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Special Dossier: Everyday practices of citizenship and identity among migrant descendants in Italy

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Abstract

This introductory piece makes the case for the need to advance our knowledge about migrant descendants' lived experiences and practices of citizenship through the example offered by Italy. Debates around citizenship, migrant descendants' identities and mobilisations have gained centre stage in the country in a period marked by increasing polarisation and racist discourses similar to those at the European level. The effects of these broader developments on the inclusion of migrant descendants require a closer examination of their political agency, which this special issue addresses through a collection of ethnographic studies regarding their identity narratives, everyday practices and acts of citizenship.

Keywords: *Migrant descendants; citizenship; identity; belonging; Italy*

Introduction

Since the start of the 2000s, a significant number of studies have investigated the level of inclusion among migrant descendants in major immigration countries in Europe. These studies have specifically focused on their labour market integration, educational attainment, political and civic participation and experiences of inclusion and exclusion, or yet questions of identity and belonging (among others Ahmad, 2020; Alanya et al., 2015; Alba and Foner, 2015; Crul et al., 2012; Crul et al., 2017; Frisina and Hawthorne, 2018; Martiniello, 2020; Schneider et al., 2022). Large-scale studies based on quantitative data have usually concerned the main North-Western countries of immigration. For instance, CILS4EU (Children of Immigrant Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries) was carried out in the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. Other studies have comprised more recent or smaller countries of immigration alongside the “traditional” ones such as the project “TIES, Integration of the European Second-Generation”, which compared quantitative data from fifteen cities across eight countries (Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and Switzerland).

Italy has been excluded from large-scale, comparative studies; only recently more attention has been directed towards the condition of migrant descendants in Southern European countries – see for instance the collection of articles curated by Gabrielli and Impicciatore (2022), which make use of different quantitative datasets to assess how migrant descendants are faring in Italy and Spain, considering three areas of interest (education, labour market, and well-being). Therefore, more empirical evidence from local and national contexts different

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than the ones that have traditionally been considered in the literature – such as the Italian one, is direly needed.

In fact, while Italy is a country of more recent immigration compared to others, the number of immigrants' children aged between 0-35 years has reached about 3 million (Riniolo, 2020) and native-born with immigrant parents quadrupled over the last decade (OECD/EU 2018). Hence, the country is now facing the challenge of a significant number of “second-generation” young adults who claim their rights and are engaged and interested in politics similarly to their native peers (Macaluso et al., 2020; Milan, 2022; Riniolo, 2019; Riniolo and Ortensi, 2021). Indeed, Italy has been the stage of variegated initiatives organised by young migrant descendants in recent years: between 2016 and 2018, many young migrant descendants drew significant attention in public debates as a consequence of their diversified mobilisations regarding the reform of the Italian citizenship law (Law n. 91 of 1992) (see Daher and Nicolosi in this special issue; for accounts of older mobilisations, see Zinn, 2011). These mobilisations spurred heated debates about these youths' status in society, bringing to the fore their feelings of belonging as well as their everyday participation in society, which also made them gain visibility in the artistic scene and in sports⁴, thereby offering further opportunities to discuss the place of migrant descendants in the Italian society.

Moreover, unlike other North-Western countries, where debates about migrant descendants' access to citizenship have taken place in previous decades, what makes the Italian case particularly worthy of analysing is that these discussions are occurring in more recent times, in a context that has become marked by increasing polarization and widespread racist discourses, which enabled far-right parties to gain traction everywhere across Europe – with the Italian case representing a prominent example in this regard. While Italy has traditionally been characterised by a closed Political Opportunity Structure⁵ regarding migrant political participation (Solano and Huddleston, 2020), the growing populist and xenophobic rhetoric that permeates its discursive space (Bulli, 2019; Chiaramonte et. al., 2018) arguably poses greater barriers for the inclusion of migrant descendants – both from the formal point of view of citizenship acquisition and from the symbolic point of view of their legitimation as fully-fledged members of the Italian society.

Yet, the changing nature of migrant descendants' claims and citizenship practices – especially in relation to such dramatic developments – has not been analysed to date. Hence, in light of the above-mentioned mobilisations and debates, and considering the context in which they occurred, it appears useful to examine in detail how the identity and belonging of Italian migrant descendants get constructed and negotiated, both through forms of political agency and of participation, and through the lived experience of citizenship in the realm of everyday practices and encounters. For so doing, the Italian case seems all the more relevant, as it represents a privileged point of departure for a broader understanding of how today's migrant

⁴ See, for example, the debate in Italian newspapers:

Grieco M. (2022) “I nuovi italiani senza cittadinanza che cambiano il volto dello sport”, *Espresso* (Italian weekly magazine), 26 September 2022, <https://espresso.repubblica.it/mondo/2022/09/26/news/nuovi_italiani_senza_cittadinanza_sport-367379501/> Mazzetti M. (2017) “Italiani come voi, siamo i rapper della seconda generazione e non vogliamo più sentirvi stranieri in patria”, *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (last accessed 17 February 2023). <<https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2017/10/20/italiani-come-voi-siamo-i-rapper-della-seconda-generazione-e-non-vogliamo-piu-sentirci-stranieri-in-patria/3925572/>> (last accessed: 17 February 2023).

⁵ When talking of closed political spaces, we draw from the theorisation of Political Opportunity Structure, POS (Koopmans et al., 2005; Morales and Guigni, 2011; for the origins of the concept, see Tilly, 1978).



descendants appropriate, practice and narrate their notions of citizenship, identity and belonging.

This Special Dossier

This special dossier provides fresh and critical insights into the everyday practices and experiences of citizenship and identity among young migrant descendants (18-35 years old), i.e. youth born or raised in their parents' country of immigration, Italy, and on their new ways of be(com)ing citizens. It offers up-to-date qualitative empirical evidence about their everyday acts, narratives, practices and claims-making relating to citizenship and to the construction of identities among young adults with migrant parentage. In particular, it analyses how citizenship is enacted by migrant descendants in their daily experiences in Italy and constructed in relationship to their negotiation of identities and multiple belongings in local, national and transnational contexts, all the while considering the intertwining aspects of these different levels (see Mitterhofer and Calabretta in this special dossier).

Indeed, rather than reducing citizenship either to a formal status or to formal practices, we approach citizenship as being constituted by individuals' acts (Isin and Nielsen, 2008) and lived experiences of belonging (Kallio et al., 2020) in order to better grasp the meanings attached to the category of citizenship, and their effects. In line with this, this special issue shows that citizenship practices can be either routinized or occasional social, political, cultural and symbolic acts through which migrant descendants situationally and relationally choose "where they belong". The contributions collected – all based on fieldwork conducted in Italy between 2017 and 2021 – showcase a great heterogeneity and diversity in lived experiences of citizenship, as migrant descendants express their political agency through fully-fledged demonstrations to claim citizenship rights (see Daher and Nicolosi in this special dossier), but also in and through a series of innovative narratives, everyday practices and alternative spaces beyond the very debate on the acquisition of citizenship (see Riniolo in this special dossier). Indeed, while the acquisition of citizenship represents a significant barrier in Italy, migrant descendants' fight for inclusion has developed broader arguments denouncing boundary-making practices based on "race", colour and gender (see Riniolo and Toivanen in this special dossier).

Overall, the present special issue aims to discuss the Italian case as an example of further changes occurring in the narratives and claims of migrant descendants and of minority youths more broadly, by illuminating more general tendencies and transformations in the lived experiences of citizenship and in the related claims among young migrant descendants and marginalised minorities across Europe. Simultaneously, this special issue intends to analyse a national context such as the Italian one without falling into the trap of methodological nationalism (see Riniolo and Toivanen in this special dossier), while considering the specificities of such setting and their bearings. The collected contributions consider the multi-scalarity of human experience (Çağlar and Glick Schiller, 2018) and the wider web of transnational linkages and mutual influences, which are intrinsically embedded in the everyday experiences and practices of citizenship and belonging. In fact, migrant descendants may embody "everyday transnationalism" in the form of daily experiences, ties and attachments that span beyond the country of residence. At the same time, their experiences of exclusion and disadvantage can be ingrained in the local level, for instance in segregated communities or in highly peculiar localities.

More specifically, papers in this special dossier contribute to answering the following questions:

- 1) How do migrant descendants enact their political agency in order to claim rights and in face of exclusion and discrimination? How do they do this in a context, such as the Italian one, characterised by a political space that is not open to migrants' claims-making?
- 2) How do specific local contexts shape the meanings attributed to citizenship and the way through which migrant descendants negotiate their identities and sense of belonging?
- 3) What is the relationship between transnational and multiple belongings of migrant descendants and their lived experiences of citizenship?

This special dossier contains altogether five contributions that focus on migrant descendants in Italy, and more specifically on 1) political and civic activism and political agency, 2) constructions of identity and belonging, and 3) lived experiences of citizenship in (trans)local, national and transnational contexts. The special issue – while enhancing the scientific knowledge on migrant descendants' practices of citizenship in Italy – offers conceptual and empirical tools to further stimulate the debate on citizenship, identity, and multiple belongings, even beyond the Italian case.

The special dossier starts with **Veronica Riniolo's** paper, titled *'Granted' and 'claimed' spaces of participation: the political activism of young migrant descendants*. In the paper, the author explores the political participation of young migrant descendants in Italy through the lens of spaces of participation. The conceptualisation, in terms of 'granted' and 'claimed' spaces, offers an effective analytical framework to capture the multiple manifestations of youth activism and their relationship with other stakeholders. Riniolo shows that processes of mobilisation from below ('claimed' spaces) strongly integrate with processes of top-down activation ('granted' spaces), highlighting that youth move with fluidity between different spaces in a pragmatic attempt to reach their overall objectives. She also interestingly points out that migrant descendant activists are not engaged only as 'children of immigrants' on issues exclusive to them, but as young generations actively involved in transversal issues.

The special dossier proceeds with **Johanna Mitterhofer's** paper, titled *Acts of belonging: Second generation youth in South Tyrol, Italy*. Mitterhofer studies citizenship beyond its manifestation as a formal legal status, and approaches it as a process which is shaped by second-generation members' everyday practices and experiences of belonging. Her study focuses specifically on migrants' descendants living in the autonomous province of South Tyrol in Northern Italy. Her case study allows her to delve deeper into ways in which actors considered to be at the margins of the state, negotiate belonging on the macro scale (the nation, the state) and the micro scale (the village, the city, the region). Hence, Mitterhofer's contribution aims at "decentring" citizenship by approaching it at, from and for the margins.

The following contribution is by **Andrea Calabretta**, titled *Young people with Tunisian origins living in Italy: A case of transnational lived citizenship?*. Calabretta's study focuses on how young people of Tunisian parentage residing in the province of Modena (North Italy) live their citizenship transnationally. His paper specifically questions their citizenship practices, whether their transnational ties translate into lived citizenship and what are the sites in which citizenship becomes practices. Based on qualitative interviews, the paper offers fresh insights into the role of transnational bonds in shaping the geographies and the contents of citizenship



practices among young people of migrant parentage. Calabretta's study contributes towards merging the transnational perspective with the lived citizenship approach, specifically concerning studies that tackle citizenship practices among migrants' descendants.

With a focus on migrant descendants' protests, the following contribution by **Liana Daher** and **Davide Nicolosi** interestingly describes the multifaceted associative and protest scenario in Italy through employing a descriptive-interpretative strategy of the 5W+1H model. The two authors highlight how the #ItalianiSenzaCittadinanza movement is a social movement of the present times. Daher and Nicolosi conclude that even if the transformation into social movement is still in progress, the different associative groups involved in #ItalianiSenzaCittadinanza movement represent themselves as a movement focusing on strategies and goals not only related to the change of the Italian citizenship law but proposing broader and long-term changes in culture and attitudes. This movement makes "acts of citizenship", aiming at reshaping from below relationships between social exclusion and inclusion, putting forward demands in a creative way.

The final paper in this special dossier is more theoretical in orientation. It is authored by **Veronica Riniolo** and **Mari Toivanen** and titled *Future paths in the study of migrant descendants and citizenship: Engaging with critical literature*. The authors draw from critical literature in migration and citizenship studies to reflect how research related to migrants' descendants, the "second generation", could potentially benefit from calls to "de-ethnicize" migration scholarships. The paper particularly discusses how such critical approaches allow problematising the inherent understanding of migrancy when discussing "citizenship" in relation to migrants' descendants, as well as how to problematise the research category "second generation". The paper suggests possible venues for future research and conceptualisation concerning citizenship and migrants' descendants.

As the contributions in this special dossier show, analysing the everyday practices of citizenship and identity among migrant descendants open possibilities to expand the broader theoretical understanding of the practices and narratives of citizenship and identity among young migrant descendants well beyond the Italian context.

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