 2.2.1.

From a social perspective, Brescia is one of the most diverse areas in the country (see 3.2.1). Despite it being historically moderate politically speaking, Brescia is also characterised, due to its industrial traditional, by a strong presence of the three
big Italian trade unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL) and smaller trade unions, such as the CoBas. However, from a conversation I had with a high-profile politician in the city\(^1\) it was pointed out that a major social actor in the city has traditionally been the Catholic Church: the local Diocese has in fact a long history of "activist Catholicism" both abroad and in the city, with this tradition culminating in the reformist figure of the Brescian Pope Paul VI. As Cappiali (2016) highlights, the Church ran the first welcome and housing centres in the city when the migrants started to arrive in significant numbers in the 1980s. Since then it has often played a mediating role in matters pertaining immigration, alongside trade unions, politicians, lay and religious NGOs and migrant associations. Another social actor, whose rootedness in the city must not be overlooked, is the radical left-wing, countercultural Social Centre *Magazzino 47* (Warehouse 47): they too have always displayed a high level of support for the migrant population in the city, especially at the times when the migrants’ confrontation with the authorities became particularly dramatic (Cappiali, 2016).

The migrant mobilisations that have taken place in Brescia since 1990 have in fact left a strong mark on the city institutions (in some cases with repercussions at the national level) and on the level and quality of local migrant activism. The first instance of tensions between the migrant community and the local authorities happened in 1990 when the city council declared *Residence Prealpino* (a housing estate in the Northern periphery of the city, populated by circa 300 Senegalese) uninhabitable due to poor hygienic conditions (Kaag, 2008). A subsequent order for evacuation was issued by the mayor (Kaag, 2008). Against the unwillingness of the residents to move and the determination of some Italian activists (including those from *Magazzino 47*) to defend the migrants’ right to housing, a struggle ensued between the authorities and the residents: this struggle dragged on for nearly two decades, with the involvement of the regional and national governments, until the demolition of the complex was completed in the early 2010s. Over the course of the years, the political discourse moved from framing it as an issue of "hygiene" to "public order", with the *Residence* declared a dangerous ghetto, therefore justifying its demolition (Kaag, 2008).

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\(^1\)See Section 3.2 for more information about the interview.
Housing was again an issue a year later, in 1991, when 400 migrants employed in the iron and steel sector occupied the Agip Motel, on the outskirts of the city, as an act of protests against lack of affordable housing in the city. Radical-left organisations supported the occupying migrants, while the Church and trade unions were negotiating with the city’s administration for a solution: eventually the migrants were granted the permission to remain in the occupied motel (Cappiali, 2016).

The third instance of migrant mobilisation in the city dates back to the spring of 2000 when the city’s migrants demonstrated for 45 consecutive days, supported by local associations and Magazzino 47: the situation became particularly heated, with frequent hunger strikes and other forms of direct struggle (Colucci, 2018). The protests began on the back of the 1998 migrants’ regularisation amnesty advanced by the national government. After months of delays the police in Brescia communicated to many of the migrants awaiting for a reply that their applications for residence permits had been rejected, sparking the tensions. In the summer of 2000 permits began to be released, after the police agreed to reconsider the applications (Colucci, 2018). The fourth migrant mobilisation in Brescia (the 2010 so-called "struggle of the crane") represents such an important milestone for the history of migrant activism in the city and Italy as a whole that is discussed separately in the next subsection.

2.2.1 The "struggle of the crane"

The 2008 economic crisis had a particularly negative impact on migrant workers in Italy (Colucci, 2018). At the same time, the national government passed increasingly restrictive laws regulating immigration, including the criminalisation of "irregular entry and stay in the country": at the same time, for other violations of the law, the "crime" of being an undocumented migrant became an aggravating circumstance and people knowingly housing undocumented migrants became liable to up to three years in prison (Olivieri, 2012). While passing these laws, yet another amnesty was adopted, targeting domestic workers and caretakers: parameters and criteria were uncertain, making the interpretation of the law difficult and
inconsistent (Olivieri, 2012). Migrant workers not employed in the domestic and
caretaking sectors felt discriminated against. In addition to this, earlier applica-
tions for regularisation began to get rejected on the grounds of the newly adopted
parameters, while the applications began to be used by the authorities to identify
and search for irregular migrants (Olivieri, 2012).

The situation exploded in the autumn of 2010 when seven migrants climbed onto
and occupied for 17 days a crane in the centre of the city as an act of protest,
demanding an all-encompassing amnesty and a fair and just treatment from the
authorities (Cappiali, 2016). A permanent sit-in formed around the building site,
mostly made up by far-left, anti-fascist and anti-racist activists, members of the
Catholic organisation Caritas, volunteers and local residents: the mobilisation was
met with harsh repression from the police, the most prominent migrant activists
were deported and militants were charged for criminal offences (Olivieri, 2012).
Contrary to previous demonstrations, the 2010 struggle did not bring about the
protesters’ demands (an all-encompassing amnesty of all undocumented migrants),
but it constituted a turning point for migrants in Italy. It was heavily covered by
national and local media, creating the space for a public debate on immigration,
while inspiring other migrant occupations in other cities (Cappiali, 2016; Olivieri,
2012). Even more importantly, this constituted an unprecedented and yet crucial
concretisation of migrant agency, exposing a high degree of "self-organization, self-
representation and alliance-building" (Olivieri, 2012: 799), especially with mem-
bers of far-left organisations (interestingly, the migrants denounced the lack of
consistent support and commitment to represent them on behalf of trade unions
and the Church (Cappiali, 2016)).

2.3 Voting rights in Italy

Considering that the topic of voting is of particular relevance for this thesis, this
section briefly outlines voting rights in Italy. Voting age is set at 18 for most elec-
tions, with the notable exception of the national Senate for which the voting age is
set at 25. Since 2001 Italians resident abroad are allowed to vote via mail in their
country of residence for parliamentary elections and national referenda. Different
provisions are in place for the European parliament elections (where only residents in other EU countries can vote via mail in absentia), while for regional and local elections and local referenda all Italians abroad are required to travel back to Italy to cast their ballots (Tintori, 2013b).

The situation for non-national residents is considerably more complicated, as successive governments since the 1990s have unsuccessfully tried to introduce legislations regulating the right to vote for non-national residents in the country (Tintori, 2013b). One of the main obstacles is the breaching of constitutional norms defining voting as a right that can be enjoyed only by Italian citizens. This constitutional barrier is also present in other EU countries, with France, Germany and Austria having all experienced a legal clash between proposed expansive legislations and the pronouncements of the respective constitutional courts in the past few decades (Bauböck, 2005). As of 2019 non-national residents in Italy are still excluded from electoral participation in elections at all levels. An exception is made for EU citizens, who were granted the right to vote only in municipal elections as a result of the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1996.

The registration process is however different for national and EU citizens. While the process is very straightforward for the Italians, who are automatically enrolled the day they turn 18 years of age and receive the electoral card necessary to cast the ballot, the process is considerably more complicated for EU citizens resident in Italy. In fact, EU citizens must actively register, with the additional need to produce documents that are not required of Italian citizens: this includes, for example, a written letter to the mayor of the commune they reside in to be received within 40 days of election day, in which they have to express their wish to participate. Not only, but the additional lists where the EU citizens are enrolled are periodically updated by the local authorities who reserve themselves the right to disqualify registered voters (Tintori, 2013b).

As a result of the convoluted process of electoral registration for non-national residents, only a marginal percentage of them is currently enrolled to vote. According to a survey run in 2012 by the ANCI, only 8% of the eligible EU citizens living
in Italy had then registered themselves to vote (Tintori, 2013b). This finding is significant as it highlights the existence of a considerable barrier to EU migrants’ enfranchisement in the country, whether it being a lack of knowledge of one’s own rights, or the unwillingness to embark on the registration process, or even the local authorities’ lack of publicisation of such right. My research does not try to investigate the reasons explaining this phenomenon, but it is nonetheless important to stress the implications that a restrictive suffrage may have on the foreign population living in Italy.

2.4 The process of naturalisation in Italy

As it will be explained in the Methodology section 3.2, I interviewed a mixture of foreign-born Italian nationals, second generation Italian citizens and non-national residents. In particular, in order to justify the choice of having included naturalised Italian citizens in the sample, it is necessary to outline the process of naturalisation in the country.

Firstly, the most important difference concerns EU citizens and non-EU citizens, who must fulfil different requirements to obtain the Italian citizenship. In fact, EU citizens must permanently reside in the country for four years, whereas the threshold for non-EU citizens is ten years; the residence requirement for refugees is five years (Tintori, 2013a). Even though the application’s processing time is set at a maximum of two years by the law, the State’s clunky bureaucracy dramatically lengthens the process, which stands at an average of five years per application (Tintori, 2013a). Children of immigrants born in Italy retain their parents’ nationalities until the 18th birthday, when they gain the right to apply for naturalisation within a year, provided that they have lived uninterruptedly in Italy for the entirety of their lives. They also have the additional need to provide evidence demonstrating permanent residence in the country for at least three years.

In each one of these cases the process is “by application and discretionary” (Tintori, 2013a: 1), meaning that individuals must apply voluntarily and that providing the necessary documentation and fulfilling the given requirements is not automatically
a sufficient condition to obtain the citizenship. In fact it is only the public authorities that hold the right to grant or refuse citizenship, based on discretionary powers that can be used to assess the applicant’s degree of integration and their proficiency of the Italian language (interestingly, Italy does not require migrants to undertake a language proficiency test (Tintori, 2013a)). An immigrant can additionally be naturalised by marriage with an Italian citizen, after two years of marriage if the couple reside in the country (three years if they reside abroad).

Having briefly outlined the naturalisation requirements in Italy can help justify the choice of including naturalised Italian citizens in my sample. Considering in fact the length of the residence requirements, it means that migrants must spend a considerable amount of time in the country of residence. Moreover, the residence requirements and the additional processing years imply that the length of stay of immigrants in the country must be longer than at least either one electoral cycle (in the case of EU migrants), or two electoral cycles (non-EU migrants). Both the Italian state legislature and the regional and municipal administrations have a theoretical maximum duration of five years, although early elections may be called. This implies that the any migrant permanently resident in the country will have had the experience of not being able to participate in at least one election. This is the reason for asking migrants about their feelings and reflections on the inability to participate in the formal democratic processes of the country and the commune of residence for a considerably long time.

2.5 Summary

This chapter introduced some background information about the context of immigration in Italy and in the city of Brescia, and outlined the right to vote and the process of naturalisation in the country.

Italy became a country of net immigration for the first time in the 1970s and the number of migrants coming to the country has steadily increased ever since: the current rate of foreign residents in the country stands at 8.5%. Despite the increase in numbers, political authorities have lacked a necessary vision to deal
with immigration in a sustainable and consistent ways, relying instead on *ad hoc* legislation and frequent amnesties.

With a specific focus on Brescia, it can be said that the social fabric of the city is characterised by one of the highest diverse populations in Italy and, considering its industrial tradition, there is a strong presence of trade unions. In addition, one of the most important actors in the city is the Catholic Church and its long tradition of activism. The presence of a radical-left countercultural movement in the city is also to be noted. Brescia has witnessed at least four key mobilisations of migrants since 1990 that have attracted the attention of national media and politicians alike: the mobilisations have mainly revolved around issues of housing in the early years and local repercussions of national amnesties in the later years. The 2010 struggle of the crane constituted a turning point for the migrant community in the city (and beyond), as it displayed an unprecedented level of organisation and independent alliance-building capacities.

In terms of voting rights in Italy, the suffrage is still rather exclusionary, as only Italian citizens are allowed to vote in elections at all-levels, with the notable exception of EU citizens, who, are theoretically allowed to vote in municipal elections. Numbers suggest that a minimal percentage of the eligible EU residents is in fact enrolled, reflecting a difficult (and rarely promoted) enrolment process. The situation is not less complicated in regard to the naturalisation process: ten years of uninterrupted residence are required for non-EU citizens born abroad (reduced to five for refugees and four years EU citizens), while Italy-born children of migrants have a 12 month’s period to naturalise when they turn 18. The labyrinthine Italian bureaucracy usually slows the process down, with each naturalisation application taking on average three to five years to be processed.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to describe the methods I employed during the whole process of data gathering and analysis, and to justify my choice of methods. The research design of a project must reflect its aim and the choice of methods should be as pertinent as possible: aiding the researcher to gather data in the most effective and comprehensive way, the purpose is to identify and interpret social phenomena (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011).

The chapter discusses first the choice of a qualitative method, followed by an overview of the field site. A critical description of the sampling and data-gathering process follows, with a description of the interview outline and structure. In addition, I present the process of data analysis. In order to demonstrate reliability and trustworthiness, ethical considerations and reflections on my positionality and on the potential risks and vulnerability attached to the research conclude the chapter.

3.1 The case for a qualitative method

For this thesis I opted for a qualitative approach, as it is most suitable for this type of research: in fact, it is centred on the in-depth exploration of the meanings and experiences that individuals attach to a particular social phenomenon (in this case political participation and belonging) and how existing social structures shape the quality and range of interviewees’ answers (Winchester and Rofe, 2016).
The strength of the semi-structured interview, i.e. the ability to obtain a comparable dataset while, at once, giving the interviewees the possibility to reflect, express and articulate their thoughts, has enabled me to gather a considerable amount of extremely valuable data, admittedly beyond my initial expectations. In fact, the case has proved to be of particular interest also for me as a researcher and as a former resident in the city, given that I came to know many aspects of the complex reality in the city of Brescia that were previously unknown to me: this rich information makes the case a particularly poignant example of how issues of belonging, political participation, access to and exclusion from the polity can come into play in an inextricable network of personal relations and (re)productions of social practices.

3.2 Fieldwork and sample

The fieldwork was conducted between the 17th July 2018 and the 17th August 2018. A total of 27 people was interviewed: 26 of them are residents in Italy with a migrant background, while one of them is a high-office politician in the commune of Brescia. All the interviewees have been anonymised and given fictitious names, as displayed in Table 3.1. Due to the varying content of the interviews, the focus of the analysis is on the responses gathered by the 26 interviewees with a migrant background: Interviewee 18\textsuperscript{1}, i.e. the high-level politician in the city, has helped me gather additional information and context of the status of Brescia and its trajectory as a city of immigration over the past three decades. For this reason, in the following section, where a brief overview of the interviewees’ demographics is presented, Andrea will not be included. Incidentally, this particular interview helped me retrieving useful information from an institutional perspective in relation to a relatively new city-level initiative. This city’s project aims at extending the suffrage to 16- and 17-year-olds and to long-term EU and non-EU residents in the local neighbourhood elections (refer to Section 6.2.5 for more information on

\textsuperscript{1}Anonymised with the pseudonym Andrea.
Another important element I considered when I started sampling is the importance played by the time passed between arrival and the moment the migrant realises that they have become a member of the host country community more or less permanently. While it is not so infrequent that a migrant will long for the idea of returning to their country of origin in the foreseeable future, it is also as likely that, at some point, there will be a sudden realisation that return is not going to happen any time soon: hence the realisation that actively participating in the country of immigration has become unavoidable (Kiely, Bechhofer and McCrone, 2005; Hay, 1998). One of the criteria I used to identify potential informants was thus a minimum period of residence in Brescia of three to five years.

The majority of the interviews were one-to-one’s between the interviewees and myself, however in three occasions interviews were held with two interviewees at one time: Ibrahima and Mohamed were interviewed simultaneously as colleagues sharing the same working space where the interview was held; Yvette and Jeanne are daughter and mother living in the same house where the interview was held; and Edouard and Joseph are housemates with no family relation but both coming from the same town in Senegal. All the interviewees reside either in the city of Brescia (eight), or in the smaller communes surrounding the city (five in Gavardo; two in Manerbio; one each in Palazzolo sull’Oglio; Borgosatollo; Roncadelle; Cazzago San Martino; Calcinato; Rodengo Saiano; Prevalle; Salò; Castenedolo; Bagnolo Mella; and Castegnato – see Figure 3.1).
List of informants’ communes of residence:

1. Gavardo
2. Manerbio
3. Palazzolo sull’Oglio
4. Borgosatollo
5. Roncadelle
6. Cazzago San Martino
7. Calcinato
8. Rodengo Sarsina
9. Prevalle
10. Salò
11. Castenedolo
12. Bagnolo Mella
13. Castegato

Figure 3.1: The Province of Brescia. The map locates the city of Brescia in relation to the surrounding communes (all highlighted in blue). The black lines indicate the motorways and the pink lines indicate the railways crossing the province. Modified by the author from the source: Provincia di Brescia (2019).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Citizenship status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Trade union membership</th>
<th>Arrival in Brescia</th>
<th>Arrival in Italy</th>
<th>Past residence in third countries</th>
</tr>
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<td>Klajdi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>ITA</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Greece</td>
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<td>ANG</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<td>ITA/UKR</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>1997</td>
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<td>UKR</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>ITA/TUN</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>France</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>ITA/MOL/ROM</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Russia</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>UK</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>TUN</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>1990s</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1995</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>ITA/TUN</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>ESA</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>ITA/BFA</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>P</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: The interviewees’ demographics. The table presents an overview of the research sample. Under the "Education" heading, D stands for degree, S for secondary and P for primary. Under the "Religion" heading, N stands for non-religious, C for Christian, M for Muslim, B for Buddhist. Citizenship statuses: for the abbreviations of the countries, refer to the List of Abbreviations.
An additional interview with a 28th interviewee (pseudonym Malia) was held in March 2019 via telephone. The purpose of the interview was to gather further contextual knowledge and information about the role of the cultural mediator in Brescia and, to a certain extent, in the wider Italian context. Malia, a 48 year-old woman of Moroccan origin who arrived in Italy 30 years ago and has been living in Brescia for the last 25 years, talked about her experience as a cultural mediator in the city and how that profession is embedded in the complex social network linking public services and migration. More information about the role of the cultural mediator and its functions and relations within the migratory context of the city is provided in Section 7.1.1.

When the interviews took place, 16 interviewees had been already naturalised as Italian citizens, with some awaiting for a pronouncement on their naturalisation application: the only EU citizen in the sample (Diana) became Italian through marriage; two informants (Yvette and Amina) naturalised when they turned 18, as they were both born in Italy by foreign parents; while the remaining 13 informants (Klajdi, Ibrahima, Mohamed, Anna, Ahmed, Veronyka, Grace, Alina, Christelle, Hasan, Noura, Habiba and Adama) were all non-EU citizens born abroad before becoming naturalised. The remaining informants were all non-EU citizens living in Italy with a permanent residence permit at the time of the interview.

3.2.1 The site

As mentioned in Sections 1.3 and 2.2, the site for the fieldwork was chosen for two reasons: firstly, being Brescia my city of origin, I am more familiar with the city’s social, geographical, cultural and political landscape than other cities and provinces in Italy. Secondly, the city of Brescia is one of the most diverse in the country (as shown in Table 3.2): the province too, while displaying different concentrations of foreigners across its 205 communes, still ranks as one of the most diverse in Italy (Table 3.3). Given the fact that, upon acquisition of Italian citizenship, the authorities do not keep record of who naturalised nor of their country of origin, one must simply rely on estimates for what concerns Italian citizens with an immigrant background residing in any given commune. According
to interviewees involved in local trade unions and to Andrea, there may be as many as 12,000 naturalised Italians living today in the city of Brescia, meaning that the population with a migrant background resident in the city could be as high as 45,000-50,000 people (i.e. 22-25% of the entire city’s population). In addition to these estimates, there is another layer of complicacy that stems as a consequence of the lack of records of people’s ethnic origin after naturalisation: in fact, such administrative void makes it increasingly difficult to keep track of how many second and third generation migrants live on the Italian soil.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provincial capital</th>
<th>Foreign population</th>
<th>Ratio between city’s foreign and total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Prato</td>
<td>38.199</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Milan</td>
<td>262.521</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Piacenza</td>
<td>19.148</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brescia</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.354</strong></td>
<td><strong>18.5%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turin</td>
<td>133.546</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>385.559</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naples</td>
<td>58.203</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: *Foreign population in selected Italian provincial capitals.* The table shows the top four Italian provincial capitals with the highest ratio of foreign residents in relation to the total commune’s population, and a comparison with other major metropolitan cities in Italy (Rome, Naples and Turin). Data retrieved from Ancitel (2019a).
Province | Foreign population | Ratio between province’s foreign and total population
--- | --- | ---
1 | Prato | 44.728 | 17.5%
2 | Piacenza | 41.212 | 14.4%
3 | Milan | 459.109 | 14.2%
4 | Parma | 62.417 | 13.9%
5 | Modena | 91.250 | 13.0%
6 | Florence | 131.322 | 13.0%
7 | Rome | 556.794 | 12.8%
8 | Mantua | 51.617 | 12.5%
9 | **Brescia** | 156.068 | **12.4%**
Turin | 220.403 | 9.7%
Naples | 131.757 | 4.2%

Table 3.3: *Foreign population in selected Italian provinces*. The table shows the top nine Italian provinces with the highest ratio of foreign residents in relation to the total province’s population, and a comparison with other major metropolitan provinces (Turin and Naples). Data retrieved from Ancitel (2019b).

### 3.2.2 The interviewees

In this research I focused on people with a migrant background that have been long-term residents within the boundaries of the province of Brescia. The reason for doing so is twofold: firstly, even though most of the interviewees live in the commuter belt communes outside of Brescia’s city boundaries (17 out of 26), they all display a high degree of involvement, knowledge and personal experiences of the main city, whether for family, work, study or socio-cultural reasons. This fact has enabled me to ask these interviewees whether they perceive a difference in the level of acceptance and tolerance of migrants among the local communities in the smaller communes and in the main city: the answers were mixed, as it will be explained the Analysis section 5.2.

Secondly, long-term residence can be considered as a factor contributing to the development of a set of emotions, experiences and inter-personal ties that can in turn affect one’s sense of belonging and attachment to a particular place (De Nardi, 2017): as the literature demonstrates, symbolic meanings attached to the person’s social and spatial surroundings are the basis for the development of feel-
ings, processes and understandings of their own geographical situatedness, leading to attachment, belonging and, in some cases, identification with the place (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011; Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001). As it is shown in Table 3.1, all of the interviewees that were born abroad have been living in Italy for at least nine years (Marie being the last one to arrive in the country in 2009), while the last interviewee to move to the Province of Brescia is Mehdi (2014), after more than two decades spent in the country.

A comment must be added in relation to the two interviewees (Yvette and Amina) who were born in Italy. Despite the focus of my research being first-generation immigrants, these two cases are representative of second-generation immigrants, i.e. people born in Italy from immigrant parents. The Italian law says that at the fulfilment of the 18th birthday foreign citizens born in Italy can apply for an immediate naturalisation (see Section 2.4), something that both my interviewees have chosen to do. However, both of them had the possibility to maintain their original passport (Senegalese (Yvette) and Ghanaian (Amina)) and in the interviews they elaborate on key concepts and personal experiences pertinent to the issues of belonging, identity and citizenship.

3.3 Sampling process

Interviewees were contacted in several ways. Though most of them were reached when I was already out in the field collecting data through snowballing (thanks to interviewees who gave me the contacts of other potential interviewees), I initially contacted potential interviewees via email from Oslo.

3.3.1 Pre-fieldwork contact: selecting my entry-points

In May and June 2018 an initial contact was made online (mostly via mail or Facebook messages from my personal account) with organisations present in the territory of Brescia. There does not exist a single, official register of migrant or cultural associations in Italy, but each organisation has the possibility to register
themselves on a voluntary basis in a publicly-available database called *Mappatura delle Associazioni Migranti* (Mapping of the Migrant Associations): the database was first launched in 2014, it was updated in 2016, and it was last updated in October 2018 (*Integrazione Migranti*, 2018), after the fieldwork was completed. At the time of planning my fieldwork I had to unfortunately work with an older register, that included wrong or outdated information, hence limiting the scope of my potential reach.

The database is dependent on three governmental departments (the Ministry of Work and Social Policies; the Ministry of the Interior; and the Ministry of Education, University and Research) and is completed with the help of the 20 regional governments as part of the Government’s integration strategy. I contacted all the 31 associations registered in the Province of Brescia and received a reply from nine of them. In addition, an informal list of associations and migrant groups compiled in October 2009 was available on an online platform (*Bresciaonline*) that provides useful information on local news and contacts: of the 107 associations listed, most of them are not in operation any longer, or the contacts are outdated or non-existent.

### 3.3.2 Reflections on the initial contacts and their implications

Both the outdatedness and the informality of the registers can affect the quality of the data gathered: in regard to the register’s outdatedness, one can argue that the authorities’ slowness in updating their databases can impact on what is available to external parties, for example researchers who might employ official sources as their entry-points in the fieldwork. In this sense, existing and operative organisations may have been left out of because of an impossibility to contact them. Regarding the informality of the registers an important point must be made in relation to who and which organisations are willing to register themselves with the authorities.

This obstacle can in fact hide the existence of cultural groups and associations that exist on the territory but are not, or not yet, inscribed in the lists, hence
again hindering contact from the outside. This is not of secondary importance, given that these groups may be the ones that are less likely to communicate with the authorities, the Italian populace or other migrant and cultural associations: this can give an impression of detachment and isolation from the migrant networks existing in the city and the province. This leads naturally to the assumption that it may well be that the people operating in such organisations may be those who naturally feel less attached or have developed a lesser sense of belonging to the city and the community they live in. In this case the research may be affected in a way that it is precluded from exploring what elements and circumstances negatively affect a migrant’s sense of belonging to the polity. The implications are that it is impossible to draw a sweeping conclusion about the link between political participation and sense of belonging solely based on the present dataset: it is nevertheless valuable to highlight and expose the conditions and the factors contributing positively to the enhancement of such link.

3.3.3 Snowball-sampling

Upon arrival in Brescia, phone contact was made with those who previously gave me their availability via mail. This initial sample selection gave way to a further round of sampling, based upon the contacts obtained by the first interviewees. This process, also known as snowballing, allows the researcher to expand their sample by taking advantage of the interviewees’ social networks (Cloke et al., 2004). This method has the advantage of enabling the researcher to establish contact through a person trusted by both the researcher and the third party, enhancing the chances of a successful interview (Quinn-Patton, 2002). Moreover, snowballing helped me identifying those individuals who may be otherwise impossible to reach from an outsider position. This point is in fact particularly relevant for this research, as the sampling strategy focused at the beginning on contacting publicly available organisations’ and associations’ representatives, therefore potentially missing out on those individuals who may not be reachable from an external position. Snowballing has had in this research case the advantage of providing the majority of the interviewees (17 out of 28 - including Andrea and Malia).
An important point about potential drawbacks associated with this technique must be flagged. The interviewees reached through snowballing may be subject to a certain degree of bias, in the sense that an interviewee’s personal contacts may share similar life experiences or personal values, thus potentially skewing the findings in a similar direction. Reflecting on the sample, the snowballed interviewees had five different types of relationship with the initial interviewees: organisation and association networks (including trade unions); work relations (e.g. present and past colleagues); family; members of the diasporas; and neighbours. The variety of networks present in my sample appear to limit the potential bias in the data, given both the diversity in the interviewees’ demographics (gender, country of birth, nationality, religious affiliation) and the breadth of opinions provided, which have also resulted in contrasting feelings on certain issues, such as the willingness to vote for an independent political list wholly made up of naturalised citizens.

3.3.4 Walking in the field

While in the field, I had the opportunity to explore the city by foot, identifying relevant offices’ and organisations’ headquarters. At the beginning this process was more casual than planned, but as I understood more and more of the city’s socio-political networks, I managed to plan my visits better. The first office I found, i.e. the migrants’ office of the UIL trade union (one of the Italian big three) was in the close proximity to some of the places where I arranged to do interviews with other interviewees. Having made a successful contact within the office, I decided to adopt the same technique and to visit the migrant’s offices of the other two big trade unions (CGIL and CISL): one of the visits was again successful, and resulted in an impromptu interview with a couple of employees; whereas the other visit did not bear any fruit, as I could not manage to obtain the office’s line manager’s approval to interview the employees, due to the line manager’s absence for holidays. A fourth, smaller trade union I visited (CoBas) was also closed due to the summer recess.

The two unplanned interviews (with Rodrigo, and with Ibrahima and Mohamed) worked out this way: with Rodrigo we agreed on a time we could meet to have
the interview, prior to the approval of his union’s line-manager. In fact I had to do a brief meeting with him explaining my research and the reason I would have appreciated the opportunity to interview with one of the employees, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality. Oppositely, the interview with Ibrahima and Mohamed was totally unplanned, as it happened the moment I stepped in their trade union’s office: Mohamed reached us at the end of Ibrahima’s interview and we further discussed the interview’s main topics (their relationship to Brescia, particularly their experience in finding a job and their perception of how good the city is to be a migrant in Italy; their understanding and experience of political participation; and some personal background information). It was in that interview that obtained precious information on the tentative to create an independent migrant’s list in the city’s newly held municipal elections, information that would have otherwise been very difficult to obtain.

3.4 The interview

The decision to employ a qualitative method for the data gathering process is justified by the aim of the study. Given that the purpose of my research is to analyse how migrants explore, articulate and reproduce many forms of political participation in a rather exclusionary socio-political context, the most efficient and insightful way to achieve this is to apply in-depth interviewing (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011). In particular, I chose semi-structured interviews as the means to gather the data. The reason for choosing this "data enhancing" technique lies in the fact that semi-structured interviews allowed me to follow a comparatively similar structure across the interviewees’ sample, while letting the respondents express and articulate their thoughts in a deeper way than in structured interviews (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011).

Another methodological advantage of having used the semi-structured interview lies in the ability to reign in the interviewees in case they follow a train of thought that moves them astray from the intended theme: as this occurred, with interviewees often telling in a great deal of detail personal stories, private thoughts and confidential information, I was able to eventually get them back on the interview
track. The flexibility of a semi-structured interview allowed me to also start the conversations from different sections of the interview, in accordance to the feelings and needs expressed by each interviewee: in fact, there were some interviewees who jumped into the theme of political participation without any prompting and prior to build-up questions referring to their personal past or their relationship with the city.

In order to mitigate my own potential interviewer bias, I gave each interviewee the possibility to add comments and thoughts, express opinions and ask questions at the end of their interview. In a number of cases this resulted in insightful additions, completely led by the interviewees. The intention of allowing this is exactly to offer the interviewees an opportunity to free their thoughts in a less restrained way, after the development of a feeling of mutual trust and respect matured during the interview.

It is worth to add that prior to the fieldwork, I was able to pilot the interview with an Italian friend: this helped me identifying the weak spots (e.g. lack of clarity in the question, or poor choice of wording) and the most functional way to present the questions. The process of improving the interviews continued while in Brescia, too, as I was able to adjust the questions and the sequencing of some of the questions, in order to improve the interview flow: this was enabled both by a process of continuous self-reflection and from a direct input by the interviewees. The process of piloting, adjusting and improving the interview is strongly advocated for (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Dunn, 2010), as it enhances the quality of the interview by identifying strengths and weaknesses in the wording of the questions and the logic flow of the semi-structured interview: this, by consequence, enhances the quality, reliability and pertinence of the data obtained.

3.4.1 Interview structure: Part 1 – Belonging

The interviews, which lasted between 20 minutes and two hours, were all divided in three sections (see Appendix A for the interview structure). The interviewee’s relationship with Brescia and sense of belonging to the city was addressed first:
the intent of this first section was to let the interviewees think about their present and past geographical and social surrounding, by asking a series of questions spanning from reflective to descriptive: by alternating descriptive questions (such as the perceived diversity in their current neighbourhood; their current job and their experience in getting it) with reflective questions (such as the feeling of belonging to one or more communities; and the perception of Brescia as a good city to be a migrant in), the interviewees were able to gradually articulate their personal understandings of belonging and attachment to the city. This way also allowed the emergence of themes such as integration, illegality, discrimination and racism, without the need on my behalf to prompt on such issues. In addition to providing useful insights into the interviewees’ experiences (e.g. arrival in Italy, instances of discrimination in the workplace, emotional and legal struggles), the first section was useful insofar that it acted as an introduction to a potentially more controversial topic, i.e. political participation.

3.4.2 Interview structure: Part 2 – Political participation

The reason for keeping the political participation section in the middle of the interview was not random: given the nature of the topic it was important to first build rapport and trust between myself and the interviewees, in order for them to feel safe about discussing political opinions with, in certain cases, a remarkable degree of openness. The section on political participation handled on the person’s past experiences of voting, both in Italy (if applicable) and abroad in their country of origin, and their reasoning for choosing to vote or not. As in the previous section, the current section alternated reflective and descriptive questions: the questions ranged from exploring the meanings attached to acts such as voting (both generally and at the local level) and expressing a preference for a hypothetical migrants’ political list, to reflections on the link between sense of belonging to the city and the right to vote, and on what authorities could do to ensure that migrants are offered a more inclusive and friendly access to the city.
3.4.3 Interview structure: Part 3 – Personal Information and final questions

The third section of the interview was a set of 19 close-ended questions examining the interviewees' demographics. In the section 3.2, I presented the demographics of my sample: in addition to the information displayed, I asked the interviewees other questions pertaining their private life. These questions included: the number of people living in the interviewees’ households, if they were family and their nationalities; whether they arrived in Italy alone or not; and if they have any other family members living in the city and the province of Brescia, in other parts of Italy, or and in other countries outside of Italy.

Two additional questions were asked each interviewee, both prompting the interviewee to reflect on their own personal experiences and feelings: the first question asked about their intention to move to another place, whether in Italy, or back in the country of origin, or in a third country, and their reasons for willing (or not willing) to do so. The purpose of the question was to further investigate the interviewees’ feeling of attachment to Brescia and how they fit or construct a discourse on "return": the concept of return is contested among the interviewees, as it will be explained in depth in the Analysis section 5.4.

The second question was formulated differently to fit with each immigrant’s status (whether naturalised Italian or still non-citizen resident). In the former instance, I wanted to investigate if they had experienced a strengthening or an increase in their desire to participate more actively in the local political context, as a result of gaining Italian citizenship; in the latter, I asked whether or not the interviewees had the impression that, by naturalising in the future, they may develop a stronger desire to participate in the local political context. The reason for allowing the interviewees to think about this issue was twofold: on the one side, I could probe the concept of citizenship (or lack of it) as an enabler of political participation (or a barrier in case of a lack of citizenship); on the other side it allowed me to understand what forms of political participation are put in practice by those individuals who are excluded from the right to vote, and whether they align with
the assumption that "political participation" equals voting. The wording of these questions was changed also for the two interviewees that have been Italian citizens since their 18th birthday: in fact I asked in more general terms whether they think that the ability to participate in democratic consultations enhances the individual’s sense of belonging to the place they live, instead of reflecting directly on their past experiences.

3.4.4 Interview structure: Part 4 – Information on migrant organisations

In addition to the three previous sections, one further set of seven open-ended questions was asked to the interviewees that occupy a representative position in one or more migrant organisations or associations present in the area of Brescia. As these interviewees have an insider view of the activities offered to the public and of the networks developed over time with local authorities, other migrant and cultural organisations, and the local Italian population, the fourth section enabled me to understand how the associations position itself in the social texture of the city and which forms of political participation may have resulted from such a form of activism.

3.5 Analysis

3.5.1 Transcription and translation

All the interviews were conducted in Italian and were then transcribed verbatim, with the aid of the software f4transkript. As soon as the transcripts were completed, I sent them to the interviewees, allowing them to check that the information contained was correct, and to withdraw their consent from using certain parts of the interview if they so wished. Together with the transcript, the interview guide was also sent to them, so that they could add other relevant information that did not get included in the course of the interview. Sending the transcript back to the interviewees additionally provided the chance to ask other prompting questions,
helping me with the interpretation of unclear passages.

The process of analysis began with the transcription phase. Given the amount of data retrieved in a relative short time span (24 interviews in 31 days of fieldwork), the process of transcription began while I was in Italy but protracted until November 2018 when I concluded transcribing all the interviews. This phase was particularly important for two reasons: on the one hand, it helped me remembering the settings of the interviews, the feelings, thoughts and emotions connected to the first approach with the interviewees, especially as time went on between the fieldwork period and the last transcriptions. On the other hand, the transcription process constituted a first of analysis of my work. In fact, as I employed a cyclical analysis method for this research, rooted in the continuous evaluation of the data and reflection on the meanings and understandings formulated by the interviewees, the first stage of transcription constituted an initial step of familiarisation with the content of each interview, and to remind me of valid and worthy points made by the interviewees.

Parallel to the transcription, at this stage I kept a separate record of personal notes and reminders about potential overlaps between interviews, emerging common themes, contrasts and similarities across the whole dataset. Once this initial stage of transcription and note-writing was concluded, I began with another round of in-depth reading of each interview, making sense of the notes that I had already written and identifying the potential nodes that I could have employed in the following coding stage.

The process of translation of the data from Italian to English was done by myself, as I am an Italian native speaker: while the process has proven to be relatively straightforward, in some instances the utilisation of peculiar Italian expression made the translation more complicated: resorting to periphrases ensured a translation as close to the original as possible. In the case of such periphrases and untranslatable expressions, the original wording is included as a footnote during the whole text of the thesis.
3.5.2 Coding

The coding stage was aided by the employment of software NVivo, which allowed me to import all the transcription files and part of the secondary data that I obtained. The coding process required a cyclical reading of the interviews during which time the codes were continuously changed and adapted to fit the emerging theme in a more cohesive way, and to allow the identification of the most relevant data. In the first phase of the coding stage I began by reading and coding the interviews "vertically", i.e. interview by interview, highlighting and identifying key themes and information. The second phase of coding proceeded "horizontally": I analysed the content of the interviews by each interview section instead, as outlined in the Section 3.4. This system of double reading has enabled me to both get accustomed with my data and my interviewees and to explore patterns, similarities and differences across the sample spectrum on each of the interview themes.

This process of data-enhancing (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011) has exactly the finality of focusing on the most relevant information available in a very wide dataset, through a continuous process of refinement. The developed coding scheme is made up of a series of "parent categories" from which depend a series of sub-categories. An example of the categories and codes developed in the first two phases of coding is the Belonging category, under which depend "identity", "belonging in function of voting rights", "return" (itself divided into "desire", "myth", and "no desire").

It is necessary to point out that the classification I developed cannot be claimed to be the only and the best possible: given the direction set by the research questions and the themes of the thesis, I personally developed the categories and the coding, reflecting on which elements within my vast dataset were the most pertinent, relevant and useful to include within the research. The coding is wholly a reflection of my own interpretation and my situatedness within the context of the topic. These elements do not constitute by any means the only interesting elements, but I needed to focus on a limited number of issues, given the limited breadth of the research: I kept in fact many of the interviewees’ personal stories, anecdotes and narrations in the back of my mind when analysing the data and
writing the thesis.

3.6 Secondary data

I obtained secondary data while researching local sources. First, I stumbled upon the 10\textsuperscript{th} June 2018 local elections’ electoral lists while walking in the streets of Brescia. In Italy it is a legal requirement for local authorities to affix on publicly accessible street-panels the electoral lists displaying each party’s list of candidates to the local council, together with additional personal data (place and date of birth). As the latest local elections in Brescia were held only five weeks before the start of my fieldwork, these electoral lists were still available on some of the city panels, as shown in the Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

Secondly, in the build-up to the December neighbourhood elections, the commune of Brescia published online the lists of all the candidates, with the addition of a document for each candidate including personal information (date of birth, place of birth, current residence), a personal statement and a brief CV. These documents were made available for download on the council’s website: however, being the public disclosure of such documents dependent on the candidate’s agreement, it was impossible to obtain it for each of the candidates, leaving a few gaps in the information available. Despite this shortcoming, it must be noted that the available documents contain valuable data consolidating the primary data findings on the migrants’ desire to participate politically in the city and, to an extent, to represent their community of reference, as highlighted in the Section 6.2.5.

Additional to these two sets of public registers, the complete results of both the local elections and the neighbourhood elections are fully available on the internet, published the websites of local newspapers and of the commune: this has allowed me to fetch both the detailed results of how many individual preferences each candidate to the city council received in both the June 2018 local elections, and in the December 2018 neighbourhood council elections (as shown in the Section 6.2.5).
Figure 3.2: Electoral lists to the 10th June 2018 local elections in Brescia. Highlighted in yellow the candidates with a migrant background. Copyright: Davide Bertelli, 2019.
Figure 3.3: Electoral lists to the 10th June 2018 local elections in Brescia. Highlighted in yellow the candidates with a migrant background. Copyright: Davide Bertelli, 2019.
Figure 3.4: Electoral lists to the 10th June 2018 local elections in Brescia. Highlighted in yellow the candidates with a migrant background. Copyright: Davide Bertelli, 2019.
3.7 Ethics

In regard to ethical concerns, prior to each interview the interviewees were asked to sign a consent form, outlining the project and the purpose of the interview (see Appendix C). The consent form, written in Italian, clearly stated the interviewee’s rights to anonymity, confidence, withdrawal and suspension of recording. The form also mentioned that upon delivery of the thesis, all the data will be destroyed, in line with the NSD guidelines. The consent also specified the interviewee’s right to interrupt the registration. Each interview was registered on my personal phone and immediately transferred to both my personal laptop and an external hard drive, both of which were stored safely in my house. As soon as a transcript of the recording was completed and sent back to the interviewee, the registration file was deleted from my phone.

The stated need to destroy all information upon completion of the thesis left some interviewees perplexed as to why that was necessary, while some of them could be said to be even disappointed by that: my interpretation of their perplexity and disappointment is that they would have appreciated to have their personal stories, anecdotes and experiences made public, helping to shed a light on the conditions of being migrants in today’s Italy and contributing to a counter-discourse on immigration. It is also quite typical that interviewees feel particularly proud and attached to the content of the interviews, as they are often seen as opportunities to feel valuable and important, a validating exercise that sets in motion an array of feelings within the interviewee, who ultimately owns the content of the interview (Grossman, 2011): the best way I found to deal with this issue was to be unambiguously clear about my intent as a researcher, explaining also the ethical requirements and the personal conduct that are expected of me during the study. In addition, I sent a copy of the transcribed interview to each of the participants, handing over to them the ownership over its contents, including the right to amend it, to withdraw their consent over the publication of the document, and to personally use it as they see fit.

As for the secondary data obtained on the city council’s website pertaining the
personal statements of the candidates for the December 2018 Neighbourhood elections, I chose not to anonymise the names of the candidates in the tables presented (see Fig. 6.1 and 6.2), as it is public information available both on the official website of the Commune and on the local media. However, the content of the personal statements, despite being publicly available and fully accessible on the internet, was made anonymous: the reason for doing so is mainly to maintain consistency across my sample, and to ensure that the data contained in the personal declaration can fit in the wider sample obtained by primary research.

3.7.1 Influencing the interviews: locations and researcher’s role in the conversation

The locations of the interviews varied, depending on the availability of the interviewee: eight interviewees were interviewed in their workplaces; seven in their houses; six in cafés; four in the headquarters of the association they work or volunteer for; and one in a public library. I can confidently say that, regardless of the location, all interviewees displayed a significant degree of openness and did not refrain from sharing very personal stories and opinions, reinforcing the trustworthiness and the authenticity of the testimonies.

In addition, the way I presented myself did not impact the quality of the answers: on the contrary, the act of presenting myself as a migrant established a certain level of empathy and understanding between the interviewees and myself, which was reflected in expressions often used by the interviewees looking to validate their points (e.g.: "as you know"; "you know what it means"; "you too live abroad"). The choice of the language form I used also helped bringing down potential barriers or perceived power imbalances between myself and the interviewee: in fact, it is customary in spoken Italian to refer to newly met people with a courtesy form, demarking a respectful personal distance between the interlocutors. However, I opted for a courteous yet informal language in order to avoid instilling a sense of uneasiness and distance, which could have impacted the quality of the answers by limiting, for example, the extent of the details expressed when telling personal stories.
3.8 Summary

In the chapter I have presented the choice of methods I employed in this research to collect and analyse the data. A qualitative method is justified to be the best approach for this kind of research, as it allows to explore in depth the feelings, interpretations and understandings of the interviewees. In addition, I presented the interviewees and the field site, locating it geographically and socially within the Italian context. A total of 28 people were interviewed in the course of the process, including a high-profile politician in the city of Brescia and a person I interviewed remotely via phone in March 2019 about the role of the cultural mediator.

The process of sampling began in the summer of 2018 by contacting associations and organisations via internet: the field was later expanded by means of snowballing and contacts I made while exploring in the field. After the sampling section, the interview process was presented, including an explanation of the division into three section, covering sense of belonging, political participation and demographic background (plus an additional section for the members and founders of associations and organisations in Brescia): two other questions were added at the end of each interview, covering the topics of return and of the link between the right to vote and sense of belonging. The analysis of the data was discussed next, as I talked about transcribing, coding, note-taking, memos and the translations of the contents of the interviews.

Secondary data were then presented: I obtained them both by walking in the field and on the website of Brescia City Council. The secondary data proved to be valuable sources of information, as they added an extra layer to my primary findings. Eventually, ethical considerations and reflections on my positionality as a researcher were discussed.
Chapter 4

Theory

“Sense of place”, or, rather, the sense of attachment to “place” is a core element of this research. The degree to which individuals articulate their feelings of belonging to a place, or indeed many places, is a key component in understanding how the migrants’ everyday experiences of the city in all its forms (political, geographical, social, cultural and economic) are closely interlinked to the concept of political participation. The meaning(s) attached to a place vary greatly across the nearly infinite array of actors that come to experience it: the fact that “places do not have single, unique “identities”, they are full of internal conflicts” (Massey, 1991: 29) is particularly relevant for this research.

In fact, there emerge in this research contrasting views of what belonging to a place means: the idea of “place” is often in conflict between the locally and nationally constructed, socio-political framing of Italianness (which is increasingly idealised, romanticised and exclusionary of those “newcomers” who cannot partake of a shared ethnic belonging) and the migrants’ continuous process of meaning-construction. The way in which such meaning is acted upon has repercussions on the degree of political participation displayed by the interviewees in this research: the migrant’s sense of place is often multi-scalar (from the neighbourhood to the “human community”) and multi-local, in which several, geographically distant places co-exist as equal components within a person’s construction of their own identity.
The theory chapter is dedicated to the discussion of concepts that will be used to understand and discuss the research findings. Mirroring the Analysis chapters and the three research questions (how migrants articulate their belonging; their meanings and practices of political participation; and the implications of the manifold relationships between the two elements), the themes will be presented in the following order: definitions and dimensions of belonging; political participation and its articulations around the formal and the informal spheres; and how belonging and participation are brought together through incorporation, politics of belonging and citizenship. The chapter will end with a section on a theoretical framework connecting these elements together.

4.1 Belonging

The first section of the Theory chapter turns its attention to the theme of belonging. Understanding belonging implies the acknowledgement of both the fluidity of its meaning, as a person’s perception of belonging can and does vary through space and time, and that it is shaped simultaneously by the individual’s making sense of and articulating its inner emotions and feelings attached to a particular place, and by the others’ attitudes and willingness to accept, recognise and value the individual’s presence and participation in the polity (Wood and Waite, 2011).

"Belonging is not just be-ing, it is also a longing or yearning"

With this definition, Wood and Waite (2011: 202) seek to establish the complex relationship between the material, geographically-placed understanding of belonging ("be-ing"), and the emotional sphere that is necessarily attached to a geographical space for it to become place. In fact, through the development of a sense of belonging, i.e. feeling attached to and included in a given community, one goes through a two-directional process: one side the self-identification and acceptance of the self as a member of the community; and, on the other side, the wider community’s acceptance of and consent to allow the individual in (Erdal, Doeland and Tellander, 2018; Antonsich, 2010).
The discursive nature of belonging becomes then prominent, since it is the relational and interlinked product of two narratives: *how do I formulate my sense of belonging in the everyday? What is the sense of belonging that the wider community allows me to develop?* These two questions are intrinsically dependent on one another, as the wider discourse on belonging can be translated into a normative set of rules and definitions setting in stone who is allowed to *belong* and who is not, through the adoption, for example, of restrictive citizenship regimes and/or actively discriminating practices of exclusion (Askins, 2016; Scuzzarello, 2015). It is possible to argue, in fact, that the feeling of "validation" (Scuzzarello, 2015: 1218) generating from an inclusive public discourse (shaped by both state-actors, non-state actors and individuals) feeds positively into one’s own conception of belonging, consequently facilitating the participation in the political structures of polity (Scuzzarello, 2015), as it is argued more in depth in Section 4.1.4. The reason for choosing the term "validation" over "recognition" is centred on the understanding that validation has a more deeply psychological connotation, as it touches upon the idea of affirmation of one’s own identity, opinions and, more generally, one’s own self (Hopkins, 2011). It then becomes important to stress that the point about the relation between the discursive and the normative implications of belonging does not pertain just migrants, as is the focus of the thesis, but it is also applicable to all the socially, politically and culturally marginalised groups that are present within any given society.

In addition to the geographical dimension of *place-relation(s)* (with place being both singular, *one place*, and plural, *many places*, as belonging can coexist at once in one or, indeed, several places and at different scales (Antonsich, 2010)), belonging does therefore assume a significant emotional dimension: this encompasses all the complexities of social, familial, cultural links that tie and bridge the individual to a specific place, which can be both geographically proximate just as much as geographically remote (Askins, 2016). Hence, the social practices and interpersonal relations that characterise the individual’s everyday life simultaneously influence and are influenced by the degree to which they perceive and frame their fitting-in in the community.
In the political context of migration and the nation-state, the discourse on belonging becomes more complex, as the individual must additionally face the legal and political implications of being either an outsider or an insider. With the state ultimately holding the power to define the boundaries of inclusion and protection (thus exclusion and insecurity), the way migrants construct their sense of belonging is also dependent on the degree of inclusivity of state practices, or how and to what extent the state as the overarching political entity is willing to accept and acknowledge migrants’ identities (Munro, 2008): in other words, the complex set of emotions arising by the state-sanctioned inclusion-exclusion dichotomy influences the migrants’ meanings and articulations of belonging (Askins, 2016). The feeling of being excluded by the state can foster the development of a parallel social, cultural and political community (and the consequent sense of belonging to that community) among the members of the polity who experience that state-led exclusion first-hand (Munro, 2008). Conversely, a more open political and socio-cultural state structure can set in motion a set of responses and practices that foster a sense of inclusion and attachment (Seidle, 2015; Giugni and Morales, 2011).

### 4.1.1 Definitions of belonging

In order to clarify what the elements that make up belonging are, I shall refer to Antonsich’s (2010) summary of the existing literature on the theorisations of belonging. As already mentioned, the concept of belonging is generally comprised of two dimensions, the personal experience of it and the social context in which the social actor lives their everyday. These two sets of elements can help understanding how the interviewees in this research construct their sense of belonging and what the repercussions are for the forms of political participation they adopt.

Indeed, there exist other formulations of which elements influence the process of belonging-building in the literature. For example, Mulgan (2009) identifies “10 feedback circuits” that directly affect the individual’s sense of belonging, by providing “nourishment, care, protection and prosperity". While providing a useful insight into the link between social contributors and sense of belonging, the author’s framework falls short of identifying how the individual can develop a sense
of belonging by enforcing their agency and concretising their will, desire and aspirations into actions that can consequently shape their belonging: Mulgan’s model can be interpreted as rather one-directional, where the person plays a more or less passive role in comparison to the more active role undertaken by external factors. In addition, the framework proposed by Mulgan (2009) considers the element of “power and politics” relative only to the ethnic representation in political positions of power, ignoring one of the key dimensions of this research, i.e. the variety of forms of political participation which migrants interpret and enact in their lived everyday, without any confinement to traditional political roles, nor roles of power. Finally, Mulgan’s model lacks a clear integration of the discursive dimension that shapes and (re)produces places and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at the social level.

Pollini (2005: 497) offers another alternative model for the development of “socio-territorial belonging”. In theorisation he argues that the structure of belonging is framed and constituted by the interplay of four elements (“attachment”, “loyalty”, “solidarity” and “sense of affinity” (Pollini, 2005: 499-500): while these elements may well be stepping stones in the process of belonging formation, it is also possible to argue that this model does not go as far as to provide a necessary discussion of how the political, the geographical, the temporal and the discursive dimensions can affect each and every single one of this blocks.

Given the shortcomings of some existing theorisations and the need to find a theoretical framework able to weave in personal, emotive, social, political and cultural features of both the individual and the community of reference, I will be basing the interpretation of my research on the model provided by Antonsich (2010), as presented in the following three sections.

4.1.2 Personal dimensions of belonging

Antonsich (2010: 644) coins the term “place-belongingness” to define a state of attachment to a place imbued with emotional connotations, such as the feeling of
safety and of being “at home”. This personal, private and intimate dimension is developed by the individual and it can be argued to be the product of six different interdependent elements (Antonsich, 2010): autobiographical; relational; cultural; economic; legal; and the length of stay.

“Autobiographical elements” relate to the past personal lived experiences, feelings and sensations that a person attaches to a specific place, including the physical presence of other people, or the immaterial memories of people that each person carries. Somewhat tied to it are “relational” elements, which include the broad set of interpersonal relations between the individual and the wider community, including the quality and density of such relationships: the more profound, personal and lasting these relationships are, the more likely a person is to develop a deeper sense of attachment to a place. “Cultural” elements are certainly centred around the language utilised to communicate in the everyday, and they can evoke feelings closely related to familiarity, or a longing and yearning for it, but are not necessarily limited to the language sphere: these feelings can in fact stem from the proximity to one’s own culture through shared traditions, food, religious beliefs, festivities and a mutual sharing of memories. All these listed elements are in line with the Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) "belonging hypothesis", which states that individuals constantly search for belonging, seeking to establish and maintain interpersonal relations. This, in turn, can be argued to help strengthening sense of belonging and attachment in a circular fashion.

“Economic” and “legal” elements may be more straightforward to understand, as they pertain those life aspects that more tangibly conduce to a “safer” existence: economic factors can positively impact on the generation of a sense of belonging if they guarantee conditions of stability and tranquillity. “Legal” elements are instead tied to the individual’s political status vis-à-vis the state authorities, considering that being a citizen or being granted a permanent resident permit facilitates the strengthening of “place-belongingness”. Finally, as stated in the Methodology section 3.2, the length of stay can constitute an element influencing directly how the migrant develops and feels their belonging and attachment to place.
4.1.3 Political dimensions of belonging

When analysing the nature of belonging it is necessary to focus also on the discursive and normative elements that shape it. In fact, the extent to which the emotive and personal elements influence the process of belonging-building is directly influenced by how the community’s discourse and norms allow for the formation of one’s own self-understanding in the polity (Antonsich, 2010). Simply put, the political side of belonging directly affects the personal side. Norms and society’s framing of discourses that are hostile to certain “other” social groups can result in the institution of an exclusionary regime, that limits both geographically and politically these groups’ ability (or willingness) to access the polity: *you do not belong here*. There emerges a tension then, between those who claim a belonging and those who can exert the power to grant or refuse “formal” belonging (Antonsich, 2010). The argument proceeds onto identifying three ways in which political belonging is played out: “economic”, “social” and “universal belonging” (Antonsich, 2010: 650).

“Economic belonging” is defined as the ability to fully access a place’s economy and, particularly, the ability to work safely and enough to provide for basic needs. “Social belonging” refers to the people’s extent and ability to participate freely in the public life of the community, creating, reinforcing and reproducing social bonds and ties across a variety of social actors.Lastly, “universal” belonging refers back to the idea of the universality of human rights, implying a positive impact on the fostering of a sense of belonging in the presence of human rights protection and the guarantee of a fair, non-discriminatory and dignified treatment in comparison with the other members of the community. All these elements combined comprise the concept of “political belonging”: the difficulty in developing a sense of belonging in the absence of these political elements becomes consequently clear (Antonsich, 2010).

However, the simple act of granting citizenship, understood as the ultimate and most formal type of inclusion in any given society, is not sufficient a prerequisite to construct a strong sense of belonging (Erdal, Doeland and Tellander, 2018;
Staeheli et al., 2012). These elements constituting political belonging may not be enough to actually set the belonging-building process in motion, as society as a whole can adopt an exclusionary, othering, discriminatory rhetoric, despite the theoretical openness of the political system.

4.1.4 Bringing the personal and the political dimensions together

Relations are hence crucial to understand belonging. Limiting the scope of analysis to the spatial element while ignoring the emotive and the personal (or vice-versa) is insufficient a method to comprehend what belonging means to different people, at different scales and at different times. It is equally insufficient to comprehend how people construct and make sense of belonging as a result of their interactions with social groups in all their complexities and, to use Flint’s (2003) terms, "big-P political and small-p political" institutions at all scales. Each construction of belonging has repercussions on the lived everyday, including the willingness and the desire to politically participate in the polity, to what extent, where and how.

Importantly, the mistake of interpreting belonging as a singularly-situated concept needs to be avoided, too, especially in the light of the contemporary migratory movements and rise of transnationalism (Antonsich, 2010). In fact, belonging does certainly appear to be shaped by the intensification and the expansion of the migratory processes on a global scale, enabled, for example, by the widespread, remote access to national media through the internet and satellite TV, the ease and accessibility of international communication, and the remittances flows (Mulgan, 2009). For this very reason belonging must be interpreted through many lenses, from the personal and the emotive to the political and the geographical. This thesis highlights how these elements are tied together and display their interplay in a contemporary, particular, socio-cultural and political context.

A major contribution to the theory connecting the personal and the political spheres comes from Scuzzarello’s (2015) work on double identification and po-
political participation among migrant communities in Europe. Importantly, it must be stressed that Scuzzarello’s (2015) understanding of political participation is solely limited to voting, whereas the breadth of this research includes also other forms of participation, including informal ones, as explained in further detail in Section 4.2. There exists in fact evidence supporting the idea that a strong sense of belonging directly influences the participation in voting (Heath and Roberts, 2008): according to the authors, belonging and attachment are positively linked to "social trust", "civic duty" and "support for the current political order" (Heath and Roberts, 2008: 2). It can nevertheless be argued that Scuzzarello’s (2015) conclusions are applicable to other forms of political participation, as this research emphasises.

The starting point is that taking part in the political life of the community of residence is interpreted to be a positive instance of migrant incorporation in society and that, generally, migrants are "underrepresented in the political process" (Scuzzarello: 2015: 1216). The elements that either facilitate or hinder this manifestation are two-directional: on the one side, one must take into consideration the degree of openness of the institutional and discursive structures through which migrants can find ways to mobilise, while, on the other hand, one must account for the degree of the migrant’s identification with the community of residence. Additionally, and significantly, identification is not regarded to be "either-or", but migrants can (and indeed do) maintain and develop emotive, familial and social links with members and places across borders. "Dual identification" (Scuzzarello, 2015), is a double process that results from both the society’s acknowledgement, willingness and openness to accept multiple identities, and the individual’s process of identity formation. The way in which the polity constructs its openness to multiple identities depends on identity, citizenship and belonging discourses, which are in themselves rather fluid constructions.

The concept of "dual identification" becomes then key in understanding how and if migrants are willing to participate in the democratic life of their community of residence: the deeper it is, the more likely the individual is to think of themselves as validated by the wider polity and, consequently, to want to acknowledge the
entitlement to the same rights and duties of the rest of the population - this ultimately fosters direct involvement in the political life of the place of residence (Scuzzarello, 2015).

4.1.5 Migrants’ identities, home and "homing"

It needs to be highlighted is that the sense of belonging to a place should not be conflated with the concept of “place identity”: while it may be easy to slide into using the two terms interchangeably, it is however necessary to distinguish between them (Devadason, 2011). On the one hand in fact the individual may develop a range of sentiments and emotions bonding them to a specific place (or a number of places), but on the other hand this feeling of connection to a place does not automatically translate into a feeling of identity, as shown by Hernández et al. (2007).

Many different elements interact simultaneously in the development of a sense of a place attachment, and people with comparatively similar personal backgrounds may concretise place attachment in different ways, spanning from a nearly totally juxtaposition between “place attachment” and “place identity” to a complete divergence between the two (e.g. a very high degree of attachment to a place, while, at the same time, the rejection of a place-dependent identity). Defining one’s own identity entails a twofold process of, first, understanding the self as made up of a set of ideal traits, and, afterwards, of utilising that very understanding to "communicate the essential aspect of a self or personality (Martin, 2005: 97). It is possible then sense of belonging to a place, a country or a social group and the process of identification with those may overlap (Gilmartin, 2008).

In this sense, theorisations about national belonging may help comprehending the way migrants position themselves within the context of the nation-state. The fact that first generation migrants and their offspring develop a sense of self-identification which stands at odds with society’s definition of "nationality" highlights the existing tension between being and belonging (Antonsich, 2016): the idea of a singular notion of "we" is then put under an increasingly pressing questioning: what is "we"? In the face of globalisation, identification with the nation
seems to have either increased or stabilised, which is, at least, true for countries in the Western Europe (Antonsich, 2009). Without entering in a discussion about "globalisation", which falls outside of the remit of this research, the point to be made here is that the role of the nation-state is still relevant (Giugni and Morales, 2011; Antonsich, 2009). "National identity" is then interpreted in two ways: on the one hand a regressive interpretation that sees the "other" as a threat and that clusters around the entity "state" constructions of the nation as an ethnic and racial essence: the state is seen as the shield against external threats (Antonsich, 2009). On the other hand, a progressive notion of national identity, devoid of the fear of and anxiety about the "other", is embedded in a self-conscious awareness of the self that does not regard "the other" as a threat nor as a source of anxiety (Antonsich, 2009). Consequently, it needs to argued that national attachment is the "product of a self-reflexive choice, rather than a socially imposed structure" (Antonsich, 2009: 294). In addition, there is no evidence suggesting that an increased mobility is automatically reflected in a weakening of national attachment: on the contrary, it is a notion that is reworked and assumes new meanings.

The concept of home and the relationship(s) that migrants establish with "home" is one of the underlying themes in the research. As outlined by Ralph and Staeheli (2011), a great deal of academic literature focuses on the concept of "home" within the context of migration: in addition, the authors propose an important contribution to the debate on the question of home, suggesting the apparently contradictory notion that home is in movement and still at once, and that the two conditions ought to be analysed as inseparable elements. The concept of home is argued to be in a constant process of outward expansion towards the migrants' places of origin (home there) and contraction over the close and immediate location of home (home here): this bi-directional, inward-outward movement is to be seen as the result of a set of personal and social relations that tie the migrants to a multiplicity of places, of which they negotiate their meanings, attachment and belonging on a daily basis (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011).

The concept is indeed present also in Boccagni’s (2017) work on the meaning of "home" among migrants, its constructions, understandings and its relational na-
ture. In line with Ralph and Staeheli (2011), Boccagni (2017: xxiii) redefines the concept of home in the context of migration and stresses the multi-dimensional nature of home, framed as both "sedentary and mobile" and "material and "ex-periential": he moves away from the notion of a "here versus there" towards a new, holistic notion of "here and there". The proposed "migration-home nexus" (Boccagni, 2017: 19) helps explaining the process of "homing" through the analysis of the interconnectedness of "home" and "migration". Given that home ought to be understood as a set of social, relational and emotional links and practices, alongside its physical existence and material situatedness, and that at the very core of the migration is the process of (re)creation and cultivation of homeliness, there can indeed exist multiple and non-mutually exclusive feelings of attachment and belonging to one or two (or more) homes across state boundaries: the material and non-material elements of "home" concur to develop specifically characteristic bonds with each place (Boccagni, 2017).

In particular, the role of the migrant in the production of home outside of their place of origin can have a direct impact on the way the community can be reworked. In fact, it can be argued that the constant process of negotiation of one’s attachment and belonging directly draws on the individual’s available resources and external opportunities, conducing to a potential reshaping of one’s own self-awareness and interpretation of home (Boccagni, 2017): considered that the migrant acts within and together elements of the community, the implication can also conduct to a transformative shift in the structure of the polity. Therefore the definition of "homing" as the

"people’s evolving potential to attach a sense of home to their circumstances, in light of their assets and of the external structure of opportunities (Boccagni, 2017: 23) [emphasis in original].

At this point it is necessary to highlight how agency is critical in understanding how migrants make sense of themselves and their surroundings, something that has been clearly pointed out by Erdal (2014). The "homing" process becomes then just as dependent on external circumstances and factors as it is on the individual’s own process of conscious interpretations, self-positioning and managing emotions.
and networks across boundaries (Erdal, 2014).

The next section discusses the theme of political participation.

4.2 Political participation

"Political participation is understood as the active dimension of citizenship" [emphasis in original] (Martiniello, 2007: 84). Starting from this definition, this section defines a theoretical framework for the study of political participation among migrants. One of the premises of this research is that the ways in which political participation is constructed and (re)produced in the everyday of the polity are not homogeneous and depend on the multiple personal, social, cultural, geographically situated, present and past experiences of the individual. While acknowledging the existence of recurring patterns and similarities, political participation does then assume a meaning that is next to unique for every single person: consequently, there stems a whole range of enactments and concretisations of the meaning(s) and practice(s) of political participation.

Indeed a very interesting contribution to the study of immigrant political participation in the European context comes from Martiniello’s (2007) argument on the migrants’ performance of political participation, as I outline next. Importantly, it needs to be acknowledged that political participation cannot be reduced to just the simple act of voting and of standing for office: the way political participation is understood and practised takes a variety of forms, that can even fall outside of the formal realm of formal politics (as shown also by Bevelander and Pendakur (2009) and Van Heelsum (2002)). In fact, as Martiniello argues (2007) one needs to consider how migrants participate in political arenas other than those dictated by state-defined suffrage (active and passive voting): trade unions, ethnic and cultural associations and community organisations ought to be considered under the definition of political participation, too. Taking this in consideration, the assumption is that, more or less openly, migrants have always displayed a certain degree of participation in the political structures of both their countries of residence and of origin, given the openness of the available opportunities. What forms does po-
political participation then assume?

Martiniello’s (2007) starting point is that the forms of political participation are largely dependent on the legal context of the nation-state, and that that context is neither necessary nor permanent, but changes across space and time: for example, the definition of suffrage, i.e. the formal set of qualifying rules defining who is entitled to participate directly in the political system through the means of voting, is hardly fixed (and has not been fixed through history either). Hence, the mechanism of "inclusion-exclusion" (Martiniello, 2007: 88) determines which forms of political participation migrants can undertake, providing them with the instruments and the spaces to further political action. In addition to this, the author also recognises that the migrants themselves have the ability to exert their agency and shape forms of mobilisation and participation with the aim of opening up either existing or "new avenues of political participation" (Martiniello, 2007: 88). Interestingly, one of the elements determining the extent to which migrants are argued to participate politically is identified as sense of belonging (Martiniello, 2007): as it will be further discussed in Section 4.3 it can be argued that sense of belonging may not simply be an enabler of political participation, but also a result of political participation, therefore avoiding the inference of the "sense of belonging-political participation" causality.

Given that the available political opportunities are largely dependent on the nation-state, migrants can utilise their agency to find their way through an intricate political structure (Erdal, 2014), which can lead to a change in the existing political structure itself to accommodate the migrants’ demands and their new forms of participation. Martiniello (2007: 91) proceeds in his analysis to define two spheres of political participation, i.e "state politics" and "non-state politics", as explained in the following section 4.2.1, while this is a useful and insightful way of grouping different instances of political participation, I would argue that it is also important to take this model forward, to include also other, especially informal, manifestations of political participation.
4.2.1 Formal and informal political participation

Martiniello’s (2007: 91) division into "state" and "non-state" politics sees in the former group "electoral", "parliamentary" and "consultative" politics, counting as "state" also those complementing democratic institutions found at the sub-national level (regional, municipal and sub-municipal level).

First, electoral politics refers to how migrants position themselves in relation to voting and whether there exists a phenomenon the like of "ethnic voting" or block voting (something that seems to be disproved): in fact Martiniello (2007) argues that the migrant votes contingently, very much in line with the rest of society and in accordance to their principles and opinions. Second, parliamentary politics constitutes a form of political participation in the sense that the migrants can be elected to office (whether the state allows for passive suffrage to non-national residents, or whether the migrant is required to previously naturalise): this instance can be concretised in forms of representativeness along ethnic and community lines or not, reflecting a wider and complex political discourse. Third, consultative politics is another instance of political participation, especially (but not exclusively) in those state contexts where non-national residents are excluded from voting: in some contexts, in fact, migrants are offered a space for consultation by the political authorities, especially at the local level, to deal with problems perceived to be specifically affecting the migrant communities. The actual effectiveness of the integration of these "invited spaces" (Miraftab, 2009: 33) within state governance is not to be assumed, but it is however outside of the remit of this research to argue for or against this case.

Within the "non-state" category, Martiniello (2007: 97) identifies four instances: "political parties", "union politics", "other pressure groups" and "mobilisation of ethnic communities". Despite political parties being one of the principal gateways to "state politics", the author argues for the categorisation as "non-state politics" in the light of the fact that parties are voluntary organisations for which the individual must develop an active interest for to get involved in and to invest emotional and physical resources for. Similarly, union politics is understood to
be "non-state", as it is mainly voluntary and trade unions, while able to exercise power, have no direct influence over the political decisions made at an official level. In terms of migrant participation in trade unionism, there exist instances, as in the case of Italy, where trade unions have developed specific migrant offices and groups to deal with issues pertaining that area. The last two cases proposed by Martiniello (2007) develop from the notion that migrant may get involved both in organisations and pressure groups that are not strictly related to migration issues and in associations that, instead, focus on the advancement of the ethnic, national, cultural and religious minorities they express their belonging to.

4.2.2 More-than-representational political geographies

The emergence of “meaningful places” (Gustafson, 2001: 6) is through the elements of locale, location, sense of place: they all come together. Meaningful places are produced in social contexts and through the (re)production of social relations (meaning that they are variable across time and among individuals); they are geographical in nature (space), but are simultaneously and inextricably linked to their social, political and cultural surroundings: all these elements coming together help developing a so-called sense of place.

“Shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions”

(Lorimer, in Müller, 2015: 409)

are all the small elements that contribute to the formation and formulation of life meanings, contributing to the individual’s process of sense-making of the surrounding world. Müller (2015: 407) introduces the term “more-than-representational political geographies” to indicate modes of research moving beyond the centrality of the idea that humans are sole agents in the variety of processes that shape social dynamics at a multitude of scales. As presented in the diagram in Section 4.3.4, the idea that the world is in a continuous and circular transformation and that “performative practices” (Müller, 2015: 408) actively influence human behaviour
and actions is well documented in the thesis, in line with Müller’s more-than-representational mode of research. Additionally, it is necessary to not dismiss how the sphere of the affective and of the emotive contributes to the process of meaning-making and meaning-giving, and what the implications of such process are on the lived everyday (Müller, 2015): in a similar fashion, non-human elements (including other living beings and lifeless objects) are constantly attached a significance by people and may assume a symbolic role, influencing in turn the people’s own development of interpretations, meanings and considerations about their position in the polity (Müller, 2015). Applying a “more-than-representational” model to political geographical enquiry thus allows to move away from restrictive, formal understandings of political participation, in order to consider alternative, informal forms of political participation an indispensable complement to the realm of big-P-politics.

The following section will propose theoretical frameworks linking political participation and belonging.

4.3 Belonging and political participation: theoretical links

The third section of the Theory chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks explaining the link between belonging and political participation. The notion that sense of belonging influences, while being at the same time influenced by, participation in the polity, can be seen through the lens of the "citizenship-belonging nexus" (Erdal, Doeland and Tellander, 2018: 2).

Bringing together the concepts of belonging and citizenship, the authors seek to explain how the two elements are interconnected and are together dependent on time and space: citizenship is indeed a complex term, encompassing both the legal dimension (that pertains the formal, state-sanctioned access to rights, protection and membership) and the social dimension (that pertains the informal, community-
and individual-driven networks of relationships cutting across society) (Erdal, Doeland and Tellander, 2018). Within the legal, political and social framework of the nation-state in which the locality is situated, the feeling of membership and belonging to place becomes then two-directional. It is directly influenced by the personal strive to recognise one’s self as a "member" of the community (regardless of whether the person enjoys the formal status of "citizen" of the state), while being also dependent on the rest of society’s level of acceptance, acknowledgement and readiness to consider the individual as a member of the community (Erdal, Doeland and Tellander, 2018; Antonsich, 2010). The process of inside/outside boundary-drawing must then be understood as a continuum between the process of self-understanding and placement of the individual and the role of the community in facilitating or hindering this process: the two cannot be separated from each other.

As discussed in the Analysis Section this relationship comes to light, with all its contradictions and complexities, as migrants negotiate their status and position in society, often in overtly critical ways: Erdal, Doeland and Tellander’s (2018: 3) suggestion that the formal dimension of "citizenship may (or may not) matter for the individual’s sense of belonging" emerges in all its entirety.

4.3.1 Political incorporation

An interesting analytical framework linking the issues of migrants’ identities and political participation on many different layers is “political incorporation”, proposed by Jones-Correa (1998). The reason for choosing this approach lies in the fact that it combines elements of formal and informal political participation to explain the degree to which migrants seize the opportunities created by the political structure to implement change (or, oppositely, the extent to which institutional barriers keep them out of the polity (Mahler and Siemiatycki, 2011). While moving beyond dualisms, such as formal-informal political participation (e.g. electoral politics versus alternative forms of organisation involvement) and individual versus group level participation, one of the strengths of the political incorporation model is that it admits that political participation can and does include a broad range of
activities, spanning from political parties’ activism to informal and traditionally non-political organising (e.g. religious and ethnic associations). The importance and the relevance of “political incorporation” is defined as an analytical tool to understand migrants’ political positioning within the host country’s polity (Jones-Correa, 1998): political incorporation does not end here, though, As explained by Mahler and Siemiatycki, (2011) it is even more relevant today to understand the position of migrants in our societies, considering the waning importance of big P-politics in determining the degree of migrant assimilation in the countries of residence.

To grasp political incorporation as a broad set of practices is necessary to consider the different experiences, practices and spatiality of migrants’ political involvement. Despite the original article (Jones-Correa, 1998) focusing solely on the lives of immigrants in the United States, a political entity confronting the issue of migration in a deeply different manner than Italy, there are indeed points of contacts with the reality that migrants have to face in today’s Italy. “Political incorporation matters” (Jones-Correa, 1998: 77): the argument encompasses the issue of political representation, making the point that as long as the migrant communities are not incorporated into the formal democratic structures, there is an ongoing and not-so-hidden risk among elected representatives of falling short of satisfactorily meeting the needs and addressing the priorities set by the migrants. The fact that political representatives can avoid accountability over the issues that affect the members of the outsider communities, excluded by the legal and political systems, constitutes a considerable challenge to the legitimacy of the democratic institutions (Jones-Correa, 1998). This democratic void can be filled by the political incorporation of migrants in the polity, allowing for the development and advancement of political ideas and perspectives and instituting a continuous dialogue between established political actors and emerging social actors in the modern state.

This point is of particular relevance for my research, as there emerge a few points of contrast between local migrant residents and the elected local politicians which have time and time again since the early 1990s manifested themselves in visible acts of open confrontation, public criticism and mass-mobilisation (Cappiali, 2016).
Not only then becomes the issue of a democratic void visible, but this can also explain why the majority of the interviewees have confirmed the fact that, in order to overcome the exclusion deriving from the restrictive legal-political Italian regime, the process of naturalisation is considered to be a major step in the direction of the official recognition of one’s value and contribution to the local community (also politically). Naturalisation becomes a “political act” (Jones-Correa, 1998: 75) that will foster the personal protection of the individual and will enhance one’s sense of belonging to their place of residence.

The second layer of analysis within the political incorporation model is the one referring to the actors involved: who is incorporated and by whom? Given that political participation is interpreted to cover more than electoral participation, the scope of incorporation moves beyond the traditional role played by political parties in recruiting voters and activists. The incorporation role is increasingly played by actors such as trade unions, religious entities and the role of ethnic organisations, all of which do not exist independently of one another, but are indeed interconnected, especially at the local level (Jones-Correa, 1998). The direct relationship between party-led incorporation and increased participation in formal politics comes as no surprise, while the repercussions of third parties’ involvement in migrants’ political incorporation is not as straightforward: the invited participation in the public life of the community can indeed enable the development of a stronger political awareness among the migrants, especially if there exists strong networks of non-state organisations working at the local level (De Sipio, 2011).

However, in order to broaden the spectrum of the political incorporation model, I suggest the addition of two groups: undocumented and regularised migrants. From the research findings and existing literature (Cappiali, 2016; Olivieri, 2012), in fact, these are two emerging categories that experience political participation and incorporation in different and not necessarily mutually exclusive ways: whereas regularised migrants followed a more gradual path into political incorporation, often through traditional or established actors (e.g. political parties, trade union activism, religious groups or ethno-cultural organisations and volunteering associations), undocumented immigrants are faced with the dilemma of demanding
rights while feeling the need to remain invisible, or under the authorities’ radar to avoid deportation. Some of the undocumented immigrants opt to live an invisible, quiet existence to maintain a low profile up until their regularisation, from when they enact more public forms of activism. Yet some of undocumented immigrants may also display a high level of political involvement stemming exactly from their precarious political and work conditions: there seems to be this bifurcation in the migrant’s decision to implement a form of political involvement, or not.

4.3.2 "Belonging and the politics of belonging"

Quoting the title of Yuval-Davis’ (2006) article, I refer to the author’s proposed analytical framework to explain the link between sense of belonging and the politics of belonging, and the way in which migrants position themselves against these two domains. Yuval-Davis first identifies three elements making up “belonging” ("social locations"; "identifications and emotional attachments"; and "ethical and political values" (2006: 199).

First, social locations are to be understood as categorisations that people actively use (or are passively imposed upon), to locate their position in society vis-à-vis the economic, social and cultural power grids that are in place: such structures are hardly permanent and necessary, as they are in fact dependent on time and space, hence the fluidity and the contingency of these categorisations, which indeed undergo a process of constant (re)negotiation (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Second, identifications and emotional attachments result from the individual’s and the community’s strive to identify, define and enact their belonging, an effort that is clearly emotion-laden and reflective of the process of both self-identification and the externally driven imposition of one (or indeed many) identity/identities: just as it is true for social locations, also emotions, identities and attachments are dependent on time and space, leading, again, to process of contestation and negotiation (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Third, ethical and political evaluations define and influence the ways in which identities, belonging and attachments are critiqued, contested and reworked: contestation can yield change (however progressive or
regressive it may be) and shift boundaries, as the individual confronts the social, political and cultural structures they are immersed in. Having outlined how these three elements are interconnected, what are the implications for the politics of belonging?

The politics of belonging pertains the "boundaries of the political community of belonging, [...] that separate the world population into "us" and them"" (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 204). Given the position of belonging as a concept dependent on both the individual and the external political powers, the politics of belonging is consequently shaped in a top-down fashion by dominant powers, as well as in a bottom-up fashion by the individuals struggling to assert their belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In fact, dominating powers resort to promote certain constructions of belonging that determine the membership of the collectivity, while reinforcing their own political superiority: at the same time, however, the instances of contestation coming from the social groups falling outside of the hegemonic boundaries of membership aim to rework, redefine and recreate spaces of belonging, participation and identity, crystallised in the (debated) concept of citizenship.

The emerging issue is then the complicated relationship between state, citizenship and membership, which becomes apparent in all its complexities and contradictions in the context of migration. While citizenship can be argued to be made up of a legal dimension (rights and responsibilities) and a political dimension (participation in the polity), the issue is that membership does not automatically translate into belonging, with the opposite holding true, i.e. that a sense of belonging may not be necessarily be matched by the ultimate concretisation of membership - i.e. citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Essentially, there exists a constant tension over the definitions and the boundaries of who is allowed to be a member of any given society, with push-pull factors identifiable in both the dominant powers’ struggle to maintain their privilege to gate-keep the community, and the excluded members who engage in a constant process of struggle and contestation over the superimposed boundary of us/them.
4.3.3 Citizenship and the "ordinary"

The concept of "ordinary" has been coined by Staeheli et al. (2012) to evidence the inseparable interconnectedness of the "legal" and the "everyday" dimensions of citizenship. This concept is of particular relevance for this research as it aims to shed a light on the multidimensionality of citizenship. The authors (2012: 641) argue for a "more complete geography of citizenship", able to move beyond the simplistic notion that "citizenship" corresponds entirely to its legal, state-dependent and state-defined notion: the argument moves in fact in the direction of critiquing notions of citizenship as a neutral act, by which all the people that share it, live and experience it equally.

Citizenship is in fact continuously negotiated and fought over, its boundaries are constantly redesigned and interpreted with social actors trying to make sense of their position in society and their relationship to enjoying (or not) the status of "citizen": this means, consequently, that it is impossible to fully comprehend the vastness and the complexity of the term without encompassing the emotional and spatial elements that make up the core of "citizenship" (Staeheli et al., 2012). Without dismissing the notion that the state is still ultimately the highest political and judiciary authority with the power to determine who is officially allowed to be a fully right-bearing member of the nation-state community, it is also necessary to focus on both the places where notions of citizenship are contested and reworked (from the micro-level, as the home, to the macro-level, as the transnational level) and the non-geographically situated networks that allow the feeling of belonging to develop, as the case of "cyber-communities and activist networks" (Staeheli et al., 2012: 641).

It can be argued in fact the state, intended as a political and legal entity, is still decisive in defining the identity of individuals, despite the increased challenge represented by the current growth of international migration. Giugni and Morales (2011) argue that one of the key facilitators for the political inclusion of immigrants is an open citizenship regime, asserting that extending full access to political and electoral rights via means of citizenship is a milestone of utmost importance in the
development of the migrant’s political participation in the host country. At once, one of the implications of this conclusion is that the state still matters: despite an increasingly apparent waning of the power and the role of the state in the light of transnational migration, the argument supports the opposite, as it is maintained that state structures are still of primary importance in defining the limits of political inclusion (Giugni and Morales, 2011; Bloemraad, Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2008; Bloemraad, 2000).

Taking this consideration into account, the proposed concept of the "ordinary" thus assumes even more relevance, as it refers to the double nature of its definition: on one side what is traditionally regarded as "order", i.e. the set of laws and norms in place within the nation-state entity; and on the other side what is traditionally understood as normal and everyday-like (Staeheli et al. 2012). "Citizenship is constructed through the interactions of both status and positioning" (Staeheli et al., 201: 631). The "ordinary" becomes then a term including in its definition the legal and normative side, alongside the daily (re)production of meanings, interpretations and actions at the individual and community level which try to both transform the existing structures and help marginalised and excluded individuals and groups navigating and negotiating their existences. What is especially pertinent about this theory is that the proposers (Staeheli et al., 2012) lay out the practical consequences ordinary citizenship has on the social groups that perform it and the localities where it is played: complexities and contradictions are bound to emerge, resulting in the unpredictability of the ways in which identities are formed and political participation is performed. These concretisations, however big or small they may be, have ultimately the power to implement political and social change at a number of scales, from the local to the transnational level.

4.3.4 A theoretical framework to understand belonging and political participation

Considering what has been outlined in the previous sections of the Theory chapter, it is possible to propose a model that can help understand how political participation and sense of belonging are inextricably connected and influence each other (4.1).
Sense of belonging, made up of its personal and political elements, can lead the migrant to take part in forms of political participation either in the informal or in the formal spheres (or indeed in both spheres, which are in constant communication with one another and often overlap). Becoming and being involved in political endeavours can enact change politically and socially, and at a multitude of levels (from the micro- to the macro-level such as the neighbourhood, the city, the state and beyond, through to transnational activism), none of which are mutually exclusive. The political and social change produced by political participation is made possible by democratic participation in the structures of the polity and through the incorporation and the expansion of formal and informal social networks, connecting people and communities within the polity. The level of political and social change implemented by participation is then reflected in the migrant’s ability to develop, further or deepen their sense(s) of belonging, whether to the place or country of residence, or to their country of origin (or a mix of all the
three). The circle starts then again, as it has been argued that an increase in sense of belonging is often reflected in a higher degree of political participation.

There are two main reasons for keeping this diagram circular. On the one hand, in fact, a circle is non-hierarchical, indicating that there is no difference in the magnitude of importance, but that all are interconnected and inseparable. On the other hand, a circle has naturally no end and no start, reinforcing the idea of interconnectedness of all the elements involved: not only, but a circle has no directionality and no causality is implied. This is one of the most crucial observations about the diagram, as I do not pretend to infer any sort of causality or relations of dependence: the point of the research is to shed light on the many different types of relations that connect political participation and sense of belonging. For example, a person may find themselves participating politically without necessarily having a strong sense of belonging: the consequence of political participation may originate and expand a sense of belonging. Conversely, someone with a strong sense of belonging may decide to participate politically in the community(-ies) they belong to, implementing consequently social and/or political change.

### 4.4 Summary

Following the structure set by the three research questions of this thesis, the Theory chapter was divided into three sections: Belonging; Political Participation; and theories linking the two.

Belonging is a complex concept, made up of an inextricable network of connections, overlaps and dimensions: it is both material and geographically placed somewhere and emotive, framed by how the individual relates themselves to their surroundings. Belonging is determined by a dual process of self-realisation and self-acceptance on one side, and the polity’s recognition and validation of the individual’s self. In particular, Antonsich (2010) theoretical framework on belonging was adopted in this chapter, as it represents a straightforward yet comprehensive analysis of the construction of belonging. In fact, Antonsich (2010) states that
belonging is dependent on a number of personal dimensions that contribute to the formation of "place-belongingness", centred around the idea and the perception of being "at home". In addition, there exist the political dimensions governing belonging, which include normative and discursive constructions. The personal and the political must therefore go hand in hand, and the idea of a "dual identification" (Scuzzarello, 2015) emerges as a result of the migrant’s making sense of their position and of the polity’s construction of a more or less inclusive social and political structure: the deeper the feeling of dual identification among migrants, the higher their political participation.

Which brings the discussion to the second theme of the Theory chapter. As Martiniello (2007) discusses, political participation greatly depends on the legal context of the nation-state, and that the opportunities that are shaped by it affect migrants’ agency: this develops into forms of formal and informal political participation. On one side (formal) are acts such as voting and standing for office: on the other side (informal) are instances of activism in unions, parties, pressure groups and ethno-cultural organisations. Again, the way in which formal and informal political participation is determined is dependent to an extent on emotive elements which link the individual to the surrounding world, including the non-human.

The third part of the chapter connected the previous two: it is necessary to recognise that the migrant’s own sense of belonging should not, and is not, necessarily bound to adhere to the legal and political status defined by the state: in fact, multiple belongings can coexist and the complex web of social, political and cultural links they come to create exists at different scales (from the local to the international, and even to the supranational), transcends the legal and political boundaries imposed by the state entity. Through the way identities and attachments are constructed, lived, reinforced and re-framed in everyday practices and interactions, sense of belonging is argued to be conducive to participation in the political life of the community, both at the informal and at the formal level. Given that participation can implement social and political change, this, in turn, means that it can directly positively influence the person’s sense of belonging.

The following three chapters constitute the Analysis section.
Chapter 5

Sense of belonging

The aim of this first chapter of the Analysis section is to answer the first research question, i.e. to discuss how migrants articulate their sense of belonging to Brescia, Italy and beyond. Starting from the definition of sense of belonging, the chapter analyses the spatial dimension of belonging and how migrants define their identity. The last two sections deal with the issues of "home" and integration.

5.1 What is sense of belonging?

The first section of the analysis chapter focuses on the theme of belonging, looking at how interviewees have articulated understandings of their own selves in relation to the rest of the community (or communities). As stated in the Section belonging is more than just "be-ing", it is also "longing or yearning" (Wood and Waite: 2011: 202), meaning that the emotional sphere is just as decisive in determining belonging as the geographical sphere is. This definition is elaborated even further by Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy (2018: 230), who state that the feeling of belonging is about

"emotional [...] attachment, about feeling ‘at home’[, and that] part of feeling ‘at home’ has been described as being in a ‘safe’ space", the concrete and emotional nature of which is "shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions" (Blunt, in Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2018: 230).
This definition captures well the sentiments expressed by the interviewees in relation to this theme: the elements contributing to the fostering of belonging are many and related to each other in complex networks of personal relations and feelings. Recurring answers include work, family, friends and daily habits: many interviewees talk in fact of how there are many reasons for which they have come to develop a strong sense of accustomation, attachment and even love for Brescia and the surrounding environment. In particular, it often emerges the role of "starting a family" and of "having children" as a conducive element to "getting accustomed" with the Italian reality (Noura), belonging and even to "integration" (Veronyka), and to "really beginning to feel good" (Christelle): the fact that the birth and growth of children has enabled this process is explained by the interviewees as a necessity to need to relate to the rest of the community, especially other parents, starting from kindergarten to higher schools, and as a result of their children mixing up and interacting daily with other children, creating themselves their own strong social bonds.

Other environmental elements influencing the migrants' sense of belonging include regular everyday acts, including the adoption of the local lifestyle, of the local food and of idioms and dialectal expressions

"that come out [...] naturally. And that means that by then you are a part of this society, of this community" (Habiba).

Even the participation in local cultural events enables the formation of a certain sense of attachment. This is the case of, for example, the local painters' club (Diana) and of the museums' exhibitions and tours of the city for foreign residents: as explained by Veronyka, they help to get the city's migrants and their families and friends to know better the local history and culture and to become fond of it. Veronyka began volunteering to be a guide for Eastern European visitors and she developed herself a strong fondness for the local history and culture.

Not only, but the perception of diversity in the locality appears to be an important determinant of how positively some interviewees may feel towards the locality. The early experiences of contacts with other migrants from very different cultural back-
grounds (from Latin America to Saudi Arabia, Eastern Europe and North Africa) through the participation in the cultural mediator courses (see Section 7.1), have been instrumental in the creation of a tight-knit cross-cultural community. Alina has in fact grown to be deeply attached to that community, to the point where she states that she belongs "to the world of immigration", as much as to the city of Brescia and to the wider Ukrainian community. Despite their cultural mediation course having taken place around 15 years ago, it proved to be a remarkably powerful experience, leading to the enacting of a performance presented in different theatres across the province in which the original class of cultural mediators read poems and excerpts from their previous works about their experiences of migrant women in Brescia.

Another interviewee, Ahmed, has identified Brescia’s cultural diversity as one of the key strengths of the city, alongside the availability of jobs (at least from when he arrived in Italy in the early 1990s to the 2008 economic crash). In his words,

"the city has more or less all the colours, like, I feel more at ease seeing ten Italians and four foreigners on the streets. [...] I feel like I belong to this community. At ease, I feel... at home, like. [...] By now Brescia is in my heart".

It is however unclear exactly to which community Ahmed says he belongs to, considering that his following comment is that he and the other migrants, regardless of the naturalisation status, still feel excluded from the Brescian community by barriers put up by the political institutions, both at the national and at the local level: "we still feel like tier-2 citizens".

This brings back to Antonsich’s (2010) formulation about the role that the openness of political institutions and actors plays in the generation of a sense of belonging. The meaning of "belonging" becomes then contested over: belonging can be partial, yet fulfilling, as clearly demonstrated by the contradictory account of Ahmed. The feelings of recognition and acceptance may in fact come from outside of the institutional realm, as, for example, the opportunities to socialise, live and value both one's own diversity and that of the surrounding community are pro-
vided by members of the civil society.

5.2 Belonging where?

When asked which communities the interviewees belong, if they feel like belonging to any community at all, nearly all of them talk about how there is a multitude of complex relations governing the sense of belonging and attachment: in fact, nearly everyone sees themselves split between belonging to their country of origin and belonging to Brescia, or even Italy. A handful of interviewees try to make sense of this complexity by stating that they belong to the "world of immigration" (Alina) or to the "human community" (Grace). It is necessary to recognise that these multiple attachments coexist and that there is no zero-sum game where attachment to one place necessarily has to exclude another (Carling and Pettersen, 2014): moreover, the terms utilised to give connotations to these complex feelings are generally positive and indicate happiness and contentedness, spanning from "enriching" to "complementing": Ibrahima even describes himself as "lucky" to be able to belong to two communities, Senegalese and Italian. Among the answers there surely emerge a desire and a strive to reach a form of "self-validation" through both a sense of belonging in the culture (or country) of origin and the identification as Italian or Brescian, or both.

Among those acknowledging the attachment to a locality, and the feeling of belonging to Italy, the majority express a deep sense of attachment to the city of Brescia specifically, with some recurring words being "love" or "adore": this is also mentioned by the interviewees who live in the surrounding towns (Christelle, Noura and Abdoulaye), who stress how they particularly love the city and the people there, or how they go to the city to feel at home and to "recharge the batteries" (Noura), in contrast to the realities of their smaller towns of residence. In fact, there are only three interviewees who make explicit their attachment to their places of residence outside of Brescia: one of them (Habiba) has developed a strong attachment to her town of residence thanks to her job and to the town’s location in a highly scenic portion of the province, Lake Garda (she never mentions an at-
It is particularly worthy of attention the case of Yvette’s and Amina’s attachment to the towns: these two interviewees are in fact the only ones in my sample to have been born in Italy and to have lived in the same location for the entirety of their lives: despite the negative instances they have experienced as people of colour in those places, they still regard them as their homes. The contrast becomes even starker when comparing the answer given by Yvette to that given by her mother, Jeanne, to the question of belonging in their town of residence: Jeanne, in fact openly refuses to acknowledge her belonging to the town, as a result of the hostility, discrimination and racism that she regularly witnesses. Simultaneously she has much more positive feelings towards the city of Brescia, where "people are free" and she does not "feel like a foreigner": Brescia is the place she goes to, together with family and friends, "to put [their] celebration clothes on and live [their] Africanness".

It is also noteworthy how some interviewees talk about how they, and other people in their immediate social proximity, went through a sudden moment of realisation that the present is "here" and "now", in Brescia, not in their country of origin, and that to be involved in the Brescian polity is fundamental to recognise one’s own self as an active and contributing member of the community. In line with what was formulated in terms of double (or multiple) belonging to several communities, they argue that one does not have to forget, renounce or bury their ties to other cultures and the previous baggage of experiences, but it is also important to focus on and make an effort to become part of the society of residence: the immediate result of this is an increased sense of serenity, acceptance and ease, thus paving the way for developing a stronger sense of belonging. People are willing to recognise that personal baggage and, from there on, they develop and put into practice, more or less consciously, different forms of activism, whether in the formal or informal spheres of political participation, including at the transnational level. The personal becomes hence political.
5.3 Identities

As evidenced in the literature, belonging and identity are two concepts that are not fully interchangeable (Devadason, 2011; Gilmartin, 2008; Hernández et al., 2007): the extent to which these two concepts overlap may be great, but it is necessary to not use them as synonyms. In fact, as discussed in the previous Section 5.2 there are interviewees (Ahmed and Jeanne) who negotiate their belonging and identity on a daily basis, having difficulties in fully establishing a sense of belonging to Brescia, despite a full identification with Italianness and/or Brescianness, a fact that is mainly ascribable to the existing exclusionary nature of the political structure, both at the local and at the national levels, and to the perception of being othered and alienated by socio-cultural practices. Therefore it becomes even more clear how the process of belonging-building is then dependent not only on the person’s willingness and disposition, but it depends just as importantly on the surrounding social, cultural and political environment and its openness and inclusivity. A migrant may perceive and define their identity inclusive of the national and/or cultural traits of the country of residence, as a result of the adoption of the language, idioms and, generally, "lifestyle", but that alone is not an indication that belonging ensues automatically.

A case in point is the highly contested nature of the migrants’ identity. With the exception of Hasan, who, as already mentioned, 35 years after his naturalisation openly rejects the idea of considering himself either Jordanian or even a migrant, it is a common feeling among the interviewees to be constantly a "foreign". Anna says that "In Italy we feel Ukrainian: we go back to Ukraine and we feel more Italian", but she is not alone: in fact, Edouard expresses the same feeling using more or less the same words, "I feel like a foreigner in Italy and I go to Senegal and I also feel like a foreigner". This aspect is worth highlighting because the "foreigner" label may be attached by other people to demarcate us/Them dichotomies both in the country of origin and in the country of residence, neither of which dichotomies the migrant can quite fully fit in; but it is also true that the "foreigner" label can come as a result of the migrant’s process of self-identification when they try to make sense of their own networks in the communities they attend to.
In particular, this assumes a specific relevance when the issue of race and interracial relations enters the mix. A number of interviewees, specifically those whose origin is in sub-Saharan countries, describe how the issue of "race" can reinforce "foreign identity". This theme has also been explored by Antonsich (2018), with Italian second generation migrants who are perceived to be non-Italian because of their physical appearance traits, but fluently speak the language, often marked by local dialects and accents. What it is most salient about Antonsich’s findings (2018) is that these people are regarded to be breaking up the notion of Italian nationality and national identity as based on racial traits of whiteness, bringing into question the whole idea of what national identity really means and how it is (re)produced in the everyday. An exemplification of such issue comes from Yvette’s testimony about her experience of voting in the town where she lives:

"I don’t know why, but they struggle to understand that there are some black people who are Italian, no? So, when you go to vote, they look at you as if to say "But what are you doing here?", things like that, no? At the end you feel a bit like you weren’t in the right place, but you’ve come to fulfil your duty as a citizen, so..."

Another example of the issue of racialised identities is Grace, who, after identifying herself as a "person first, and then foreign", says that she is "foreign because sometimes we have a different way of seeing things", which is a normal and acceptable fact of life in itself, but also that

"the skin makes you look different: you cannot forget your origin. [...] It’s a testimony, it’s a form of testimony of the diversity"

which is, again, interpreted by Grace as a simple fact of life, reinforcing her belonging to the "human community" and her attachment to Brescia. The feeling of being considered as a "foreigner" by others is also relevant for Yvette who, despite her strong attachment to Italy, Brescia and her town of residence, her "home", regularly experiences an othering dynamic at the hands of the white Italian majority in the town:
"You are the usual black girl that lives in [the town], like, they don’t recognise you as a citizen"

The utilisation of the skin colour to define an us/Them boundary happens not only in Italy. A discourse of white versus black is framed also in the country of origin, to demarcate the social and cultural distance from the original community that has come to define long-term emigrants, as a result of living their lives in geographically distant communities and of integrating other, even alien habits, customs and uses in their everyday: Christelle mentions that

"when I was down there, they always accused me of being white... then, I come back here and they tell me that I am African... well, make up your minds!"

One of the key messages emerging from the discussion on migrants’ identities is that they are mutual and interchangeable. One of the most recurring themes emerging from the interviews is that two or more national identities coexist, in a continuous dialogue reinforcing and complementing each other. The complementarity of multiple identities is held very dearly by the interviewees who may resort to nurturing and caring metaphors: for example Noura, Anna and Julia compare their identities and belongings to "planting new seeds", while "taking care of the roots". Abdoulaye explains the interrelationship between different identities very explicitly:

"We Guineans are here in Brescia, we’re working here, we’re doing all our activities here and we have our family and all, we are in a Guinea environment, like a micro-Guinea when we get together; but within this micro-Guinea there is the bigger community, which is the Italian society"

This interpretation thus enables the idea that multiple belongings are not mutually exclusive and the complexity is made sense of by the migrants as both a strength, deriving from a "mix of cultures" of which the best is chosen "so that they can get to our children" (Christelle), but also as a weakness in the sense that "you are in the society up to a point, beyond that you’re not in any longer" (Abdoulaye).
5.3.1 Two ends of the spectrum: from fully Italian to not Italian

The great majority of the interviewees mention that their identity, or identities in fact, is comprised of complementary elements, making it hence difficult to pinpoint one, single, specific national or cultural identity. However, the degree to which one identity (that of the country of origin) or the other (the Italian) may prevail can be argued to be dependent on how strong the social, cultural, familial and sentimental ties to the country of origin are: the interviewees who identify the least with their original countries (Hasan and Amina) constitute two interesting example, as Hasan, of Jordanian origin, is the first of my interviewees to have arrived in Italy in 1973 and became naturalised in 1984; whereas Amina is one of the two Italian-born interviewees and has double Italo-Ghanaian citizenship status. What unites the two is a weak tie to their countries of origin: the only family members left there are long-distance, whereas many more of the nearer family members are either in Italy, or in third countries both in Europe and North America; they seldom travel back to their countries, with Hasan even utilising his Italian passport to travel back to Jordan, despite the fact that he still maintains both Jordanian citizenship and passport.

While being politically aware and participating in the Italian democratic life, neither of the two is particularly interested in the current affairs nor the politics of Jordan and Ghana, respectively: Amina is only incidentally exposed to Ghanaian affairs via her father, who regularly follows Ghanaian news channels on the internet. She says

"I feel like an Italian citizen, who is Muslim, who is young. [...] Yes, it’s true I am Ghanaian, but I don’t feel it very much... Not as much as I feel Italian",

while Hasan goes even as far as to completely reject the notion of being anything other than Italian:

"I now feel fully Italian. [...] I think I belong to Italy, I am Italian, I don’t consider myself an immigrant".
Oppositely, the two interviewees who show the faintest identification with Italian-ness display some of the strongest ties with their countries of origin. Marie came to Italy as a teenager with her brother, after her father had already found a job and settled down in Italy, and, upon arrival, she did not fit in the new Italian context: in addition she is planning her studies to suit best with the intention of moving back to Senegal as soon as she graduates, despite her nearest family being now resident in Italy. In her words, "I am Senegalese, I will be that until death! I will never say that I am Italian, never!". The other interviewee who mainly identifies with his original heritage is Christian, whose "heart always beats for Cameroon". The community he feels the deepest sense of belonging to is the Cameroonians of the city: when he arrived in Italy in 2002, he arrived directly in Brescia, thanks to contacts his family in Cameroon had, and has spent most of his spare time with that particular community ever since.

5.4 "Returning" home or "staying" at home?

Where is "home"? What is "home"? Interestingly, the meanings interviewees attach to the idea of "home" are interchangeable, moving back and forth from "home" in Brescia to "home" in their country of origin. "Home" is often understood to be the place where one lives their everyday, where the actor reproduces routines that give a sense of familiarity and tranquillity: while it is a contested concept (Antonsich, 2010), there is no emergence of this tension in the dataset. Oppositely, "home" is often imbued with positive feelings and emotions, and it is often regarded as the place where one belongs and to which certain memories are attached: Veronyka’s words are particularly descriptive in this regard, as she says that

"when I say home, I mean here in Italy. [...] If someone says "go home", home is here. You know, it’s the place where you feel good".

Many other interviewees express similar opinions, indicating Brescia as their home, but they simultaneously refer to their country of origin as "home": those who do so are more likely to have strong connections to those places, especially familial bonds.
Is it then possible to have several homes? And what are the implications for political participation? According to a study by Staeheli and Nagel (2006) on Arab-American activists in the USA, the multiple locatedness of "home" does not impact on the sense of attachment to the USA, nor it weakens the migrants’ willingness to participate directly in the American political system. The liminality of migrant identities is exemplary in the case of my research, where migrants miss home, or something connected to their place of origin that makes it "homely", and they long for this "home": yet they know they are missing something when they return to their place of origin, i.e. those small, even banal routines, that they can only enact when they are "home" in Brescia, (e.g. the Saturday morning coffee at a café attended by friends, the bicycle ride to the Saturday morning central market, or the Saturday lunch piadina with the family), reinforcing a feeling of attachment and familiarity.

A lot of the interviewees long for a return, but acknowledge the practical difficulties and its unattainableness, considering familial, social and work ties. The dream and the desire exist, but they are of difficult achievement and no interviewee has actually made a plan to move back to their country of origin. The two youngest interviewees, both of whom were born in Italy, have expressed the possibility to move to a "third" country, away from Italy, but also not their country of origin either, citing the economic and social difficulties in the current environment in Italy as the driving reason. This is effectively in line with a shared feeling expressed by younger generations of ethnic Italians, too, who take the decision to move abroad in search for a better and more fulfilling life (and have done so especially since the intensification of the crisis in the years of post-2008 financial crash).

Interestingly, there is no clear demographic trait able to explain the differences in the interviewees’ responses on the wish to move back to the country of origin: as mentioned, the general feeling is that there is often a tie keeping interviewees still attached to their countries of origin, but there is a general sense that the foreseeable future is in Brescia, not even in other places in Italy. The process of realisation of one’s own belonging to the host country is however often long and difficult, conflicted and never linear, as exemplified by Anna’s account:
"It always seems temporary. And now arrives the understanding that it is not possible to resolve everything with temporary solutions. [...] It would be easier to begin realising that this is another life, to give up on everything that’s behind, to begin from scratch, it would be more effective for both the person and the country that welcomes us".

However, it is the oldest interviewees (in their 60s and higher 50s) who are more likely to rule out the possibility of going back permanently: younger interviewees are likely to consider the option of saving and investing their future pensions by buying a house in their country of origin in the long-term future, but there lacks a more coherent plan. Jeanne clearly sums it up:

"I am Italian and my first home will be here; my second home [in Senegal], like a holiday home. Here I am really Italian. If they make me feel like it, good; if they don’t make me feel like it, their problem! I have the citizenship and that’s it. I am Italian!".

This brings about the idea of the "myth of return", a concept coined originally by Muhammad Anwar (1979) to describe the implied phenomenon of migrants planning their lives as *migrants* with the aim of returning back to their country of origin at a later life stage: this in turn justifies a limited involvement and political participation in the country of migration, also because of the perceived hostility and discrimination of the host society’s towards the migrant community. Critiquing Anwar’s theory is out of the scope of this research: however, it is necessary to engage with his work and the conclusion that most migrants end up staying "because of economic reasons and their children’s future" (Anwar, 1979: ix).

The myth of return, in turn, enables the possibility to study what forms political participation assumes in the context of transnational migration: from this study emerges in fact that the level of political participation is not hindered by the maintenance of a strong attachment to the country or culture or place of origin, but, oppositely, these persisting strong ties and links may offer an alternative to develop and discover new forms of participation, often at the transnational level. "Living" and (re)producing the place of origin abroad (and vice versa) is made possible thanks to technology, but also thanks to the transnational value of social networks
and of daily actions reinforcing the cross-border connection, as demonstrated by Bolognani (2007).

Some of the interviewees have used very meaningful metaphors to describe their relation to "home" that span from "roots" from the relationship between a mother (the home) and her children (the migrants), but there is also a recognition that going back means losing something, or someone: a few interviewees go as far as to mention that they would lose rights that exist in Italy but do not exist back in their countries of origin, hence are unwilling to embark on such endeavour. Not only is the protection given by certain social and political rights an element to which migrant may cling on to when weighing the possibility of moving back to their countries of origin, but also the wider social networks and the complexity of habits and daily routines become more important, or appealing, than the idea of moving back to an environment which is more or less still familiar. This is exemplified by Santiago's words:

"I don’t know if it’s for the fact that I am already used to the life here, to what I do here daily, but I don’t think I’d find myself down there, not even in my home! In fact, I don’t even think of going back to live there... I wouldn’t go back because I got used to [Brescia]."

Practicalities such as a stable job, a pension and a functioning health system appeal against the prospect of going back, no matter how much the place of origin is missed. All these elements combined (rights, living conditions and familial and/or emotive connections), contribute to a renewed framing of one’s own sense of belonging to be stronger in Brescia than in other places: Hasan says in this regard

"Don’t ask me to go back... two thirds of my life have been spent here, now Italy is my home, I really don’t think of changing or of returning, no".
5.5 Integration

The theme of integration proved to be a rather controversial topic among the migrants. This should not come as a surprise, considering that is just as contentious among scholars as it is outside of the academic realm (Erdal and Oeppen, 2013). Despite the fact that I decided not to direct the discussion towards the topic of integration, it was something that emerged anyway, being mentioned by the majority of the interviewees with different connotations. The interpretation of the word "integration" varies in fact across the sample, with some interviewees being particularly hostile towards it, as they interpret it as a synonym to "assimilation", or as a perceived need imposed by the host community to reject their own traditions and cultural background to fully embrace a certain vision of "Italianness". In fact, a few interviewees objected the fact that it is often present in the public discourse a certain hostility characterised by the othering of the migrants, whether or not they are already Italian citizens: obtaining the naturalisation does not automatically translate into a complete acceptance of the individual in the community, with many perceiving a stark difference in treatment, defining themselves as "tier-2" citizens.

Other people have instead a neutral-to-positive relation to the word integration, embracing the term as a good indicator of being a functioning and contributing member of society, with a good network of people from different backgrounds and cultures. Not only, but it is also referenced by a small number of interviewees as a positive outcome of receiving the Italian citizenship, hence the right to vote. This general referring of "integration" as an indicator of the process of "adaptation" to the community of residence in line with empirical findings on common migrants' interpretations of their own experiences (Erdal and Oeppen, 2014). In particular, Habiba explains how the process of "integrating" is two-directional, necessarily having to come from both the host community and the migrants themselves: political authorities need to facilitate the migrants' access to the social and political life of the country, while, simultaneously, the migrants themselves need to acknowledge that
"they must get interested in the good of the country [...] and there is no integration if there is no true participation in the social and the political life".

5.6 Summary

Sense of belonging can be defined as the feeling of "being at home" and it is shaped by an array of emotive connections, lived experiences, everyday practices and the perceived inclusivity of the community of residence, confirming the idea that belonging is made up of both a personal and a political dimension and that its process of development is two-directional (coming from both the individual and the rest of society). Additionally, it emerges that sense of belonging is governed by a multitude of complex geographical relations, as interviewees articulate belongings to various community, from Brescia, to their countries of origin and even "place-less" communities, such as "the world of immigration" and "humanity". None of which constitute a zero-sum: multiple belongings co-exist and are never mutually exclusive.

Identities are often contested and struggled over by the interviewees, including those who were born and raised in Italy: with the exception of one interviewee (who has a weak link to his country of origin and has lived in Italy since the 1970s), every other interviewee defines their identity as somewhat foreign, both in Italy and in their country of origin. This finding is related to the concept of home, which comes up as often split between home in the country of origin and in Brescia: when prompted on thinking about the idea of returning, most interviewees would consider it one day, but also consider how difficult or attainable it would be. Only the oldest interviewees have ruled out the idea of moving back completely.

Eventually, the concept of integration is contested among migrants, with some of them considering in a neutral to positive light as a synonym of active contribution to the community, while others reject the concept on the basis of an assimilationist understanding: this has repercussions on the framing of political activism in the city.
After having addressed the element of belonging in this chapter, the next chapter looks at how migrants in Brescia participate politically both at the formal (including voting and activism in political parties) and at the informal level (including associations and trade unionism).
Chapter 6

Political Participation

The second chapter of the analysis section turns to the theme of political participation, which is divided into formal and informal. The reason for doing so is to fulfil the aim of the chapter, that is to answer the second research question of this research: how migrants (re)produce and put into practice acts of political participation on the Brescian territory: the intention is to highlight how migrant utilise, shape, produce and reproduce different channels for participation in the polity, and how, in turn, these channels can have repercussions both on their sense of belonging to the locality and on the surrounding political and social environment.

6.1 Why and how do migrants want to get politically involved?

It is necessary to highlight at this point that the separation between formal and informal forms of political participation is mainly drawn to help to categorise and to identify the different instances of participation developed by migrants. However, it is just as important to clarify that participation often coexists in the two spheres of politics, with migrants being often involved, for example, in the running of cultural organisations and associations while simultaneously being activists in traditional political parties. The key message here is that it is absolutely paramount to understand how the two spheres are in constant communication with each other.
and continuously complement each other, shaping new forms of participation and reworking existing ones.

Looking at the information available in the sample on the enablers political participation, it is possible to identify an underlying motive: there is a strong willingness to overcome existing issues impacting everyday life. This often is translated into a "sense of duty" to utilise one's own experience in order to help the newcomers who are undergoing similar issues. The way in which the wish to make oneself available to help others is translated into various forms. This desire covers a continuum going from party politics activism (in which migrants find their ways through the structures of political parties in order to contribute to changing the political system of the polity), to the formalisation of already existing informal social networks through the foundation of cultural and ethnic organisations. There exist many instances of such concretisations of "help", and they all constitute examples of how migrants make sense of their social and political surroundings in the country of residence, and how they perceive themselves, their roles and their position within society.

Other interviewees have instead developed their activism by chance, as a result of events and circumstances that the interviewees had to come to terms with as foreign residents in Brescia. Examples of circumstances falling under this category are: discrimination or unfair treatment on the workplace; local authorities' responses to national amnesties and bureaucratic barriers; transport of the bodies of dead family members or friends back to the country of origin for burial; and the dominating rhetoric surrounding the issue of immigration. These examples are vastly different in nature, yet they have sparked responses that have set in motion forms of participation in both the formal and the informal political realms: these isolated instances, that have happened outside of the control of the individual migrant, have acted as nodal moments leading to an array of different responses, which, in turn, have come to politicise migrants in one way or another.

In fact, migrants have come to mature a considerable level of awareness that has changed the individual’s perception of their own role in society and how they can
actively contribute to the advancement of the community. In particular, a num-
ber of interviewees have stated how they have developed their interest for direct
political participation as a result of the hostile, anti-immigrant discourse that is
currently so predominant in Italy: as a result of this, they have defined their po-
litical awareness as a form of reaction to the hostility of politics, stating that they
are willing to get directly involved to contrast the discourse by offering an alter-
native framing of migration, a sort of myth-busting project, aimed at shedding a
positive light on the role of migrants in society against dominant xenophobic atti-
tudes. Christian is an example of this phenomenon: despite his admittedly lack of
general interest in politics and of experience in political activism in his country of
origin, and despite the fact that he identifies mainly as Cameroonian, once natu-
ralised he is hoping to contribute to the wider political discourse in Italy not just by
voting, but also by taking a step in the direction of formal party political activism.

6.2 Formal political participation

The aim of this section is to give an insight into how immigrants in Brescia partic-
ipate in formal political spaces and how they make sense of the political opportu-
nities available in the polity, starting from the basic principle of direct democratic
participation through voting, to political parties’ membership and candidatures
in local elections. Starting with voting, the section then turns to membership of
political parties and eventually to candidatures in elected posts in the city.

Among the factors enabling participation in formal political structures is the felt
necessity to change the political system from within, contributing to the advance-
ment of the community as a whole and to the solution of everyday problems:
migrant want to make use of party political platforms to advance their ideas,
proposals and contributions, seeing themselves as equally worthy members of the
community as ethnic Italians. It can also be seen that they want to advance the
pleas of the communities they represent, formalising the presence of the migrant
communities by means of representation. The felt necessity to act as the spokes-
people for the community of reference is framed as a personal duty owned to both
the newcomers and to friends and older members that may not be as politically inclined, or are sceptic towards the political system. One of the reasons adduced to justify the involvement in formal politics is to also act as a guide or as an example for other migrants who are described to be as unhappy about the system like a good part of the rest of society, but who also refuse to get involved or act directly to change things: Alina sums up this feeling rather explicitly:

"You see, I can say that I am not a common person because among my fellow citizens, I don’t see many people that want to do something for the society they live in. But in my opinion, [...] I say to many of them "But it’s been 20 years since you’ve been here [in Italy], you don’t do anything in the socio-political sense in Ukraine other than sending money to the kids, [...] for the social life there we don’t do anything and here too we don’t do anything!" So, we complain because things in Ukraine don’t go well; we criticise the Italians, the governments they can’t choose, yet we don’t do anything to influence things, the local ones [...]: instead, on the local level what we can do we must do it!"

6.2.1 Voting as a right, voting as a duty

"It’s a natural principle, in my opinion, that there must be equal rights and equal duties. If I am equal to an Italian in my duties, why shouldn’t I be equal also in my rights?"

Klajdi’s words concisely sum up the general meaning that interviewees attribute to voting, which constitutes the first part of the formal political participation section for obvious reasons: either you have a right to vote, or you do not, and if you do, you decide to either vote or abstain. In a functioning democracy, the legitimisation of the elected bodies comes from the public’s direct participation in the vote. As outlined in Section 2.3 migrants in Italy have a very limited access to formal political participation, as a result of a restrictive suffrage.

What does the act of voting mean for migrants then? First, it cannot be stressed enough that every single interviewee without failure recognised the value and the
importance of taking part in democratic consultations, regardless of whether they then actually vote (if they have the right to), or not. Being, living and existing within a community presupposes a degree of participation in the public life of that very community, and being included in the decision-making process is simply fair and just: the fact that immigrants are excluded from formal participation is perceived as an artificial barrier dividing society into right-bearing insiders and outsiders, from which it is anyway expected to fulfil the same duties as the national citizens. Simultaneously a considerable group of those immigrants who have succeeded in gaining the Italian citizenship have begun organising politically, whether at the individual or at the personal level, in order to proactively contribute to shaping the public discourse. This is the case, for example, of the association "Tunisians in Brescia", which, according to Habiba, promotes the political and electoral participation among its members and even more: in fact, she mentions that one of the association’s aims through its awareness campaigns is to

"possibly place [our members] in some commune, in some councils, some administration, and this is doesn’t do anything but enriching the society".

There emerge thus a few trends that connect the migrants’ answers and they can be broadly be grouped under the "rights and duties" discourse, and under the "meanings and value" of voting. The majority of the interviewees acknowledge their presence in the community as citizens, whether in the legal sense of the term if they have obtained the naturalisation, or in the participatory sense of the term if they see themselves as active, contributing members of the community, to use Stokke’s (2017) terminology. The very fact that people position themselves in society and stress the fact that they have access to the same services as the rest of the population without, however, having a say on how to best run them, explains clearly how migrants may perceive the injustice of being shut out from the public debate. Paying taxes, paying bus fares, sending children to school, making use of the public health services, accessing the public administration’s services and having to make sense of the bureaucratic process from which depends their ability to secure residence permits, are all considered everyday aspects majorly impacting their lives in the city, for which they recognise the necessity to be included in the
public debate on how to run them: the most direct method for doing so is thus voting, and those who are excluded from the suffrage perceive it as unfair. Equal duties, equal rights. "By now we are an integral part of this community and so, our voice, as voters, must be heard", says Rodrigo, echoing Marie’s words:

"It’s a right. [...] In my opinion, if one wants to vote, they should have the right to vote, even if they are a foreigner or not a foreigner: what’s important is that they are there, that their documents are fine and that they have a willingness to be part of that culture."

Those interviewees that have received the right to vote as a result of naturalisation express the importance of voting, interpreting the act as their duty, to demonstrate that they value the acquisition of citizenship, honouring the duties they have been bestowed with. The concept of duty is particularly relevant here and entirely in line with the existing literature, as Chareka and Sears (2006) argue. Migrants recognise the value of a hard-won right, especially in the case of Italy, where the discourse about the importance of exercising the right to vote has its roots in the Republic’s founding values that stemmed from the republican, anti-fascist resistance during the inter-war dictatorship: in this sense Alina captures this feeling when she protests against disenchanted voters (regardless of nationality and ethnic background) saying that "people paid with blood to give us this right, and now we are "disenchanted"?".

In particular, the use of the verb "must" is rather striking, as it comes up in nearly every interview: the idea that, for whatever reason, residents and members of a community should be directly participating in the elections by voting is one of the most recurring themes. The rationale supporting this stance is articulated along three lines of argument, including the idea of civic duty and good citizenship, as already mentioned. In addition to that, there is also an element of doing it for their peers, family members and friends who would like to be able to vote but cannot, interpreting then the enactment of voting as giving a voice to those who

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Footnote 1: From the Italian *dovere*. *Dovere* is both a verb (must) and a substantive (duty). In conversations where *dovere* is mentioned is sometimes difficult to discern whether the interviewee used it as a verb or as a substantive. The message is nonetheless comprehensible.
are cut out from the democratic process. The third line of argument emerging is the interpretation of voting as a way to feel valued and to "take part" in society, avoiding further marginalisation:

"We must, we must participate, because if you don’t participate in the social life, in the political life, we will always remain on the margins of society." (Veronyka)

The idea of legitimising the governing authorities is crucial for the fulfilment of the requirements of what makes a "good citizen", and that the migrant is ready and willing to be proactive in the polity.

"If I live here I must participate also in the political life. The political life is this: who runs my locality, I need to know what they do, and so if I know what they do and I like it, I support them; if I don’t like it, I must contribute to make them go" (Adama).

The aspect of "contributing" to something, which can be the advancement and the progress of the community is also utilised often, remarking what the meaning of voting and participating directly in the elections is. Synonyms of "contributing" also often come up, such as "help deciding", "collaborating", or "expressing one’s opinion", while the justification for deciding to contribute is articulated as "caring" for the community and for the future generations, by being instrumental in securing a certain future. Noura’s thought sums this section rather exhaustively:

"It’s important to express one’s own opinion and to influence the political life [...] It’s necessary to do it for everyone, for our children, for those who feel 80% Italian or even more."

### 6.2.2 Voting in the country of origin

Turning to the acting of voting in the country of origin, this is obviously dependent on a crucial aspect, namely a voting provision for the national citizens living abroad. Some countries in fact allow that (e.g. Ukraine, Tunisia, Russia, Senegal), whereas others do not allow for such possibility, requiring their citizens to travel back to cast their votes (e.g. Albania, Angola, El Salvador). The interviewees
emigrating from the countries that do not provide the right to vote abroad have cited the impracticality of having to travel back to cast a vote, resulting in the majority of them not exercising their right: in their opinions and experiences the act of casting a vote is not worth the effort and the hassle.

There are many reasons that the interviewees use to justify their decision to not engage with voting in their countries of origin: for instance, geographical distance and the length of the journey is a key factor for some of the interviewees coming from the countries furthest away (e.g. Angola and El Salvador), but the perceived lack of democratic transparency in the political institutions of their country of origin constitutes a key discouraging factor too, as people do not see the relevance of contributing to the advancement of their opinions in a system seen as rigged, corrupted and steered by a political elite distant from the populace.

Other important elements expressed by the interviewees in this regard are a lack of contact with political personalities and candidates and a superficial knowledge of the political battleground, resulting in a difficulty trying to decide who to vote for and on what basis. This point is however also relevant for the people who are entitled to vote from abroad, resulting in some of them deciding not to enact their right.

It can be argued that one of the contributing factors to the distancing from the political system in the country of origin is the proximity to the political system of Brescia and Italy. This is an element often emerging from the discussions with migrants about the importance and the meaning of actively participating in the democratic life of the community of reference: given that the majority of the interviewees recognise themselves as members of the Brescian community (or the Italian, or both), they automatically focus their attention on the "here" and on the "now" of politics, meaning that they direct the majority of their interest and attention to the everyday problems, issues, challenges and questions arising in the political environment in Brescia. Being politically aware in Brescia becomes more important, or at least as important, as being aware of the political developments in the country of origin.
An additional element influencing the degree to which interviewees express their participation in the elections in their countries of origin is the exposure to those countries’ media and news outlet, something that is made increasingly possible due to the spread of cross-national media accessibility. Such level of exposure is particularly present in those family nuclei where one of the members is deeply invested in the politics of their country of origin: some of the interviewees have expressed this interest and they are the actors in their family nuclei that actively pursue the information, hence exposing the rest of the family to the affairs of the country of origin. This tends to happen regardless of whether the country allows for abroad voting or not, or whether the interviewees have made the conscious decision of voting (or not voting). The interest persists anyway: whether it is acted upon or not is dependent on other factors, such as, for example, the perception of the "usefulness" of one’s own vote.

Other interviewees, on the other hand, tend to receive this exposure passively and, despite the desire to be up-to-date of other members of the family, they do not display a significant level of interest in the affairs of their countries of origin: if they did not receive a consistent exposure to the information from their parents, they would not necessarily pursue that themselves, or at least not so systematically, which is true especially of the youngest interviewees who are still living at home (Marie, Yvette and Amina). In the case of the first two interviewees (both Senegalese) this is translated into a relatively disinterested participation in the elections, often seen as a way to help or favour long-distance relatives who are standing for office in Senegal. Amina does not vote in the Ghanaian elections at all:

"Like, honestly also because I don’t know the politics [of Ghana] very much, ok? I believe it’s a self-serving vote. [...] Yes, maybe I should, but maybe I don’t feel as obliged as I feel towards Italy."

The elections in the countries of origin are not as enthusiastically participated by this group of interviewees as, for example, other forms of political participation (especially on the informal level) both in the home country and, especially, in
Brescia. The electoral participation in the countries of origin is thus not seen as a priority, nor it is framed as important an issue as the participation in the political life of the country of residence. Investing material and psychological resources in matters and affairs happening in the country of origin can be a too consuming a process (our surely not a priority) for migrants who maintain a tenuous, or at best weak, link with their communities of origin: this, coupled with the temporal and spatial proximity and the exposure to the events happening in the polity where the migrant resides, explains the degree to which migrants may adapt to the life in the country of residence and, consequently, develop a vast array of forms of participation (Erdal and Oeppen: 2014). I must remind at this point that, with the exception of Abdoulaye, who is a now-naturalised political refugee, my sample is comprised of migrants who, or whose families, emigrated voluntarily: it can be a contentious issue to compare their experience of participation in transnational activism to that of refugees and other forced migrants and that it is not the aim of this research to propose sweeping statements about the experiences of all migrants. As the experience of Abdoulaye highlights, there may be some overlapping and comparable traits and features with the rest of the sample, but his contribution remains unique in the context of this research.

6.2.3 Participation in political parties

Considering the importance that interviewees give to the principle and the act of voting, as shown in the previous section, it is rather natural to note that there exist a few migrants who have decided to further their political involvement by joining existing political parties. Two considerations must be made at this point: first, that just like other citizens and activists, interviewees stress the fact that their relationship with the apparatus inside political parties is often problematic and critical and that their loyalty is not a blank cheque (some interviewees have been members of parties in the past, but have not renewed their memberships); second, that migrants clearly hold radically different political viewpoints, rejecting any assumption or preconception that all migrants belong to one political sphere, or that migrants coming from certain regions in the world are all likely to belong
to the same political field. The opposite holds true instead: not only has it come to light that interviewees have (or still do) participated in political parties placed from the left to the right wings of the political spectrum, but there are also empirical findings supporting this point, as the pictures of the last local elections’ electoral lists show (3.2, 3.3 and 3.4).

An additional element that may explain why some interviewees decide to participate directly in the locality’s political system by entering the political parties’ formal structures is their personal inclination to take part in political activism. Some interviewees have in fact expressed their previous interest in politics prior to their arrival in Italy as an explanation for their current involvement. For example, the skills obtained and developed through previous participation in their country of origin in pro-democracy social movements (e.g. in Guinea and Burkina Faso), mass mobilisation and national general strikes (e.g. in Ukraine), the exposure to an environment characterised by political contestation (e.g. Angola and Morocco), or the simple act of mobilising and campaigning for elections in relatively stable and democratic states (e.g. Senegal), can all directly affect the degree to which individuals may want to then enter the world of party politics in their country of residence. Though it is a peculiar case due to his political refugee status, Abdoulaye utilises in fact his own personal experience as an explanation of his involvement in the politics of Brescia, saying that it has never been possible for him to live without being politically active, to the point where he is willing to organise the Guinean diaspora in Lombardy while, simultaneously, expressing his dream of being elected to the council of his local town of residence outside of Brescia.

Directly participating in electoral politics assumes an important relevance, especially in light of the discussion on voting in Section 6.2.1. In fact, the activism in political parties can function as a way to advance what is essentially regarded the plea of the community of reference: "it’s a struggle that I must fight within the party", as Abdoulaye says. In addition to participating directly in the workings and activities of political parties, which itself requires a proactive effort on behalf of the individual, migrants have also had in the past the possibility of taking
part in coalition primary elections organised by the main centre-left party in the
country, the Democratic Party, both at the national and at the local level. In this
instance, the main difference with becoming involved in a political party is that
primary elections are also open to party sympathisers and, since 2008, to 16- and
17-year-olds and non-nationals with a permanent residence permit. This means
that those individuals who prefer to be less involved, may find the possibility to
participate, as in the case of Rodrigo who says:

"I wanted to participate because maybe I am someone who don’t ac-
tively throw myself in, but behind the scenes, passively, I participate".

Not surprisingly, a lot of the respondents who express a desire to participate di-
rectly in the political life of the community, but are unable to do so, have utilised
at least once this opportunity made available to them, in order to formally express
their views. Voting in the party primaries is also seen by some of the interviewees
as a chance to help to elect the leader of the party who is more sympathetic to
the migration cause, or the leader who has the most convincing plan for the ad-
vancement of the migrant communities in the country. Given the fact that party
primaries are organised internally to a body whose rules for participation are not
directly regulated by the Italian constitution, this space of participation consti-
tutes an example of how migrants can access the political sphere by overcoming
the limitations of their legal statuses, helping to build up a stronger sense of own-
ership over the wider society’s political processes and, simultaneously, a deeper
sense of attachment to the community.

6.2.4 The case for a migrants’ list and the issue of representa-
tion

In the run-up to the 2018 local elections, the city of Brescia hit the news due
to the fact that the migrants in the city, coordinated by FABI, were considering
standing their own independent, political list in the upcoming elections (Francese,
2018; Trebeschi, 2018). The aim of the list was to bring migrant representation
in the city council, with a programme articulated on issues affecting directly the
migrant population, together with general, non-migrant specific themes (security,
work, school and environment, (Francese, 2018)). What is interesting about this point is that, had this list been successfully presented in the election, it would have been one of the first examples in the whole country, in one of the biggest and most diverse cities in Italy. The project did not however go ahead, as the committee opted to field their candidates in the existing traditionally aligned lists. The project gained the attention of local politicians and media alike, also reviving issues of belonging and identity, questioning the idea of who should be entitled to stand for public office and for what reasons. As Mohamed explains,

"We thought, we'll make our own civic list, to enter these elections: our world fell apart. Because the civic list means... when you talk about the active and passive vote, here [in Italy], only those who have Italian citizenship can vote. OK. And the civic list is comprised of whom? Of Italian citizens. And who goes to vote? Italian citizens. The only thing is, I and [Ibrahima] are Italian citizens, but they called the list "the ghetto list" because it only includes foreigners. [...] I had to come out with another press release. It’s ignorant to think this way. [...] You haven’t understood anything. [...] There is tier-1 and tier-2: the Italian citizenship is not equal."

This quote highlights the contradictory nature of citizenship, right to vote and belonging in a space that is politically and discursively restricted: despite the fact that it was Italian citizens of foreign origin who wanted to stand as candidates, the issue was framed along the lines of "true" Italianness, and who is allowed to access the political space to represent the community. Adding to the lack of clarity, was also the way the media framed the news, utilising potentially misleading wordings, such as the one on the national newspaper *Corriere della Sera*:

**Stranieri sì, ma un po’ Bresciani**
(Foreigners yes, but a little Brescian (Trebeschi, 2018)).

Migrants making sense of their own identity and belonging to the city of Brescia protest the "non-Italian" label they receive, which implies the loss of political legitimacy necessary to stand as candidates to represent the rest of the community: this is a contested notion, but it confirms the migrants' experiences of being
constantly considered "foreigners", despite their identification as Italian or, even more formally, the legal value of their naturalisation, as discussed in Section 5.3.

Migrant representation is however not regarded as a need by all the interviewees. In fact, when asked about the likelihood of voting for such a list, if it existed, the interviewees’ answers were mixed, with only a few interviewees strongly in favour of it, with the remaining majority split between those who dismissed the idea completely and those who would not dismiss it entirely, but would need to understand the political orientation and the programme. The respondents who are more supportive of the list consider it as a means to allow a considerable minority to enter a formal political space in the community, to overcome the issue of not being "listened to with due respect" (Marie). In particular, two interviewees have pointed at the issue of migrant voices being treated in a paternalistic way within traditional parties, supporting in very general terms "immigrants" and facilitating "immigration", but falling short of following up on the slogans and of providing an adequate platform: the risk becomes of using representation and identity politics as empty vote catchers:

"They don’t do it because you’re an immigrant and they value as an immigrant; sometimes someone does it just to have the votes" (Christian).

In regard to those who dismiss the idea of supporting a migrants’ list, the main objection moved against it is the fact that it would cause an unnecessary cleavage between people with a foreign background and the rest of the population. These interviewees see it as more important to work through the structures of existing parties, without any need to split electorate and activists along racial or ethnic lines: the key justification for this point of view is the fact that people feel like they are members of the Brescian (or Italian) community and that it is then best to work together to resolve the community’s issues. Additionally, the idea of working within a political party is also understood to be a challenge, and ultimately an improvement, of the traditional political parties’ stance on migration issues: cooperation for an inclusive advancement of the community as a whole is a crucial achievement, as Ibrahima explains:
"We give a stone to build, but in that house we want to live too, because all the projects must include also us. We see it that way. To create a separate party is not appropriate".

Not only, but the concept of integration is also brought back to the surface, as its facilitation is interpreted by some migrants as a result of political fighting from a common platform, moving on from the simplistic aspect of representational politics: as Klajdi says,

"It’s not necessary that we, migrants, create our ad hoc political party. Because the first thing is that there mustn’t exist in our vocabulary "we" and "you". No. It’s "we"."

On this topic, a key point is made, eventually, by Santiago:

"At the end of the day, if I have the right to vote, being a migrant starts being a little less".

This is of particular importance because it brings back the perspective of identity and belonging. The message of Santiago is that, given especially the Italian context where only Italians are allowed to vote, the very fact that one has the right to vote means that they are Italian: consequently, the identification with a status of "migrant" decreases, leading then to a questioning of the actual purpose of a migrants’ list.

6.2.5 Migrant candidates in the city

To be active and to directly participate in the democratic structures of the polity is one of the key dimensions of political participation and: the fact that there are many migrants willing to run for elected positions is an indication of this desire to participate. As mentioned in Section [7.1] the political space in the city in which non-naturalised migrants are able to be voted in and sit in elected positions, is in one of the city’s 33 neighbourhood councils.

Established in 2014, the purpose of the neighbourhood councils is to enable a sub-communal space for dialogue and consultation between the communal elected
authorities and the residents. Representatives on the neighbourhood councils are elected from a single non-party list and from 2019 they are also responsible for managing a micro-budget of €35,000 each: importantly, given that it is the Brescia city council who has ownership and responsibility over the councils, they were able to extend the suffrage beyond the constitutional limit of the Italian state. According to Andrea, the high profile politician in the city, there have been debates on whether to secure guaranteed places in the neighbourhood councils to migrants, or to allow them to participate in the contest alongside other Italians: the second option was eventually adopted. The councils were renewed in December 2018 and a total of 26 candidates out of 511 had a migrant background (approximately 5%), as shown in Figures 6.1 and 6.2.
Figure 6.1: Neighbourhood Councils’ 2018 elections candidates with migrant background in the North, West and South constituencies. Country codes: refer to List of Abbreviations. *Fiume (today's Rijeka) was an Italian colony in 1938, Mario Scundi’s year of birth. It is now in Croatia.
From the personal statements of the candidates with migrant backgrounds available on the council’s website there surface some common themes among the reasons for standing. On top of a desire to contribute to the growth and the improvement of the quality of life in their respective neighbourhoods, there is often mention of "integration", "cultural interchange" between people with different ethnicities and cultures. Interestingly, it comes up a number of times that the candidates would want to be voted in office to improve the living and social conditions of "new" (or alternatively "today’s") Italians, as opposed to the Italians "of origin", or "yes-
terday’s": this points in the direction of the existence of the continuous process of (re)definition of one’s identity and renegotiation of their position in society.

What I interpret however to be the biggest finding in this case is however the fact that all the ones that mentioned their prominent role in the communities of origin, specifically from South Asia ("spokesperson of the PAKISTANI [emphasis in original] community" (Candidate 1); "In the area I’m well known in the PAKISTANI [emphasis in original] and Indian community (Candidate 2); "I’m always available for the needs of the Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi community" (Candidate 3)) have been elected to the councils: taking into account also what has been said by other interviewees on the ability of the Pakistani community to mobilise the vote for their representatives, it can be argued that in this case, contrary to the general interviews’ findings, the role of representational politics plays a considerable role.

Along with the neighbourhood elections, the 2018 local elections in city of Brescia constituted an example of the high participation in the elections of people with various migrant backgrounds. According to interviewees working in trade unions and to Andrea, 2018 saw a record number of candidates\(^2\) with migrant background that stood for election (as displayed in Table 6.1), covering the whole political spectrum from far left parties to neo-fascist formations, reinforcing again the fact that migrants hold political views as heterogeneous as the rest of the population. In total these candidates gathered 951 votes, mostly within the left/centre-left field with two candidates in particular that got very close to winning a seat on the council (Zouhair El Youbi and Abdul Munaf Choudhry, with 213 and 351 personal preferences respectively). It can be inferred that, despite the large proportion of naturalised, enfranchised citizens in Brescia, the appeal of voting for a candidate based on their ethnicities may not be so high, confirming in a way the general feeling I got from the interviewees that, within the local context, party programmes, ideas and political positioning count more than the cultural or ethnic proximity in terms of appealing to the voters.

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\(^2\)Unfortunately it was not possible to find the electoral lists of previous elections.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Political orientation</th>
<th>Votes to the candidate</th>
<th>Votes to the party</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>PaP</td>
<td>Far left</td>
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<td>Neo-fascist</td>
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Table 6.1: Candidates in the Brescia 2018 local elections with a migrant background. Definitive data are presented as officially reported by the authorities (Giornale di Brescia, 2018)
6.3 Informal political participation

One of the most striking findings emerging from the discussions with the migrants is how cultural, social and ethnic associations and organisations constitute an important form of active engagement on behalf of the migrant population, and of how the communities have organised themselves on the territory. There emerge in facts some key traits that unite each one of the associations and organisations I gathered information about, through interviews with representatives, founding and current members. These traits are common among groups irrespective of their ethnicities, year of arrival in Brescia, and size of the community.

Before turning to a section specifically dedicated to the analysis of migrant associations in Brescia, it needs to be mentioned how some of the interviewees have experienced participation in other informal spheres. For example there seems to be a relatively persistent involvement in religious groups, especially among women, of both Christian and Muslim faith, who volunteer (or have previously volunteered) their time to represent their community: it is the case of Amina, who, at the age of 26, is a high-profile representative in the city's Islamic Centre and dedicates most of her spare time to organise activities bringing the Centre closer to the heart of the Brescian community. One of the key events that have been organised by the Islamic Centre is the "Open Mosque" day, which has repeatedly attracted the attention and the support of the political, religious and quasi-religious institutions in the city and has started what has become a well-respected platform for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in Brescia.

Another case of religious volunteering is that of Jeanne, who talks about her experience in the church parish council of her town of residence. Her decision to volunteer on the council was driven by their desire to represent the African catholic community in a place where there have been also instances of racism and discrimination in the parish and among churchgoers (i.e. white Italians refusing to shake hands with her and her family as a sign of peace during the Sunday mass - a deeply painful event that has left a mark on the interviewee and that has also been directly witnessed by another interviewee living in another area of the province):
after ten years of volunteering she left because of the inability (and unwillingness) of the rest of the parish council to act and take measures to contrast racism inside the parish.

6.3.1 The role of migrant associations in Brescia

Migrant associations were born out of the necessity to help each other and overcome mutual issues. The first immigrants to arrive felt the need to establish contacts and networks with people they shared with not only common culture, language, religion, habits and origins, but also practical problems to solve.

"We created the associations so that those who came before could help the others":

Anna’s probably sum up best what the common experiences of migrants were upon their arrival in Brescia, especially considering the fact that 20 of the people I interviewed arrived, whether somewhere else in Italy first or directly in Brescia, alone.

Practical help is a key factor enabling the creation of associations in the city. the formation of groups where people, who had to face those same barriers and managed to overcome them before, could instruct, support, redirect and teach the newcomers, in order to smooth their transition to the new city is an important aspect:

"everyone had the same problem: integration, everything, starting from the language, how to move around, where to go..." (Anna).

The act of getting together in an initially informal organisation is often based on a need for friendship and "cameraderie", as Christelle says, but even to recreate in Brescia the communities existing in villages, towns and provinces in the country of origin, as highlighted by the Senegalese interviewees.

Interestingly, a feature that regularly comes up in three cases revolves around the repatriation of corpses of people who died in Brescia. The people that died had networks of friends and acquaintances within their communities of reference, who
joined forces, pulled together resources and worked a solution to the monetary and logistical problems of sending the dead body back to their respective countries of origin for burial. The issue of migrants’ burial has been witnessed in the literature too (Erdal, 2014), highlighting all the complexities of multiple belonging and "home" - the dead’s wish is to be buried where? The outcome of this type of "forced" gathering of members of an ethnic community has led to the establishment of deeper and more structured groups that slowly, over time, have evolved into formal organisations, with the capacity and expertise to help on a wide array of matters.

In particular, the process of development and formalisation that these associations in the city have undergone since the first informal gatherings, has opened up the path for the specialisation of services provided to their members and to the cooperation with other associations and organisations in the territory. The services offered often include "moral and economic help within the reach of our possibilities" (Ibrahima), but also help with documents, contracts, translations, issues on the workplace: as described by Adama, talking about how the Burkinabe community is capillarily organised all across Italy in regional and provincial associations feeding into a national diaspora network based exactly in Brescia, the role of the associations is to

"organise the community, to inform, [...] to gather their worries, if they have them, to send them either to someone here or in Burkina Faso, we always write their worries, we compile a report".

The instance described by Adama, which has a lot in common with Nadiya, i.e. the main Ukrainian association in the city, and first such organisation in Italy, points then in two directions: on the one hand, the transnational character that this type of associations increasingly assumes, by building new links and strengthening old ones with the country of origin; and, on the other hand, the importance of "organising" the diaspora in the country of residence.

The transnational dimension of associational activism becomes then particularly relevant, as it helps reinforcing the sense of belonging in both communities and
it fits into the discourse framed by the migrants themselves about the need to do something "here" and to be active in the community. Some of the examples of transnational activities offered by these associations often include fundraisers for projects in the countries of origin, either in the form of material donations (e.g. ambulances and hospital equipment), or in the form of money donations: commonly the events and activities organised in this regard are centred around "socio-cultural" activities, or intercultural events that can provide a platform for intercultural dialogue among the migrant communities themselves and with the Italian public, raising hence awareness and offering a learning experience to the native population.

In the case of Brescia, the presence of active migrant associations on the territory have led to four key consequences, all of which help understanding how the involvement of people in the public life of the community of residence can directly affect and implement change in the political and social structures of the polity, while, simultaneously, reinforcing a strong sense of belonging among the participants.

The first consequence is that associations and organisations have set in motion a long-term and sustainable process of cooperation with other migrant associations, specifically at a cross-cultural level, to the point where it has become standard practice that some events are held together to offer migrants a shared platform. In fact, and this is the second consequence, 14 of the migrant associations in the city have over time coalesced into FABI: at the time of fieldwork, the federation was comprised of 14 migrant associations operating in the city, with a working committee formed by people with different cultural backgrounds and ethnicities. According to the FABI’s web description, it is an "intercultural association providing integration activities, interaction between people, communities, native and foreign associations in Brescia". Not only, but in addition to the role of coordination of social and cultural activities, they have also helped mobilising the migrant communities politically, according to interviews with members of the FABI’s working committee: discussions were in fact held in the run-up to the 2018 municipal elections about the possibility of fielding an "all-migrant" political list in Brescia, something which itself did not concretise, but had noticeable repercussions on
the city’s political dynamics, including the responses of traditional political parties.

The process of cross-cultural network-building has also been facilitated by the role of local authorities and institutions, which is the third consequence of migrants’ associative activity. Over the past three decades local institutions have recognised, valued and supported the role of the organisations and associations, aiming to better integrate them in the social, cultural and political fabric of the city: these include religious institutions such as the Diocese, a historically powerful actor in the city, and the more recent Islamic Cultural Centre, which already represents over 85,000 residents in the province (6.8% of the total population in the province (Palamenghi, 2017), which is the highest proportion in the country (Groppi, 2018); trade unions; non-profit and volunteering organisations and foundations; cultural trusts and museums; and political entities, such as communes and the Province.

The fourth and final consequence is the recognition of some of the associations by the Consulates of their countries of origin, something which is largely and unsurprisingly dependent on how positive the relationship between the political authorities and the diasporas, as witnessed by Nieswand (2009) in the case of the Ghanaian diaspora in Germany. In two instances, the Ukrainian organisation Nadiya and the Cameroonian organisation Solidarity of the Guys of Cameroon (Solidarietà dei Ragazzi del Camerun) have established solid networks with the Consulates in the country providing further help and official support and cooperation.

Moreover, one of the elements that seems to influence the formation and the strengthening of associations in the city, and is worth noting, derives from the interviewees’ desire to share their expertise with other migrants. The case is particularly relevant for the two interviewees who are lawyers (Klajdi and Christian), both specialised in immigration law: the very reason for deciding to undertake the specialisation came as a result of their willingness to help the migrant community (it is also worth noting that both interviewees did the entirety of their law studies at the University of Brescia, as international students, which means that both of them have been immersed in the world of migration in the city for the past two decades). In fact, Klajdi has helped coordinating the foundation of the Albanian
lawyers in Italy and is a member of the informal network of the immigration law specialists in Italy, while Christian is currently working with other migrant lawyers to establish an association of foreign lawyers in Italy: according to his words,

"personally I don’t find it right that the problems the migrants have in Italy, it’s always Italians defending them, when there are people who have the abilities and the competences to rebut the various criticisms."

In contrast to what is discussed in Section 6.2.4 here the issue of representation becomes prominent, but it is somehow detached from its strictly political interpretation. In fact, the relevance of representation comes to the front when it pertains the defence of individuals in legal proceedings, for which it is understood to be necessary to have someone not only expert in immigration but also with a first-hand experience of it. The role of the associational activity among migrants can be argued to be essential to the consolidation of a strong attachment of migrants to their place of residence, reinforcing link also with the communities in the countries of origin. Simultaneously, this level of activity is strongly conducive to the incorporation of the migrant communities within the socio-political fabric of the polity, helping then a process of socio-political transformation at the local level.

6.3.2 Trade unionism

Around a third of the interviewees are current members of trade unions, suggesting that these may have an appreciable role in the political participation of migrants. More concrete problems have demanded more concrete actions on behalf of the migrants: workplace discrimination and unfair treatments have caused the mobilisation of some migrants within local trade unions: in some instances this has even brought about structural changes within the unions themselves. Two of the interviewees (Mohamed and Ahmed) have in fact talked about their personal experiences of their first years in the industrial sector in the province in the 1980s and 1990s, a time when the trade union sector was still insufficiently equipped to deal with immigration and migrants’ issues.
Their demands for the trade union’s protection and representation in confrontations with the employers led to the creation of a tight-knit network of offices around the extensive territory of the province, including the creation of "migrant offices" inside the local structures of each of the major Italian trade unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL), specifically designed to directly answer the needs of the migrant working communities on the territory of Brescia. According to the two interviewees, Brescia constituted a novelty in Italy in terms of organising trade unions in a way to specifically offer support and representation on migration issues. Moreover this is demonstrated by the fact that it is a recurring theme among the interviewees the fact that Brescia has acted, over the past four decades, as a model for the rest of the country, with political institutions, authorities and officials often utilising Brescia as a blueprint for the integration of the world of immigration in the administrative and legal structures of the country.

Rodrigo, who is employed in the immigration office of one of the main unions, describes his involvement in the union movement as a consolidation of his previous political activism: in fact he mentions his previous taking part in demos and political manifestations in Brescia as a "stimulus for integrating myself in the migration process", which led to him taking on his role in the immigration office of his trade union:

"Then there really came that feeling of giving a hand to the other immigrants that really have a hard time understanding the migratory process" (Rodrigo).

He then adds that when he will naturalise, he would like to further his commitment for the cause by working inside political parties, potentially standing for office in the future local elections.

It must be noted that the relationship between mainstream trade unions and migrants in Italy has been far from unproblematic, especially in the case of Brescia during and after the 2010 Struggle of the Crane (see Section 2.2.1). It is argued in the literature that Italian trade unions (and other unions in the global North) have historically neglected to adequately protect the interests of the most under-
privileged and vulnerable workers (mainly of immigrant origin), failing to tackle issues of institutional racism and exploitation in the underground economy (Cappiali, 2016; Avendaño, 2014). It is also true that in an increasingly globalised world trade unions have also had to adapt to an increasingly diverse (and more challenging, if one is to consider the presence of, for example, undocumented migrants) workforce, leading to new forms of representation, community alliances and workers’ solidarity (Avendaño, 2014). This is a statement that is partly in line with the case of trade unions in Brescia and their reworking over the 1990s to answer the needs of a changing demographic.

Moreover it is important to note that the fact that trade unions in Brescia have taken up to complement bureaucratic roles historically played by the state-led public administration (e.g. document processing; legal advice; translation services; naturalisation requests) is in line with the literature on the issue (Marino, Penninx and Roosblad, 2015): it can be argued that Brescia constitutes a case in line with the authors’ argument about the reworking of trade unions’ structures to "promote inclusion of migrants in a context of increasing institutional indifference and social hostility" (Marino, Penninx and Roosblad, 2015: 14).

After having discussed forms of political participation in the formal and informal spheres in Brescia, the next chapter will be looking at the ways in which sense of belonging is directly influenced by participation in the political sphere, both at the formal and at the informal level - and vice versa. What can be argued in fact is that the two elements inseparably influence each other, continuously shaping and reshaping interrelations among the polity together with political and social spaces.

6.4 Summary

This chapter has been divided into three section (why do migrants get involved politically?; involvement in formal politics; and involvement in informal politics). The purpose was to identify how migrants (re)produce forms of political participation, both in Brescia and transnationally. The main reason for getting involved is a strong desire to resolve day-to-day issues that are affecting the migrant’s quality
of life, often translated into a sense of duty to help other migrants that are finding themselves in a similar situation.

Within the realm of formal political participation three main themes were identified (voting, participation in political parties and standing as a candidate in local elections): participation in formal politics is seen as a crucially important means for changing the community’s political structures directly and from within. Voting is necessarily dependent on how a country frames suffrage: in the case of Italy, participation is mostly restricted to Italians (and limitedly to EU citizens); whereas other countries allow abroad voting. With the exception of a former political refugee, voting in Italy is seen as a more important and pressing issue than voting for the country of origin, indicating the immediateness of political issues in the community of residence and the desire to act in it. When asked for the eventuality of supporting an all-migrants political list, only a small minority was in favour of it, with the majority expressing either scepticism or outright refusal, on the ground that it is necessary to deconstruct social barriers. The degree to which participation in formal political structures is valued is demonstrated by the number of candidates in the two rounds of elections that have taken place in the city of Brescia in 2018.

In relation to informal politics, two main themes have been explored: participation in migrant associations and trade unionism. In both instances the reason for becoming involved is mainly the necessity or the will to help each other and/or to overcome common issues affecting the group of reference. Participation in the migrant associations and trade unions has helped implementing political and social change both in Brescia (with repercussions on the rest of Italy) and in the countries of origin, establishing links and coordinating the diasporas. One of the key points of this chapter is to highlight that participation often takes place simultaneously in formal and informal politics and both have the potential to enact political and social change at different scales and across borders.

The following chapter analyses the multiple links between sense of belonging and political participation.
Chapter 7

Sense of belonging and political participation: what are the relationships?

"Those who are active have been so always and regardless. To become a citizen brings you from a smaller box to a bigger box. I feel safer, sure, more protected, I have more rights. But political participation exists regardless." (Noura)

This third chapter of the analysis section seeks to answer the third research question of the research, i.e. how sense of belonging is influenced by political participation. First, the way migrants relate to the city of Brescia will be presented, including a section on the role of the cultural mediators. After that, the issues of naturalisation are presented, followed by the link between the right to vote and sense of belonging and how the exclusion from suffrage directly impacts the lives of migrants living in Brescia.

7.1 Relations to Brescia

"They came to Brescia because there was work. And the people benefited from the fact that they began to see black people, [the migrants] began living with Africa at home, they built houses. And so when the
men arrived first, they made their wives come, the wives began to give
birth, to have children: it’s for that reason that Brescia has become
what you see today. And the crisis came, many have left, but Brescia
stays in the people’s heart: Brescia is a whole story, the story of an
experience, a story of... how can I say it... a victory! A victory, be-
cause they came with nothing and came back well-dressed, with pride"
(Grace).

Grace’s description of African migrants in Brescia indeed represents a powerful
account of the migrant journey, geographical and emotional. The city and the
province are lived and crossed by foot, bicycle, car, coach and train every day
and there are small, mundane acts that are repeated and that help identifying
an emotional and deep connection between the person and the geographical and
social surroundings. Brescia is such a central part to how belonging is played out:
many of the interviewees, such as Santiago and Ahmed, who talk about going
back to their countries of origin on a visit, mention how they miss these small acts
(e.g. going for a Saturday morning coffee at a specific bar to meet and chat with
friends; or going out for a *piadina* on a Sunday with the family): it is particularly
from these small instances that it emerges how the migrants understand their own
"being" in the community, and feeling "at home", as explained in Section 5.4.

It is exactly these small, everyday acts that have the power to reinforce and deepen
the sense of attachment to a locality, resulting thus in the realisation that to be-
come active in the community is a means to enact change and to actively step up
to improve the community’s quality of life. This interpretation is in line with the
literature’s findings, as Staeheli and Nagel (2006: 1613) discuss: the activism of
migrants "as citizens", can positively affect the process of home-making, hence the
sense of belonging, in their countries of residence, without necessarily discarding,
eliminating or replacing the attachment (political or not) to their countries of ori-
igin - "it is not a zero-sum" (Staeheli and Nagel, 2006: 1613).

Some of the examples of how the city has been a model for the rest of the country
are the migrant activism in the trade union sector, the institutionalisation of the
role of the cultural mediator (see Section 7.1.1) and the institution of the neighbour-
hood councils with an extended suffrage to 16- and 17-year-olds and non-EU resi-
dents. The city of Brescia has been mentioned in a number of occasions by the
interviewees as having proved to be a "model" or an "example" for the rest of
Italy, trailblazing practices and local solutions in dealing with immigration issues
despite often repressive, openly discriminatory policies and initiatives taken at
the local level. It is not a case that the city was dubbed by the Italian Interior
Minister as a "model" inspiring the politics of integration to be carried out at the
national level in the course of 2017 (Gautheret, 2018).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, successive Italian governments have dealt with the
regularisation of migrants via amnesties and ad hoc measures, which all fell short
of providing a sustainable, long-term plan for migration. A considerable part of
the migrant demonstrations that have characterised the migrant activism in Bres-
cia since the 1990s can in fact be argued to have originated in the community’s
perception of injustice and arbitrariness of the proposed regularisation processes
(Cappiali, 2016). I managed to speak to some of the people involved in the protests,
particularly those in 2000: their accounts speak of different tactics used to direct
the attention of policy-makers and judiciary authorities towards the realities of the
migrant communities. Anna, a Ukrainian woman in her 60s then employed as a
domestic worker, and Mohamed, an Italo-Moroccan man in his 50s, then employed
as a factory worker and already involved in the union movement, were both ac-
tive in the protests. Anna helped coordinating the demands of Eastern European
domestic workers, by directly speaking to the city’s police chief, demanding to
extend the retroactive authorisation to include members of her community that
were falling outside of the state-imposed parameters: not only, but after receiving
a negative response, she resorted to contacting prominent figures in the catholic
Diocese, asking them to utilise their lobbying power to put pressure on the other
authorities. In addition, they wrote letters to the Pope, again resorting to religious
authorities to use their power and widespread respect to influence policy-makers
and the government.

The experience of Mohamed is more confrontational than Anna’s and that is partly
to be explained with his then involvement with the CGIL union, which helped organising the migrants’ sit-in and 45-day long occupation outside of the police headquarters, while brokering the demands of the migrants with the local authorities:

"[The] history of this province began in 2000. In 2000 after a retroactive authorisation, many were left without the possibility to get back the residence permit because of a lack of a working contract and […] let’s say that the "immigrants got together": They got together because they have a problem." (Mohamed).

The consequences of this direct action had both local and national repercussions, as the police ended up releasing the residence permits that had been blocked for months all across the country, while in the city the FABI (see Section 6.3.1) was founded.

"So this has given this province an acknowledgement at the national level, and not only, it has also given the migrant the meaning of "joining forces" (Mohamed).

There is no intention here to depict the relationship between migrants and the territory of Brescia as idyllic or problem-free, the opposite hold in fact quite true. The point is however to stress how elements of migrant activism at all levels, both formally and informally and across ethnic boundaries, have brought about over the past three decades a substantial reworking of the existing political, social and cultural structures in the city, often in spite of very antagonistic political administrations and/or other non-political authorities. The effects have been so significant that nearly everyone of my interviewees talks about how, in their experience, Brescia is probably the best reality in Italy to be a migrant in. This status seems to be contended with the regional capital of Milan, mainly due to its size and the considerable presence of migrants in the city (which itself is higher than the entirety of the population of Brescia (see Table 3.2): however there are mixed feelings about Milan, given the sheer size of the city and the consequent difficulty in organising, coordinating or gathering people together.
7.1.1 The role of the cultural mediator

Surprisingly, one of the features that an overwhelmingly big number of interviewees have in common is their roles as cultural mediators. The role of the cultural mediator in Italy has been developed in order to enable the communication and interaction between the migrants (including asylum seekers and refugees) on one side and the professionals operating in the fields of the social, health and education services, security (police) and justice on the other side: the aim of the cultural mediator is to both help the integration of the migrant in the public and administrative sphere, and to facilitate the relations between the professionals and the individual (Mediatore Culturale, 2018). The daily job of the cultural mediator is not to simply translate from Italian to another language and vice-versa, but to also mediate conflicts arising from cultural clashes and/or misunderstandings, and to explain and clarify to both parties cultural concepts, practices, traditions and lifestyles that may be alien, establishing a form of dialogue: the cultural mediator is hence a highly trusted person (Mediatore Culturale, 2018).

Cultural mediators tend to operate in schools, tribunals and courts, police stations, immigration offices, trade unions, hospitals and other non-profit organisations, after they have obtained the needed qualifications. Given that the official frameworks that recognise and delineate the role of the cultural mediator are a matter of the regional governments, there tends to be a certain degree of inconsistency across the 20 Italian regions, as some lack such frameworks, leaving the definition and promotion of the role to sub-regional municipalities, which, often, delegate to the third sector for the training and the promotion of work opportunities (as is the case in Lombardy, Brescia’s region, which is, ironically, the region with the highest immigrant population in Italy, both in absolute and proportional terms): this was explained by Malia, whom I interviewed in March 2019 in relation to her experience as cultural mediator. Some universities have now also begun offering degree courses in cultural mediation.

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1 Also known as "intercultural", "transcultural" and "linguistic". For the sake of clarity I will be using the term "cultural mediator".
Often the role is taken on by immigrants themselves, as it has emerged from the interviews I conducted. All the interviewees that have become cultural mediators have stated that the main reason for deciding to do it was to help other migrants that were arriving and were in a situation similar to theirs. By helping the people with whom they could deeply empathise, to navigate through the structures of an alien society, they were hoping to ease their access to the Italian society, so that they could avoid all the troubles they experienced when they moved first. This finding highlights the same kind of feeling expressed by the migrants who decided to do something to help their communities in other instances and ways, both in the formal and in the informal political spheres, as explained in Chapter 6.

One of the most striking pieces of information I obtained from the interview with Malia is that the reality in Brescia for cultural mediators operating in the health sector constitutes again a unicum and a model for the country, as it has been in other instances (see Sections 6.3.2 and 7.1): in fact, the province’s health trusts employ cultural mediators through the associations and co-operatives they received their formation from, on a permanent, long-term basis. The reason why this constitutes a unicum is that usually cultural mediators operate in the rest of the country and in other sectors on-call, without contracts with set hours. According to Malia, this ensures and reinforces continuity, helping to cement the relation of trust with both the health professionals and the migrant patients, something which is defined as a key, basic factor determining the success of the cultural mediation (Daoudagh, 2018).

7.2 Naturalisation

"You say, I don’t even want to lose [the citizenship] exactly because I worked extremely hard for it². I want to hold it tightly, maybe also for this. I don’t think it’s the same for my German peer, himself also of Ghanaian origin, who has had it though since birth. In my opinion it’s not the same, and it’s not the same for my super-Italian peer born

²The original wording is: "L’ho sudata", literally translatable with: "I sweated for it"
This quote captures quite well one of the many feelings associated with the act of naturalisation. How does naturalisation act as a link between sense of belonging and political participation? First of all, some interviewees interestingly see the act of naturalising as an enabler of a sense of belonging, or even of integration. It is a common trope among the dataset that the act of naturalising is in itself interpreted as a key stepping stone in the direction of building one’s identity and understanding their position within the polity: citizenship is the ultimate act of inclusion in a society. This arrival point is reached from two different paths: those who miss a piece in their belonging, identity and/or integration puzzle, and see the naturalisation as the final, completing piece; and those who feel they have already completed their puzzle and are then ready and mature enough to take the last step, i.e. naturalisation. Two quotes make this point particularly explicit: on the one hand Klajdi, who says

"Even if I used to feel perfectly integrated with the country, I even felt good, there was this thing that didn’t sit well with me. Now I feel integrated, yes. Much, much, much more integrated after having received the citizenship and the right to vote, too";

whereas, Christelle says, on the other hand:

"I take the citizenship because I need it, because I really feel like doing it, I am sure I am really integrated, I go then, I know what things I am facing, I don’t take the citizenship just like that".

It must be stressed that the implication that citizenship brings about the right to vote is not to be overlooked either. This seems to be a crucial aspect, especially for the interviewees that have valued the importance of participating in the elections, and that have connected the fulfilment of their identity to the ability to directly contribute to the decision-making process of the polity. In addition, in some cases citizenship is partly responsible for setting in motion the process of becoming more politically aware, of feeling the necessity to get informed about political programmes and, eventually, the development of a sense of "duty" to
demonstrate to the rest of society of being deserving of the right.

Officially becoming a citizen has also a symbolic value: the act of being "accepted" during formal naturalisation ceremonies, the donation, as a gift, of the Italian flag represents a watershed moment of extreme significance. There is an element of pride and respect, too: this is maybe depending on the fact that it takes such a long time and one has to go through so many hurdles and obstacles to obtain the Italian citizenship that the act of reaching it assumes some kind of extra value.

"At the end of the day, people not only do feel themselves Italian because they signed, but they really feel welcomed and also the flag, it was beautiful!" (Yvette).

Indeed many immigrants embark on the lengthy and strenuous process of Italian naturalisation because they see it as an opportunity to be juridically safe and legally protected and to secure the future of the rest of the family, as in the case of Santiago, who is becoming naturalised "for [his] children’s sake".

One last case that is worthy of analysis is that of Veronyka, who adds an extra level of complexity by bringing in the element of "illegality". Given that only less than a handful of interviewees arrived in Italy without documents, it is difficult to draw specific parallels about their interpretation of naturalisation and the role it played in shaping their identities. Veronyka’s experience moves from living as an "illegal" immigrant in Brescia, through the obtaining of a permanent residence permit, to, eventually, citizenship. In particular, she describes the way in which her political activism has developed over the course of the years, starting from complete silence and invisibility for fear of being discovered and deported, to a desire to help other women that go or have gone through a similar situation and, ultimately, the desire to represent them politically.

"The moment I got my residence permit, the first thing I said was "Finally I can leave, I can go around without fearing of meeting the police". You can’t think about politics then. Then you think about your dignity because there is none... it’s not like there is none, but you feel like worthless. [...] without this piece of paper you count for
nothing. You really have, I don’t know how to say it, you get crushed by everything. And in that moment you don’t think. I began thinking about doing something, to represent Eastern European women but now, when I got the possibility [with the citizenship]".

The point is really about understanding the concept of naturalisation as both a "political" act and as a "safety" act, as Antonsich (2010) outlined. These dimensions are confirmed by this study. However, it can also be argued that an extra dimension to be added is the symbolic value that drives the decision of undertaking the process of naturalisation.

7.3 Sense of belonging and the right to vote

One of the key reflective questions that were asked the interviewees was to consider whether obtaining the right to vote had an effect on their sense of belonging. As mentioned in Section 3.4 the question was asked differently both for those who were still waiting to complete their naturalisation process and for those who had not started the process yet: in this case, instead of asking to reflect back, they were asked to reflect on whether gaining that right could have a noticeable impact on their lives and sense of belonging. The answers are particularly interesting, in the sense that interviewees are nearly unanimous in stressing the link between the two elements (belonging and right to vote) and how voting is essential to foster a full sense of belonging to the community. Recurring terms associated with obtaining the right to vote are "pride", "right and duty", "honour", "being valued" and "collaboration", all of which highlight the symbolic value of voting, with its implications of formal inclusion in the polity, the possibility to express one’s opinion and confront others: simultaneously, there comes also a need to demonstrate to deserve the received citizenship, by fulfilling both the rights and the duties that that entails, including the expectation of participating and actively getting interested in the political life of the community.

Less than a handful of interviewees have expressed doubts over this link: one of the three interviewees who are in disagreement with the general consensus, Julia,
who has not naturalised yet, acknowledges the importance of voting and that she could at least contribute by expressing her opinion, but already feels very close to the community. Christelle, on the other hand, mentions her general lack of interest in politics as the main reason for decoupling sense of belonging from the right to vote, which, in her opinion, is not instrumental and is, instead, often not given any significant value to by the other migrants, if not in an initial, "euphoric", and even vain display of citizenship. Given her mistrust of politicians, lack of interest in politics and the choice to abstain in electoral consultations, it does not come as a surprise that she does not interpret voting rights as a contributing element to sense of belonging.

The case of Ibrahima is, however, more complex and worth a deeper analysis. Ibrahima, who is already a naturalised Italian citizen, expresses a deep scepticism towards the perceived connection between the right to vote and sense of belonging. He says that the main obstacle in this sense is the "politics in Italy [...], the big institutions, both political and not" that have failed to answer to the needs of the migrant communities and to help including them in society: "we don’t see enough of our representation", he adds. The preoccupation expressed by Ibrahima demarcates an element of active exclusion on behalf of the ethnically Italian institutions towards the country’s minorities, something that can be considered acting as a barrier in the process of belonging-building. Indeed, the closedness of a society’s political structure, designed to exclude non-citizens from participation, can discourage people from fully feeling attached to a place (as expressed in Chapter 6 and in the Section 4.1.3).

However, Ibrahima’s input sheds an interesting light on the theme of political participation among migrants and the local sphere assumes here a particular relevance: living in a small town outside of the main centre of Brescia, Ibrahima talks about the role of the town’s migrant community in campaigning to get re-elected the outgoing progressive mayor and councillors in the last municipal elections. Having experienced five years with a cooperative administration, described as sensitive towards and supportive of the migrant communities on the territory, migrants in the town organised themselves to
"fight the campaign together [the outgoing councillors], because [...] we feel like we, as citizens, are a part of the town, and so we feel the duty to campaign for the good side".

This is an important finding, supporting the idea that, despite the political and discursive exclusion of migrants from the country of origin’s political structures, these minorities can feel that they belong to the community regardless. Not only, but by exercising their agency, they are able to mobilise the vote and campaign (which clearly is not dependent from the citizenship status of the individual) in order to help determining the best possible political outcome, to safeguard their present and future status of residents and/or minority background citizens: a renewed and continuous dialogue with political institutions willing to listen to and to include, the migrant communities, within the restrictions of the law, can, in turn, strengthen the migrants’ sense of attachment to the place, furthering a sense of ownership of and contribution to the local political discourse.

7.4 Exclusion from suffrage: implications for belonging?

When asked to reflect on their personal feelings about the exclusion from the participation in the Italian elections, the interviewees expressed reactions that can be broadly classified in three different groups: neutrality, frustration and sadness. It is worth reminding at this point that the question was worded differently for the interviewees that had already naturalised at the time of the interview: they were asked in fact to reflect back to the time when they were residing in Italy without the right to vote.

In regard to the first reaction, "neutrality", it can be argued to be the reaction the fewest interviewees expressed. In fact, there were only two people articulating a more or less open support for their exclusion from voting. They justified it with the opinion that it is necessary to protect the workings of a well-functioning democracy from the external influence of foreign people, and that it is right that one has to become a citizen of the country before gaining any right to vote.
"If one is not a citizen of a country, they mustn’t get interested in the political or internal matters of the country. There are many other ways they can use... where this person can intervene, but not in the matters that pertain not their own country. So I am totally opposite to this fact. I say: do you want to vote? Do you want to stand as a candidate? First you become citizen of this country. When you feel ready, then you go" (Christelle).

The only common demographic trait separating the two interviewees from the rest of the sample is their country of origin, Côte d’Ivoire: both interviewees have in fact experiences of the country’s past two civil wars (2002-2007; 2010-2011) and the political and social tensions that have characterised the country’s past two decades. While it is beyond the scope of the thesis to analyse the Ivorian conflicts, the respondents mention the meddling of the Burkinabe ethnic groups in the North of the country with the internal affairs of Ivorian politics as one of the main reasons for the following conflicts. The past personal experience here plays a decisive role in the development of a personal, political stance on the issue of suffrage, equating the concepts of "citizenship" and "loyalty", hence the justification for the implementation of an exclusive suffrage and the acceptance of being excluded from the democratic processes in a foreign country.

The second recurring theme in this section is what can be categorised as "frustration". Many interviewees have expressed their desire and willingness to participate actively in the democratic structures of the locality, but they are faced with the impossibility to take part due to the lack of Italian citizenship. Given the long time needed to wait to begin the naturalisation process, many of the interviewees have developed a strong sense of attachment to the city of Brescia, yet are unable to directly have a say in how the city and the locality is governed, as Klajdi puts it:

"Rightly it doesn’t mean that "you can’t participate all the way", because no one stops you from having a conversation at the bar when you drink a coffee, you express a political thought, a social or economic opinion on the different problems the country has. But it stays there,
it's always informal: formally an extra-comunitarian citizen doesn't feel integrated from that perspective when they "participate". [...] In my opinion we must adequate to the other European countries that allow also the right to vote to extra-comunitarian citizens, at least for the municipal elections, those who have a residence permit, that have more than five years [of residence]. Because really, you give him the possibility, you make him feel like belonging to that community".

This is considered as a really unnecessary and incomprehensible barrier by many of the interviewees, who see themselves as fully contributing members of the community (by paying taxes, utilising public services, sending children to local schools, participating in the public life of the community): in fact they interpret this barrier as artificial and unfair, advocating instead a structural change in the suffrage law which would enable their access to the political system, at the local level at least. After expressing their frustration about the inability to vote, there emerge different feelings and opinions on how open the suffrage should be.

Interestingly, many of the interviewees were sceptical about the relative openness of the Norwegian system, which allows local voting to non-nationals after three years of permanent residence, citing that three years may be too little time to properly understand the political system or to develop a certain degree of belonging to the locality to reach the maturity needed to actively participate in local politics. Other interviewees may be in disagreement with the above-mentioned perceived short-comings of a three-year residence requirement, stating that three, five or ten years make little difference if the person is unwilling to be politically engaged, and that, referring to the decreasing participation rates, there are also many national citizens whose right to vote means nothing. One of the suggested solutions to overcome this issue is to let non-citizens residents undertake some form of test to demonstrate their knowledge of the Italian language, society, culture and of the political system, overcoming hence the issue of being disenfranchised, while avoiding the extension of a right for all, even to those who are unwilling to exercise it.
The third category of emotive reactions stemming from the lack of voting right is "sadness". For example, it is particularly poignant the way Abdoulaye describes his feelings when accompanying his Italian friend to the polling station on voting days. He talks of a deep sadness knowing and seeing so concretely what it means to be excluded by the polity, with the polling station itself being a visible sign, border, symbol of the system allowing people "in" or keeping them "out":

"I feel a little... I feel a little sick, because I say "You can see that here is not my country", I say it... [...] But here, I'm not in the electoral campaign, in the consultations I can't vote, so it can be seen immediately that at a higher level I am out of the field, out of the country, out of society. And this hurts. Having the possibility to express yourself, there the thing is different, you’re not longer excluded, you are in and can defend your opinion, in the association, in society. You are in the society up to a point, after which you’re not any longer: that is our difficulty as immigrants".

Without necessarily being so descriptive in their accounts, many other interviewees feel a sense of emptiness, or tangible exclusion from the rest of the polity exactly on polling days, a stark reminder that their opinion is shut out from the everyday political discourse: in some instances this is also considered as a form of discrimination, or of state-sanctioned differential treatment of people. It must be however pointed out that this instance of disempowerment is not simply accepted passively by migrants, but it is often processed and reworked into powerful and meaningful forms of political organising, both inside existing formal political structures and outside of them, as it was explained in Chapter 6.

7.5 Summary

The aim of the last chapter of the Analysis section was to bridge the discussions on political participation and sense of belonging by highlighting how the two are dependent on each other. Sense of belonging directly impacts participation in formal and informal political spaces, while, simultaneously, being directly influenced
by how politically involved migrants are. The way this dynamic is played out is exemplary: the relation to the city of Brescia is constantly in evolution, being (re)produced daily by small and mundane acts that reinforce attachment and belonging. This results in a process of realisation that, in order to enact progressive change and improve one’s own and the community’s quality of life, it is necessary to directly get involved politically in the polity. This circular motion fits with the model proposed in Section 4.3.4, with sense of belonging, political participation and political and social change being in constant communication with each other.

One of the concretisations of the link between political participation and sense of belonging is naturalisation: in fact this act is considered as an enabler of both political participation and sense of belonging. On the one hand it is viewed as the culmination, or the missing step, of the process of identity and belonging formation, while, on the other hand, it can constitute a moment from when migrants feel encouraged and legitimated to become politically interested: it is important to stress again that with citizenship comes also the right to vote.

Eventually, the link between the right to vote and sense of belonging is articulated in two ways: it is nearly unanimously argued that voting is essential for the fostering of a sense of belonging to the community, with only a few exceptions expressing their scepticism, mainly due to either the understanding of themselves as being already full members of the polity, or a general distrust of politicians and politics. The exclusion from suffrage is also generally strongly felt: the idea of being excluded from participating in the process of direct decision-making in the polity generates frustration and sadness among migrants who see themselves as fully contributing members of the polity and quite clearly experience the exclusion from the rest of society on polling days, when they are unable to cast the vote on who will be in charge of leading the community.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

The thesis has analysed and discussed how sense of belonging and political participation are interrelated and influence each other among migrants’ daily experiences in Brescia, Italy. The research I conducted was based on qualitative methods, with interviews conducted with 26 migrants resident in the city of Brescia and its surrounding towns between July and August 2018. Two additional interviews completed the dataset: the first one was with a high-profile politician in Brescia about additional information on the city and its recent history of immigration, while the second one was with a cultural mediator in Brescia specifically to gather information about the role of the cultural mediator.

8.1 Answering the research questions

In this thesis I have answered three research questions. Anchored in the interview structure, the three research questions sought to: analyse the ways migrants understand and make sense of their belonging; which character political participation assumes, both theoretically and concretely, among the migrant community in Brescia; and, lastly, what the implications of this complex, multi-directional and inextricable interrelatedness are.

The first question I dealt with was:

How do migrants in Brescia articulate their sense of belonging?
As discussed in the Theory chapter, sense of belonging is governed by a variety of factors and complex personal and social networks, that allow the individual to develop their attachment to one place or, indeed, many places. Belonging is in fact determined by material and geographical elements, as well as emotional and affective elements (Wood and Waite, 2011). The process of becoming attached to a geographical place matures as a result of a twofold movement: on the one side the individual’s self-identification as a member of a community and, on the other side, the community’s acknowledgement and acceptance of the individual’s identity (Erdal, Doeland and Tellander, 2018; Antonsich, 2010).

Day-to-day routines in which the migrant acts alone or with friends and family have repercussions on the fostering of an emotive development, often translated into belonging. Yet, it is necessary to also consider the effect of the political and discursive environment against which sense of belonging operates. This is in line with Antonsich’s (2010) theorisation of belonging as made up of intrinsically personal and political dimensions, which cannot and ought not to be kept separate when analysing and discussing belonging. The fact that migrants perceive ongoing discrimination and that there is a not-so-infrequent tendency among migrants to feel excluded from the Brescia’s (and Italy’s) political life and to be discriminated against, may suggest an insurmountable barrier to belonging. Indeed, this is true for some migrants who do not fully recognise themselves as belonging to Brescia as a result of this, but others do not consider the exclusion from the political life of the city as a hindrance to their sense of belonging; other factors are in fact valued by migrants to be responsible for their attachment to the city.

Importantly, the geographical connotations of belonging came to prominence in this research: belonging is in fact placed by migrants on a spectrum that goes from only Brescia to only their country of origin, including multiple belongings. One of the most important findings is that there is no zero-sum when it comes to belonging, with attachment to a multiplicity of places existing at the same time.

The second research question,
What does political participation mean for migrants and how do they enact those meanings?

gave me the possibility to discuss the forms of political participation (both formal and informal) that migrants actively take part in in Brescia. As Martiniello (2007) suggests, the legal and political structures of the nation-state determine the extent and type of political participation enacted by migrants. However, it is also argued that migrants can and do utilise their agency to overcome the institutional barriers and shortcomings (Erdal, 2014): regardless of whether migrants participate in the formal or the informal level, political and social change is created, as amply exemplified by the research case study.

The reason for which migrants get involved in Brescia is because of a personal desire both to help other migrants that may be currently experiencing the same difficulties and barriers that they, older migrants, have faced before and to try to resolve pressing issues affecting the community and their quality of life. Interestingly this desire is often translated into a sense of duty, both to be active and to help the others. This desire to help and to directly get involved is concretised in mainly two forms, which are themselves not mutually exclusive but are in constant communication instead: formal and informal politics.

Within the realm of formal political participation, I defined voting, membership of political parties and candidatures in local elections: crucially, all the interviewees, regardless of their demographics, understood and valued the right and the duty to vote, even those who make the conscious decision of not voting because of their distrust in the political system. The presence of a considerable number of candidates with a migrant background in the two rounds of elections in Brescia in 2018 demonstrates the migrants’ willingness to participate in the polity, while, in the case of the neighbourhood elections, the relative openness of the local political structures to include residents who may be otherwise excluded from direct participation, given the restrictive Italian suffrage.

In regard to informal political participation, I focused on migrant associations
and organisations and activism in trade unions. Many of the associations were founded exactly to overcome common issues and problems affecting specific migrant communities (e.g. the need to repatriate the dead) or the need to socialise with fellow country-people. Likewise, activism in trade unions began as a result of the need to overcome injustices and unfair treatments in the workplaces. In each of these instances, political and social change has been implemented more or less directly, as the complex history of the migrant movement in the city of Brescia is a testimony of. Not only has change been implemented at the local level, but repercussions have been felt also at the national level and even across-borders, as the migrants have utilised the territory of Brescia to mobilise the diasporas around issues affecting their countries of origin.

The third question thus brought the first two questions together and asked

**What are the implications of the relationships between sense of belonging and political participation?**

It can be argued that sense of belonging and political participation really depend on each other and that such interrelationships are neither unidirectional (from one element to the other), nor causal. The links are in fact governed by legal and everyday dimensions (Staeheli et al.’s "ordinary"). Rather, these interrelationships are the result of a process of reworking and sense-making that the migrant goes through in order to define their belonging to the community (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Therefore, in a circular fashion, sense of belonging enables political participation (both at the formal and at the informal level), which produces political and social change: this can have repercussions for the ways in which sense of belonging develops and is strengthened among migrants. Simultaneously, the opposite process is equally true: sense of belonging may as well be enabled by socially and politically transformative political participation (whether at the formal or the informal level, or both).

A concrete example of the duality of this motion is provided by the process of naturalisation: in fact it is seen by some migrants to be a means to finally enact their political participation in the official sphere of politics, as it is only naturalisation
that gives full voting rights in Italy. Other migrants see naturalisation instead as a means to set in motion the process of becoming politically interested and aware. Eventually, it can be said that political participation is broadly considered vital for the development of sense of belonging, and that the prolonged exclusion from direct political participation bears negative connotations among migrants who are confronted with their "otherness" on a daily basis. Social and political change may be implemented regardless, with the aim of transcending these social and political barriers.

8.2 Concluding remarks and the wider context

This thesis represents one case and, given the nature of the research, cannot be said to be generalisable and applicable to all contexts. Indeed, the case study focused on a political and social reality (Brescia) characterised by a relative closedness, in which migrants often struggle to negotiate and assert their belonging, identities and political participation. A relatively similar study could be conducted either in another place in Italy, where the overarching nation-state structures are the same, but the local dynamics may be different, or in another country where, oppositely, a more open political structure inclusive (to a certain degree) of migrants may be in place. The possibility for a further study is to then compare what the differences and similarities may be and where they are generated from. Nevertheless, this is an important contribution to the study of current migration in Western Europe. With this research that gives a direct voice to migrants, I hope to advance academic knowledge and an informed debate on the migrant condition today, helping to isolate problems and identifying possible solutions.

This thesis constitute a contribution to the field of political geography which interrogates itself on the links directing the relationships between migration, political participation and belonging, which are all deeply geographical concepts. In particular, the idea of including in one study different forms of political participation (hence avoiding to impose an artificial barrier between big-P and small-p politics) has allowed me to shed a light on the multitude of ways migrants live, experience, interpret and (re)produce their existences and what the implications are for po-
political and social change in the polity. In essence, sense of belonging and political participation are indissociable: their interconnectedness allows the political, social and cultural context of a community to evolve and to mutate over time.
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Appendix A

The interview guide (English)

Interview guide

1. Relationship to Brescia

- What area/neighbourhood of the city do you live in? How would you describe your neighbourhood from the ethnic diversity and multiculturality perspective?
- Are you a member of social, cultural or national organisations or associations? (They could also be groups on social media).
- Do you feel like you belong to a community? (It can be the neighbourhood, Brescia, Italy, your city or country of origin, your other fellow nationals...).
- Do you perceive Brescia to be a good city for immigrants?
- What’s your job? How was your experience in getting it?

2. Political participation:

- Political past: have you ever voted in the past? Why/why not?
- Would you vote for the municipal elections in Brescia if you had the right?
- Would you consider the possibility of voting for a political party that specifically answers the pleas of the migrants in the city?
• Do you take part in other forms of decision-making or public consultations? For example: housing committees, neighbourhood councils, school meetings, NGOs...

• What type of media do you follow on TV, internet, radio to keep you updated with current affairs? They could be both in Italian or in other languages, based in Italy or abroad, or in your country of origin.

• What does it mean for you to be able to vote in local elections?

• If you were mayor for a day and could make any decision you wanted, what would you do to make the city more inclusive and friendly?

• If you had the possibility of participating in formal democratic consultations, do you think that your sense of belonging here in Brescia would increase?

3. Personal information:

• Gender

• Age

• Migrant status

• Level of education

• How many people live in your property?

• Are they family?

• What nationality are they?

• Religious affiliation

• Are you a member of a trade union?

• Permanence in Brescia: how long have you been here?

• Have you been in other Italian cities? In other countries?

• Did you arrive alone or with other members of your family?

• Have you got other family members that live in Brescia? In other Italian cities? In other countries?
4. Final question 1: Are you considering or planning to move from Brescia in the future to go to another city or country or to come back to your country of origin? Why/why not?

5. Final question 2: some people say that when they become "citizens" (also Italians who turn 18), they become more active and prone to get interested in the political life of their community and go to vote: do you think this is applicable to you too?

6. Extra questions for organisations’ representatives:

   - How long has the association existed for?
   - How did it come to be?
   - What kind of activities does it offer to its members?
   - What relationship is there with other migrant organisations? And with other organisations of the same nationality?
   - What are the relationships with the local authorities?
   - Do you cooperate with other institutions in the city? For example: Diocese, trade unions, Islamic Centre, NGOs...
   - What is your impression on the level of acceptance and support of your community among Italian citizens?
Appendix B

The interview guide (Italian)

Guida per l’intervista

1. Relazione con Brescia:
   
   • In che area/quartiere della città vivi? Come descriveresti il tuo quartiere dal punto di vista della diversità etnica e multiculturalità?
   
   • Sei membro di una qualche associazione o organizzazione culturale, sociale e/o nazionale? Queste possono anche essere semplicemente gruppi su social media.
   
   • Ti senti di appartenere ad una comunità? Può essere quella del tuo quartiere, di Brescia, dell’Italia, della tua città o del tuo Paese d’origine, dei tuoi connazionali a Brescia, ecc...
   
   • Hai la sensazione che Brescia sia una buona città per gli immigrati?
   
   • Che lavoro fai? Qual è stata la tua esperienza nell’ottenerelo?

2. Partecipazione politica:

   • Passato politico: hai mai votato nel passato? Perché/perché no?
   
   • Voteresti per le elezioni amministrative a Brescia se ne avessi il diritto?
   
   • Considereresti la possibilità di votare per un partito politico che risponda specificamente alle istanze dei migranti della città?
• Partecipi in altre forme di processi decisionali o consultazioni pubbliche? Per esempio: riunioni di condominio, di quartiere, riunioni scolastiche, riunioni di ONG, ecc...
• Che tipo di siti d’informazione segui in tv o su internet o alla radio per mantenerti aggiornato/a con l’attualità? Possono essere sia in italiano che in altre lingue, con sede in Italia o all’estero, o nel tuo Paese d’origine.
• Che significato ha per te l’opportunità di votare in elezioni locali?
• Se fossi sindaco per un giorno e potessi prendere qualsiasi decisione volessi, che cosa faresti per rendere la città più inclusiva e amichevole?
• Se avessi la possibilità di partecipare in consultazioni democratiche formali, pensi che il tuo senso di appartenenza qui a Brescia aumenterebbe?

3. Informazioni personali:
• Genere
• Età
• Status di immigrato
• Livello di istruzione
• Quante persone vivono nella tua proprietà?
• Sono famigliari?
• Di che nazionalità sono?
• Permanenza a Brescia: da quanto sei qua?
• Sei stato/a in altre città in Italia? In altri Paesi?
• Sei arrivato/a da solo o con altri membri della tua famiglia?
• Hai altri membri della tua famiglia che vivono a Brescia o in altre città o in altri Paesi?

4. Domanda finale 1: Stai considerando o pianificando di trasferirti da Brescia nel futuro per andare in un’altra città o in un altro Paese o per tornare nel tuo Paese d’origine? Perché/perché no?
5. Domanda finale 2: Alcune persone dicono che nel momento in cui diventano “cittadini” (anche italiani al compimento del 18º compleanno), diventano più attivi e propensi ad interessarsi della vita politica della propria comunità e a votare: pensi che questo sia applicabile anche per te?

6. Domande extra per rappresentanti di organizzazioni:

- Da quanto tempo esiste l’organizzazione?
- Come è venuta a crearsi?
- Che tipo di attività offre l’organizzazione ai suoi membri?
- Che relazione c’è con le altre organizzazioni di immigrati? E con altre organizzazioni di migranti della stessa nazionalità?
- Quali sono le relazioni con le autorità locali?
- Cooperate con altre istituzioni in città? Per esempio: Diocesi, sindacati, Centro Culturale Islamico, ONG?
- Qual è la tua impressione del livello di accoglienza e supporto nei confronti della vostra comunità tra i cittadini italiani?
Appendix C

The consent form (English)

Request to participate in research project

Davide Bertelli

Universitetet i Oslo - University of Oslo

"Does the right to vote in the local election help the process of integration among migrant communities?"

Background and scope

This research is part of the work of Davide Bertelli’s master thesis, student of Human Geography at the University of Oslo (Norway), written in cooperation with PRIO (Peace Research Institute in Oslo).

The research will evaluate the different level of openness of two contrasting political systems (Norway and Italy) and how this difference has repercussions on the level of political participation among migrant groups. In Norway, non-national residents (regardless of passport) have the right to vote in local elections after three years of continuous residence. In Italy, non-national resident do not have this right if they are non-EU nationals; EU resident have instead a limited access. Does the impossibility to participate formally in the democratic structures of their commune have an effect on the sense of belonging of the individual migrant in the
country of migration? To what extent do they participate in informal political structures? The analysis will focus on the presence of a link between the ability to participate in local elections and a higher sense of belonging in the receiving community; or if the inability to participate in local elections hinders the development of sense of belonging. The studies groups will be migrant residents in Oslo and Brescia.

The person selected to participate in the study answers directly to characteristics that qualify them to the research (age, nationality, education, occupation). To the selected person it will be asked to describe their personal experiences, feelings and opinions on the theme of political participation and sense of belonging.

What does the participation in the study imply?
The research data will be collected via individual interviews. The participation implies in-depth and private interviews of the duration of around one hour. The questions will touch upon the following themes: personal experiences of political participation in the country of origin; feeling of belonging and attachment to the city of residence; personal opinions on what the barriers impeding political participation are; if the impossibility to vote can hinder political interest, participation and organisation. Another theme that will be discussed is if the experience of informal political participation (e.g. neighbourhood and housing associations, school meetings, NGOs and non-profit organisations) can enhance and strengthen the feeling of belonging to the individual’s community.

In the interview the researcher will also ask for the interviewee’s personal information, like: country of origin; length of stay in Italy; past political participation. If the interviewee gives their consent, the interview will be recorded with an audio recorder. Hand-written notes will be taken simultaneously. In the interviewee withdraws their consent about the recording of the interviewee, the recording will be interrupted and hand-written notes will be taken. If the interviewee withdraws their consent from the interview, the interview will then stop and the data will be anonymised in the research.

What happens to to all the information and data?
All the personal data will be treated confidentially and anonymously. Only the researcher (Davide Bertelli) and the two thesis supervisors will have access to the personal data. The data will be treated with safety: no name will be made public. Recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be protected and destroyed upon the thesis handing in. The participant will not be recognisable in the publication.

The project is forecast to be completed in June 2019.

Voluntary participation
Participation in the study is strictly voluntary. At any moment the interviewee can withdraw their consent and can ask not to answer certain questions. If the interviewee decides to withdraw their consent, all the data will be destroyed. If the interviewee wants to participate but has extra questions, they can contact: Davide Bertelli ([phone number]) (student researcher); Kristian Stokke ([phone number]) (supervisor 1); and Marta Bivand Erdal ([phone number]) (supervisor 2). The research has been approved by the NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Consent for the participation to the study: I have received information about the project and I declare my consent to participate in the study.
(Signature of the participant, date, place).
Appendix D

The consent form (Italian)

Richiesta di partecipazione in progetto di ricerca

Davide Bertelli

Universitetet i Oslo – Università di Oslo

“Il diritto di voto nelle elezioni locali aiuta il processo di integrazione delle comunità di immigrati?”

Background e scopo

Questa ricerca è parte del lavoro della tesi magistrale di Davide Bertelli, studente di Geografia Sociale presso l’Università di Oslo (Norvegia), scritta in cooperazione con PRIO (Peace Research Institute in Oslo).

La ricerca valuterà il diverso livello di apertura di due sistemi politici contrastanti (Norvegia e Italia) e come questa differenza ha ripercussioni sul livello di partecipazione politica tra gruppi di migranti. In Norvegia, residenti non nazionali (a prescindere dal passaporto) hanno il diritto di voto nelle elezioni amministrative dopo tre anni di residenza continua. In Italia, i residenti non nazionali non hanno questo diritto se di nazionalità extra EU; i residenti EU hanno invece accesso limitato. L’impossibilità di partecipare formalmente nelle strutture democratiche del proprio comune ha un effetto sul livello di appartenenza dell’individuo migrante.

La persona selezionata per prendere parte allo studio risponde a determinate caratteristiche che lo/la/l* rendono adatto/a/* alla ricerca (età, nazionalità, educazione, occupazione). Alla persona selezionata verrà chiesto di descrivere le proprie esperienze personali, sensazioni e opinioni circa il tema della partecipazione politica e senso di appartenenza.

**Che cosa implica la partecipazione allo studio?**
I dati della ricerca verranno raccolti tramite interviste individuali. La partecipazione prevede interviste approfondite e private della durata di circa un’ora. Le domande toccheranno i seguenti temi: esperienze personali di partecipazione politica nel Paese d’origine; sentimento di appartenenza e attaccamento alla città di residenza; opinioni personali su quali siano le barriere che impediscono la partecipazione politica; se l’im possibilità di votare può prevenire interesse, partecipazione e organizzazione politica. Un altro argomento che verrà discusso è se l’esperienza di partecipazione politica informale (per esempio: associazioni di quartiere e condominio, riunioni scolastiche, ONG e ONLUS) può aumentare e rinforzare il senso di appartenenza nella comunità dell’individuo.

Nell’intervista, il ricercatore chiederà anche informazioni personali dell’intervistato, quali: Paese d’origine; durata della permanenza in Italia; passata partecipazione politica. *Se l’intervistato/a/* fornisce il suo assenso, l’intervista sarà registrata con un registratore audio. Note a mano verranno prese simultaneamente. Se l’intervistato/a/* ritira il proprio consenso riguardo la registrazione dell’intervista, la registrazione sarà interrotta e note a mano verranno prese. Se l’intervistato/a/* ritira il proprio consenso dall’intervista, allora l’intervista finirà e i dati saranno anonimizzati nella ricerca.
Cosa succede a tutte le informazioni e i dati?
Tutti i dati personali verranno trattati confidenzialmente e in anonimo. Solo il ricercatore (Davide Bertelli) e i due supervisori della tesi avranno accesso ai dati personali. I dati personali verranno trattati in sicurezza: nessun nome verrà reso pubblico. Registrazioni e trascritti delle interviste saranno protetti e distrutti alla consegna della tesi. Il partecipante non sarà riconoscibile nella pubblicazione.
Il progetto è in previsione di completamento in giugno 2019.

Partecipazione volontaria
La partecipazione allo studio è prettamente volontaria. A qualsiasi momento l’intervistato/a/* può ritirare il proprio consenso e/o può chiedere di non rispondere a certe domande. Se l’intervistato/a/* decide di ritirare il proprio consenso, tutti i dati verranno distrutti.
Se l’intervistato/a/* ha intenzione di partecipare ma ha domande supplementari, può contattare: Davide Bertelli ([numero di telefono]) (studente ricercatore); Kristian Stokke ([numero di telefono]) (relatore 1); Marta Bivand Erdal (numero di telefono) (relatore 2). La ricerca è stata approvata da NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data.
Assenso per la partecipazione allo studio: Ho ricevuto informazioni circa il progetto e dichiaro il mio assenso per la partecipazione allo studio.

(Firma del partecipante, data, luogo).