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Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe

Evolving Conceptual and Policy Challenges

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Chapter 6
The Transnational Mobilization of 'Irregular Migrants'

Milena Chimienti and John Solomos

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores one facet of the experiences of 'irregular migrants'[1] in the contemporary conjuncture, namely the role of transnational movements as modes of mobilization by 'irregular migrants' that aim to help them gain access to rights and protection. In particular, we investigate why 'irregular migrants' take the risk to become public not only locally but, in the case discussed in this chapter, why they strive to mobilize beyond national borders. The chapter seeks to understand how they manage to mobilize at the transnational level despite their lack of resources and what additional costs such mobilization beyond borders represent. We use the case study of the International Coalition of Sans-Papiers and Migrants (hereafter IC SPM) and the specific event of the European March of Sans-papiers and Migrants that took place in 2012 in order to provide an empirical context for the arguments that are developed in the chapter as a whole.[2] This March followed several national

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[1] We use the terms 'irregular migration' or 'migrants' in quote marks to emphasize the social construction of their irregularity or their status as migrant, which changes according to the individual profile, the period of time, the definition of borders, the countries, and the individual interpretation of the representatives of authorities. We also want to stress in this way that, from a legal point of view, they are criminalized although it is only because they do not have a permit to stay.

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mobilisations and symbolized the passage to a transnational movement of irregular migrants, although in an ambivalent manner. On the one hand the activists involved in the March crossed different national borders and their claims addressed global issues. On the other hand, the majority of the participants came from one country (France) questioning therefore the transnational character of the movement.

The chapter argues that the move to a struggle beyond national borders took place at a time when the local/national mobilizations were becoming less significant, while at the same time the cause of the criminalization of migration was related to wider European policies. In this sense its organization, whilst important, seemed at that time more feasible and effective given the weakening of local/national movements.

We have organised the chapter in seven main parts. In the next part we discuss the wider context of 'irregular migration' and anti-migration politics. This allows us to situate the context in which the improbable mobilization by 'irregular migrants' can be explained. Then, we provide a literature review on transnational social movements in order to outline the main characteristics of transnational movements and raise the question of the extent to which this body of research is helpful in analysing the case of transmobilisation by irregular migrants. We then describe the methods and data we utilized in the research. The next three parts of the chapter besides the conclusion present the key empirical examples on which we draw. We start by discussing the origin of the transnational movement of irregular migrants and the 2012 March. Then, we examine the organization of this transnational movement by looking at the claims, the decision-making process, the participants, and the characteristics of its transnationalism. We then examine the forms that the movements of 'irregular migrants' took, interrogating the transnational characteristics of the movements. Finally, we discuss the impact of these mobilizations.

6.2   Situating 'Irregular Migrants'' Mobilization

'Irregular migration' is emblematic of the failure of migration policy, both in terms of controlling migration and its human consequences. In the past 20 years, a number of scholars have described and analysed the reasons for the failure of both nation-states and international human rights with regard to migration (Bolzman 1992; Chimienti 2018). As Stephen Castles has argued: "Only when the central objective shifts to one of reducing inequality will migration control become both successful and—eventually—superfluous" (2004: 224). In other words, "migration policies fail because they are about *migration*" instead of addressing the root causes, which are linked to globalized inequality and justice (Anderson 2017: 1528). In this sense the presence of 'irregular migrants' is triply subversive: with their presence and by working, they act "as if" they were "ordinary citizens" (Bassel 2015); as activists, through local or national protest they question the national structure; and through transnational mobilization, crossing national borders, they refuse to be defined and limited by the global social order.

In practice, it is not only the failure of migration policies that lay behind 'irregular migration' but also "the long-term political success of scapegoating migrants" (Anderson 2017: 1533). 'Irregular migration' is the result of neo-liberal economic policies that created both push factors leading to impoverishment in the Global South, and pull factors, increasing the demand for cheap and disposable workers in 'receiving' countries. However, at the same time, such policies can lead to demand being restricted only to those who are useful to the economy and to the rejection of those seen as 'unneeded' and 'unworthy' (Stoler 2017). Such policies are the consequence of the historical acceptance of global inequalities, imperialism, and exploitation in the Global South by the Global North. In other words, 'irregular migrants' symbolize the 'persistent epistemic violence' that silenced or subjected marginalized groups (Spivak 1988).

The anti-migration politics targeting the 'unworthy' highlights that it is not mobility per-se that is the problem, as some migrants are seen as 'mobile citizens' (Anderson 2017: 1535), but more a question of class, sometimes correlated (but not always) with race. It is the figure of the 'Eastern Europeans' who are depicted in the media as 'taking jobs' and 'undermining conditions' or as 'dealing drugs'; the 'Syrian Muslim who is seen as a potential terrorist'; and the 'Eritrean woman who is suspected of living her whole life on social assistance'.[3] In other words, categories such as 'migrants' (and indeed citizens) are a social construction based on historical, territorial and policy agendas.

In reaction to a context that became particularly repressive in the 1990s, local and national mobilization by 'irregular migrants' burst into the public view in the 2000s in some US and European cities (among others in Los Angeles, Paris, Turin, Brussels, Geneva). Local and national mobilization by 'irregular migrants' took place when their semi-inclusion was challenged and repressed[4] (see *inter alia* Ambrosini 2013b; Barron et al. 2011; Chimienti 2011; Laubenthal 2007; Montforte and Dufour 2011; Nicholls 2013; Siméant 1998). These local or national mobilisations took more or less extreme forms, from simple protests to occupations and hunger strikes, and managed in a few cases to a degree of longevity, such as in Paris the 'coordination sans papiers 75/CSP75' which started in 2002 and still organizes regular events.[5]

A few years ago, we explored whether such local and national mobilizations by 'irregular migrants' could make a difference (Chimienti 2011; Chimienti and Solomos 2011). In these previous papers we argued that the claims by 'irregular

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[3] See *inter alia* Mcqueeney 2012; Riecker 2014 As shown by *inter alia* Philo et al. (2013) and Poole (2002) the mass media have often been criticized for reproducing negative and simplistic representations of immigration.

[4] Mobilization by irregular migrants and their allies seemed to occur not only when there was a change from their relative tolerance to their repression (Iskander 2007; Laubenthal 2007; Milkman 2006), but also when there was a shared awareness among irregular migrants and structural opportunities. The absence of one or more of these conditions explains why mobilizations by irregular migrants did not occur in all European cities where they reside (Chimienti 2011).

[5] https://csp75.wordpress.com/ (last consulted 17 June 2018).

migrants' were essentially of an existential form—meaning that they were largely of an *immediate, instrumental, and individualistic* nature, such as demanding the right to stay and work in a given country. We argued that as long as they are in a situation of vulnerability, 'irregular migrants' will not be able to afford political and transformative claims and that their supporters need to attend to their basic needs or risk overshadowing their social suffering.

However, we also highlighted that the mere presence of 'migrants'—and even more so of 'irregular migrants'—is already subversive. As stated by Alessandro Monsutti (2018: 448), they "subvert the classical form of territoriality and distribution of wealth" (see also Balibar 2000, 2004; Isin 2008). We can explain this apparently non-revolutionary character by the concept of 'weak agency' (Chimienti 2009; Soulet 2004). This concept helps us to conceive forms of action that would not have been otherwise interpreted as agency. Thus, it allows us to understand that in situations of vulnerability, mobilizations will necessarily be at first instrumental and aimed for the personal good as one cannot afford—and does not have the resources—to aim to change the system as a whole. However, as Sara Ahmed argues, drawing on the work of Audre Lorde (2014) "caring for oneself" is "an act of self-preservation".[6] More forcefully, Patricia Hill Collins's work has illustrated that "survival is a form of resistance" (2000: 201). This line of analysis is taken a step further by Bassel and Emejulu, who argue that "survival strategies" are fundamental in order to build a sense of solidarity and resistance although they do not create a shift to "epistemic justice" (2017). In other words, whilst the local and national mobilizations by 'irregular migrants' "challenge the notion of citizenship", they lead at best to some regularizations and are not transformative in nature.

In this chapter we shall take this analysis forward by exploring the role of transnational modes of mobilization by 'irregular migrants'. We shall, in particular, explore the extent to which transnational mobilizations are aimed at broader transformative demands.

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[6] "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare (…) Sometimes, 'coping with' or 'getting by' or 'making do' might appear as a way of not attending to structural inequalities, as benefiting from a system by adapting to it, even if you are not privileged by that system, even if you are damaged by that system […] When you have less resources you might have to become more resourceful. Of course, the requirement to become more resourceful is part of the injustice of a system that distributes resources unequally. Of course, becoming resourceful is not system changing even if it can be life changing (although maybe, just maybe, a collective refusal to not exist can be system changing) […] Some have to look after themselves because they are not looked after: their being is not cared for, supported, protected" (Sara Ahmed 2014).

6.3 Defining Transnational Social Movements

Before moving on to the specific transnational mobilisations that are the main focus of this chapter, we want to briefly discuss the literature on transnational mobilization in order to outline some of the conceptual arguments that we shall draw on later. In particular we shall discuss some ways in which transnational mobilization has been defined, specifying what is meant by it and its main characteristics and highlighting the difference between transnational and national/local mobilisations. This overview will help us better understand the case of transnational mobilisations by 'irregular migrants'.

In Tarrow's (2001: 11) words, transnational social movements are "socially mobilized groups with constituents in at least two states, engaged in sustained contentious interaction with power holders in at least one state other than their own, or against an international institution, or a multinational economic actor". Whilst, until recently, the lens of analysis of social movements remained the nation-state, since the 1980s the literature on transnational or global social movements has expanded (see, *inter alia*, Boli and Thomas 1999; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Della Porta et al. 1999; Guidry et al. 2000; Però and Solomos 2010; Smith et al. 1997). However, as argued by Johanna Siméant (2010), this literature often overlooks the fact that transnational mobilization is not a recent phenomenon.[7]

The literature on transnational movements focused during its initial stage on NGOs (see Bennett 2005; Boli and Thomas 1999; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Smith et al. 1997). In contrast, the more recent literature describes transnational movements as "a loose network of activists, using new technologies of communication in a self-organized way and advocating for multiple issues and diverse aims and with an inclusive identity" (Bennett 2005; Siméant 2010: 9). This description characterizes the transnational nature of 'irregular migrants' mobilization which relies on new technologies of communication, has to be inclusive, and is necessarily more flexible in order to increase the number of participants as we shall show later.

Siméant (2010) also highlights the lack of clarification over the level of globalization or transnationalism: is it correlated to the profile of the protesters, the level of claims or the effects of mobilization, or does it entail all these aspects at the same time? As argued by Tarrow (2001) and Tilly (2004) we should distinguish between these different levels in order to understand the real characteristics of globalization or transnationalism in the movement and identify what is really new in these types of mobilization.[8] Although the 2012 March did not include an equivalent number of

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[7] This is illustrated, for instance, by the nineteenth-century labor movement (the *Internationale*) and, also the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), as well as by 'protypical transnational actors' such as Marx and Engels, by the movement against slavery, or by the women's suffrage movement, all of which occurred in the 1800s (Nimtz 2002).

[8] Tarrow (2001) suggests that four levels of globalization can be distinguished: the coalition of local mobilisations making global claims and seeking international support; the coalition of national or international activists who organize international protest events targeting international organizations; the coalition of international activists who mobilize against nation-states' violation of international norms; and activism within international organizations and the redaction of treaties.

participants from all countries, it fits with important characteristics of transnationalism which is at the core of the movement as we shall see later.

Finally, the protestors' or activists' reasons for mobilizing transnationally or implementing an international protest event are not necessarily based on a clear common agenda and values. Rather as Keck and Sikkink (1998) show it is often a blockage at the local or national level that leads them to find support at the international level in order to put pressure on the national government—what they call 'the boomerang effect'. These blockages can be material (e.g. lack of financial resources to continue the movement) or nonmaterial (lack of attention, legitimacy or media coverage). This is an important factor for 'irregular migrants' transnational mobilization, since they face several limitations at the local level. The 'transnational opportunities' and 'cross-national affinities' favour mobilization beyond nation-states, such as new communication technologies and international organizations (Giugni 1998), although the transnational character cannot be reduced to the globalization era (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005).

Besides these few specificities of transnational movements (which are described as more inclusive and more flexible than local movements), what is really different or new in transnational movements, according to Tarrow and McAdam, is the importance and strength of contentious action: "a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities" (2005: 331). For Tilly (2004) they are more professional, that is related to their internationalization,[9] and more often led by an elite with important human capital who might be disconnected from the movements' basic claims. For these reasons transnational movements developed according to Cohen and Rai (2000) a new repertoire of actions and forms of protest compared to the "national and autonomous" ones analysed by Tilly (2004). Their repertoire of actions would draw on "transnational and solidarist" repertoire of actions (Cohen and Rai 2000: 15).

By contrast, for Siméant (2010) transnational social movements have not led to a new repertoire of actions, which would imply a 'global repertoire', as national spaces have still a predominant political power. She argues that, whilst social movements can use some transnational 'shade' and might have occurred because they lack resources at the national level, their actions are not necessarily transnational but local and using a national repertoire of action to support their claims.

To what extent does the case of 'irregular migrants' mobilization fit with the wider scholarship on transnational social movements? In the rest of the chapter we will look in particular at the transnational nature of their specific mobilization, by exploring the extent to which it is more inclusive, flexible, and in a way stronger as it supposed to involve more and larger contentious actions, be more professional,

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[9] "To understand the internationalization of claimants and objects of claims, we must recognize two other aspects of internationalization: (a) proliferation of intermediaries specialized less in making claims of their own than in helping others coordinate claims at the international level, and (b) multiplication of lateral connections among group activists involved in making similar claims within their own territories" (Tilly 2004: 115).

and rely on a new repertoire of actions (Tarrow and McAdam 2005; Cohen and Rai 2000). We shall also explore the 'transnational opportunities' or rather the 'local blockages' which helped to trigger the 2012 March and the transnational coalition of irregular migrants and whether they still use the local context to sustain their struggle. Finally, we will explore the question of the extent to which the transnationalisation and putative professionalisation reinforce the claims and the longevity of the mobilizations.

6.4   Methods and Research Participants

The focus on a case study of a specific type of transnational mobilization resulted from our aim to situate this form of action within particular environments and contexts. Through previous research we had noticed that from the early 2000s onwards there were a number of attempts by 'irregular migrants' and their supporters to mobilize transnationally. One of the first transnational movements we identified was the 'No Border Network' which started in 1999. It was more a coalition between grassroots activists and organisations than a movement self-represented by 'migrants'. Its members met twice a year and worked otherwise by emails. According to the website, the network aimed to be "a tool for all groups and grassroot organizations who work on the questions of migrants and asylum seekers in order to struggle alongside with them for freedom of movement… It enables many grassroot groups, including out of Europe, to coordinate actions, to exchange information and to discuss about migrations and borders" (http://www.noborder.org/). The network stopped being active in 2004 but its website is still updated and local initiatives with the same label continue, such as the No Border UK (http://noborders.org.uk/). Yet, despite this history of efforts to mobilize transnationally there remains a gap in research that explores the forms and impact of transnational mobilizations by 'irregular migrants'.

It is in order to deal with this gap we have focused on the case of the International coalition of sans-papiers and migrants, which is still active, self-organised by '(irregular) migrants', and which provides a thorough documentation of the movement through a blog, social media, and its journal. We concentrate more specifically on the 2012 European March of sans-papiers and migrants that marks the origin of the IC SPM and symbolizes the transnational character of the coalition by crossing different national borders without authorizations.

The empirical material that informs this chapter is based on 20 interviews conducted between 2014 and 2015 with both 'irregular migrant' activists directly involved in the 2012 March (10 of them) and members of solidarity networks that have supported them (10). 'Irregular migrant' transnational activists were recruited through the website of the March's blog,[10] which indicated some of the participants

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[10] http://marche-europeenne-des-sans-papiers.blogspot.ch/ (last consulted, 17 June 2018).

by country and then by snowballing. We interviewed the activists indicated on the website and who seemed therefore to have played a more active role during the March in the respective country where they reside but might represent less the motivations of the basis of the mobilization. We chose those based in France, Italy, Switzerland, and Belgium.[11] France and Italy were obvious choices, as the mobilization started there and was documented mostly by activists from the two countries. Switzerland and Belgium were opportunistic choices as the research team was based there at that time in the first case and had personal contacts in the second. The interviews with activists based in Belgium were conducted via Skype. Media output by the movement, such as websites, blogs, flyers, pamphlets, calls for demonstrations, its Facebook account,[12] newspapers, and press releases, were also used for the analysis.

6.5   The Emergence of the International Coalition of Sans-Papiers and Migrants and Their March in Europe

The International Coalition of Sans-papiers and Migrants (hereafter IC SPM) follows an important history of local mobilization by 'irregular migrants' since the 1970s in Paris and in the 1990s and 2000s in some other European cities (as mentioned above). The IC SPM was launched together with the 2012 European March. The idea of a European March came from current and former 'irregular migrants' who were based in France (Paris) and Italy (Turin). The spokesperson for the IC SPM, which was created in 2011 with the aim of implementing a European march, is also the spokesperson for the *Coordination sans papiers 75* (CSP75) based in Paris.

Two main mobilizations, both of which took place in Paris, seem to have triggered the creation of the IC SMP and the launch of the 2012 European March. The first involved the occupation of the labour exchange (*bourse du travail*) and, after their expulsion, the occupation, in Rue Baudelique, of the premises of the health insurance company CPAM from May 2008 to August 2010 in a bid to push for the regularization of *sans-papiers*. The second mobilization was the march from Paris to Nice in 2010 in order to meet with around 40 heads of state from African countries during the France–Africa summit.

Both mobilizations led to a number of consequences. First, an action such as the occupation of the labour exchange and the CPAM in Rue Baudelique—which lasted 2 years—bore a heavy cost for the activists in terms of time and energy and probably also economically, with only limited results, whilst a march such as that which

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[11] The interviews were conducted in French and translated into English.

[12] https://www.facebook.com/CISPM-Coalition-Internationale-des-Sans-Papiers-et-Migrants-339882146184374/

took place between Paris and Nice might represent a less important cost yet have the equivalent or even greater effect. This may be related to the 'boomerang effect' analysed by Keck and Sikkink (1998), where the transnational level appears more accessible and more effective for mobilization.

Second, as more 'irregular-migrant' activists—as well as protesters related to different mobilizations, such as the anti-deportation protests (see Bader and Probst 2018; Ruedin et al. 2018)—joined the movement, the future leader and the spokesperson of the IC SPM (who were involved in both events and were part of CSP75) refined the claim more broadly, not only addressing the regularization of 'irregular migrants' but addressing the whole issue of the right to migrate and reside in a country. This included the whole trajectory from the countries of origin, of transit and of residence as, up until then, the issue had been fragmented, as illustrated by the specialization of some associations in defence of asylum-seekers and refugees and others on labour migrants whilst a third focused on the case of 'irregular migrants'. In so doing they intended to give one voice to the mobilization and to treat migrants' "claims according to the same logic of right to migrate". As explained by one of the leaders of the march and the spokesperson of the IC SPM in Turin (from Ivory Coast, but lives in Italy, an who obtained a permit of stay after the March):

> All this because, progressively, new people were joining the struggle and we felt this need… this need to re-target, to review the analysis, as we wanted to take on board everybody… this changed my views. I started to understand that whilst, for me, the issue of the struggle was to get a permit of stay… I then discovered that other issues are important (AS).

The fact that some of them spent time in different European countries and noticed the important and often similar difficulties faced by 'irregular migrants' in each country led them to think of a common mobilization. Third, this led them to broaden the target of their claims beyond national borders. Although the implementation of migration remains national, European regulations such as the Dublin Regulation and measures for control such as Eurodac and Frontex, are at the heart of the issues faced by 'irregular migrants'. Research has highlighted the responsibility of European policies for the increased criminalization of irregular migration (see *inter alia* Bloch and Chimienti 2011; Schuster 2011; Triandafyllidou 2010; and Delvino in this volume) and the arrangements made at the local level (Ambrosini 2013a; Spencer 2018). As mentioned by the spokesperson for the IC SPM and for the CSP75 (Malian origin, lives in Paris at the time of the interview and has a permit of stay since 2005), the roots of their problems are transnational, and therefore their claims and mobilizations have to be based at the equivalent level:

> As we know, all the directives are given at the European level although each state might still implement them as it wishes. So, to be as many, as visible, we need to do the same and take the struggle to the international level. (…) Everybody says that the smugglers are responsible [for the deaths] in the Mediterranean Sea, but nobody says that it is the responsibility of European policy, nobody says that this is the responsibility of French policy. (…) African countries should mention this (…) [a transnational mobilization] also helps to put pressure on African states (AnS).

Considering the global trajectory and responsibility and noticing that each amnesty or collective regularization was followed, to use the term of one of our interviewees, by a 'political vacuum', the leaders of the movements extended in this way their claim for the political denunciation of globalization and the capitalist system and targeted both countries of destination and the whole of Europe. They also broadened the historical analysis to a postcolonial denunciation, as the spokesperson of the IC SPM in Turin states:

> This struggle is not between the white and the black. This struggle is not between the migrant and the so-called European. This struggle is between the exploited and the exploiter (AS).

This might correspond to the 'transnational and solidarist' repertoire of actions analysed by Cohen and Rai (2000: 15) but at the same time this claim made by the leaders of the movement might not represent the voice of the mass of 'irregular migrants'.

The perspectives of the leaders of the movement have been shaped by experiences of struggle and mobilization, but also by common forms of intellectual formation. For instance, the spokesperson in Paris edits the e-journal *La Voix des Sans-Papiers*[13] that has existed since 2010 and the one in Turin has a Master's in Sociology and is currently a leader of the trade union *Union Sindicale di Base* (USB).[14] They both became public figures, regularly contacted by the media and visible online.[15] They met in 2002 when they participated in the Social Forum and have stayed in contact since then. They both obtained a permit of stay (in 2005 and just after the March). The same holds true for the spokespersons of the IC SPM in the other countries who participated to the 2012 European March, such as A. Ch—an ally and member of the association *NoBorder* based in Germany—or L. R, based in Switzerland. During the 2002 Social Forum they agreed on the importance of having a movement represented by the 'irregular migrants' themselves rather than only by their supporters, and they analysed their situation in relation to macro issues and global inequalities. Their long-term relationship, the network they created through their respective political engagement, and their human capital allowed for the implementation of transnational mobilization when the idea arose during the 2011 Social Forum after the Paris–Nice march and another in Dakar. Given their profiles, they represent more leadership roles rather than being spokespersons, and it remains unclear for us how their voice is representative of the rest of the movement.

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[13] http://lavoixdessanspapiers.eu.org/

[14] https://www.usb.it/

[15] See, for instance, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anzoumane_Sissoko

6.6   Doing Transnationalism: The Organization of the International Coalition of *Sans-Papiers* and Migrants and the 2012 March

The European March from June 2 to July 2, 2012, which marked the creation of the IC SPM, symbolizes transnationalism in several ways. The activists crossed six countries (France, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Switzerland) and nine borders.[16] Whilst the March was transnational, the geographical origin of the 128 participants of the entire March was less heterogeneous. There was a majority of 'irregular migrants' with a sub-Saharan African background, a minority from North African countries, one person from Haiti, one from Syria, and one with a Chinese background. The majority came from France and were then joined by other local 'irregular migrants' and supporters at each milestone. Only around five of these local protesters walked the entire route. In other words, the transnational character of the mobilization is more related to the target of their claims and the event that involved the passage of six countries rather than to the profile of the activists. Besides, the 'walker-activist irregular migrants' were almost all men, which shows that the coalition was based on a limited network of people with similar profiles. At each milestone they were joined by women, as well as by local protesters with more diverse profiles.

Each milestone was chosen according to the historical relationship between migration and each European country—particularly in terms of colonial history but also according to current restrictive European migration policy. In this way the choice was very symbolic and carried an important political message, which shows yet again the significant human capital of the March organizers. For instance, one of the first milestones was Verdun, where marchers were able to commemorate the involvement of soldiers originating from African countries—Malians, North Africans, Senegalese—who fought for France during the First World War and are often forgotten in historical commemorations. Whilst thousands of their ancestors died for France, current migrants from these countries are today considered illegal in France.

Another milestone in France was the town of Hénin-Beaumont, chosen because there was an increase in the number of people there voting for the *Front National* (the French extreme-right party) and because the city is close to the border with Belgium. From Hénin-Beaumont the marchers crossed the border and walked to Brussels, where they protested against European migration policy, focusing on a critique of Frontex and the Dublin Regulation, before proceeding to Schengen, where the Treaty of Maastricht was signed.

They also joined protest events occurring in the towns on other issues in order to strengthen theirs. One of the 'irregular migrants' who was part of the March put it this way:

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[16] Paris, Brussels, Liege, Maastricht, Luxembourg, Schengen, Florange, Jarny, Verdun, Metz, Mannheim, Heidelberg, Freiburg, Basel, Bern, Turin and Val di Sussa, Strasbourg.

(…) One of the leaders had explained to me that, in the end, one rallied to a cause ... all the causes that appeared to them unfair. Even if it had nothing to do with the right of the sans-papiers. In the end this movement joined ours too (E.M., Senegalese origin, lives in Paris at the time of the interview, obtained a permit of stay after the March).

This was the case, for instance, in Italy, where the March joined the movement against the TAV (the high-speed train) in Valle di Sussa. Each milestone was organized by local supporters, which gave direction to the March. Local protesters informed the local authorities about the March and asked for the necessary permissions. They were also responsible for advertising the event and mobilizing local activists to join it. The number of walker-protesters, added to local activists, created a more visible and audible mobilization. Marchers' recollections are full of emotion: shock, fear, moving moments, and laughs. As one interviewee recalls:

To see more than 600 people cross the border in Basel to get hundreds of *sans-papiers*. For me it was a shock. As there were some customs officers who looked at us as if we were pariahs, we said 'Hello' – *laughs* (CT,.Western African origin, lives in Milan, without permit of stay at the time of the interview)

As argued by Siméant (2010), transnational social movements by 'irregular migrants' are embedded in national spaces and use national repertoires of action to support their claims. However, embodying the right to mobility by crossing national borders had an important and empowering meaning for the participants. As one interviewee recalled, it was the first time—after ten years in France—that he had left the country, and he felt liberated by the experience. He was moved when he noticed that the conditions for 'irregular migrants' in other countries into which he crossed were even worse than the ones he knew in France:

In Brussels *sans papiers* were living in the streets (…) in Germany *sans papiers* are in camps, detained (…) we became aware that we are more privileged in France and have a few more rights in France (E.M).

To walk miles, to live together in rudimentary conditions, to face risks crossing borders as 'irregular migrants' was also described as both more physically demanding than planned and yet energizing.

It was physically difficult. There were some difficult moments when we did not know what to expect. When I left France, I thought it would be for one month and I took a big bag with a lot of clothes (…) we did not have transport and each one had to carry his bag. From this point of view, we were not well prepared. We walked a lot, sometimes 10–15 kilometres (…) sometimes we walked in the rain, in the cold. But sometimes it was really convivial, we were welcomed very warmly, we chatted, we exchanged information. At the beginning of the march, even when I was part of the CSP75, we did not know each other well but because [during the march] we were obliged to spend all this time together, to sleep together, to walk together, to eat together and to talk together, a lot of links were created. At the end it was heart-breaking (…) there were tears (…) it was moving (…) it has really cemented the collective. (E.M.).

Another participant recalls the provocations and insults they had to face in some cities and the repeated directive not to react to such provocation. There was a division of roles among the participants: some were responsible for security and each time there was the risk of escalation of problems, they brought things back into

order; others were responsible for food and cooking and yet others for circulating the flyers.

Another interviewee remembers the fear they felt when they were controlled by the police at the border crossing between Belgium and Luxembourg.

> There were some problems, too, some fears as well (…) we were controlled on the bus at the border. Imagine, we were 70 *sans-papiers* and some supporters (…) who were controlled. You can imagine the fear, as we had to go to a police station: 'Everybody out, document control'! 'We do not have documents'… You can imagine our fear… Some peed in their pants (laughs) …(CH., Haitian origin, lives in Paris, without permit of stay at the time of the interview).

Whilst going transnational appeared at the beginning as no more demanding than other forms of mobilization—such as the occupation for months of the labour exchange or of churches—and was an obvious level at which to situate the claims of 'irregular migrants', given the European migration restrictions, all the costs and risks taken during the march leads to the question over whether it was worth 'going transnational'.

6.7   Impact of the 2012 March

The March was well documented by activists (in the form of blogs, films, photos, social media coverage); however, the media in the different countries into which they crossed did not cover the events very much. Except for some press releases, the events did not attract much attention from journalists. This relative failure could not be explained by the different participants we interviewed. However, and despite the above-mentioned difficulties, the March was a success from the participants' point of view and an "extraordinary" moment. The March was described as "cementing the group", a "source of oxygen" and a source of strength due to the solidary it created and the hope of a better future. In this sense, the contributions made by the March were both symbolic (the mobilization provided hope) and concrete, as they created an international coalition and reinforced the group's sense of solidarity and feeling of sharing a similar situation. As explained by one of the participants, to see that, through being together, they can challenge the usual image of them as "poor and unfortunate" was important, and that facing the police empowered them:

> For me the march was a breath of fresh air (…) for these poor and unfortunate people to notice that the police could not arrest us has been something exceptional and this has been a success …(PA, lives in Switzerland, without permit of stay at the time of the interview).

From the policy point of view, the contributions of the mobilization are, as usual, difficult to assess. One participant mentioned, however, that the fact of being received by the European Parliament in Strasbourg was symbolically important and somehow helped to modify the law in France:

> Some of us had swollen feet but this solidarity…the one who cannot walk will be carried (…) we put our bodies to an important test. We suffered but we reached our goal (…) what

was important was to be received in Strasbourg. Those who could not walk would be carried, we will go with you, it was the aim and we achieved it. We were received in Strasbourg by the European Parliament. We were escorted like lords, it was extraordinary. For us it was phenomenal and when we got back to France, (…) we forced the Constitutional Court, the highest legal instance in France, to stop arresting people because they do not have documents. This has been extraordinary. (…) To denounce abusive detentions, inhuman expulsions (…). So, I think we had an influence on the decision about this law …(CH., Haitian origin, lives in Paris, without permit of stay at the time of the interview).

Despite the heroic description and optimistic account, the respondent later added a slightly more realistic view:

I would not say it is taken for granted but it has been like a jurisprudence to defend the *sans-papiers*. Before, a *sans-papiers* could be restrained for 72 hours. But now a *sans-papiers* cannot be held for more than 4 hours.[17] So it means that it gives us some flexibility to fight against their detention in a centre. (CH).

This interviewee refers to the law of 31 December 2012 on legal restraint for the verification of the right to stay (Articles 1 and 2, Law 2012 1560[18]) that was aimed at migrants residing illegally in the country. This law allowed their legal retention while their situation was checked. It was formulated when the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) decriminalized irregular stays. Therefore an 'illegal migrant's' detention, i.e., the privation of his or her freedom, which is intended for those suspected of committing a criminal offence, was not legal. A retention is less repressive, and the duration is shorter.

One aspect of the possible impact of the March were actions to allow for the regularization of 'irregular migrants', although in practice it is difficult to relate all of these actions to the March itself (see also Delvino in this volume). For instance the county of Geneva launched a two-year action to regularize the living and working conditions of 'irregular migrants'.[19] Another important change that seems more directly linked to the March, because it occurred a few months after the event, was the document drawn up by Emmanuel Valls (who was, at that time, the Minister of the Interior under the presidency of François Hollande), which clarified and listed a number of criteria for regularization on a individual basis. This did not represent an amnesty but made possible some regularizations in France.

However, as mentioned by one of the interviewees quoted above, this should not be taken for granted, as the new law on asylum-migration passed by the French Parliament in April 2018 increased the maximum duration of retention to check a person's legal status to 24 hours. This new law did not add any suggestion of regularization for irregular migrants through employment. This highlights the difficulty of assessing the direct impact of the mobilizations that we have analysed in this chapter on policy agendas and political strategies. The spokesperson of the IC SPM

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[17] According to the law, the maximal time of legal restraint is 16 h.

[18] Available at https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2012/12/31/INTX1230293L/jo/article_2 (last consulted, 17 June 2018).

[19] See https://www.ge.ch/dossier/operation-papyrus

in Paris told us that they try to mobilize and put on events on a regular basis in order to highlight their demands and as a way of mobilizing support for their demands.

6.8   Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter we raised the question of how 'irregular migrants' could make a difference when they are confronted by structural inequalities and patterns of exclusion. We argued that despite the existential claims at the basis of the movements of irregular migrants, their transnational mobilization is subversive in three ways: by their existence, by their use of local movements, and by their transnational mobilization. We have used the example of one specific mobilization to highlight the ways in which transnational modes of mobilization by 'irregular migrants' can be seen as form of 'survival politics'. Whilst the concept of 'weak agency' allows to understand forms of action that would not been interpreted as such otherwise, the concept of 'political survival' allows us to conceive forms of collective resistance that would otherwise remain unseen within mainstream definitions of activism because they do not aim to bring about structural changes but rather to demand the right to remain and exist.

In the current global conjuncture there are about 30 to 40 million migrants who are not 'authorized' (see Triandafyllidou and Spencer, in this volume), who by their presence challenge the system. They refuse to be defined, assigned to a prescribed category and fixed in their mobility as citizens and workers. By labelling themselves *sans-papiers* or *undocumented migrants* they also refuse their criminalization by such terms as irregular or illegal migrants. As we argued in discussing the case of the 2012 European March of Sans-Papiers and Migrants, they shape their claims so broadly in order to denounce not only migration policy but the whole epistemic violence of the structure between "the exploited and the exploiter", in the words of one of their spokespersons.

More generally we have argued in this chapter that the focus on transnational modes of mobilization was seen as necessary given the source of their problems, namely European-level institutions and policy agendas. At the same time mobilization at the transnational level was also opportunist, in the sense that after years of local mobilization with only limited impact, it was hoped that transnational mobilizations could have a 'boomerang effect' and create spaces for more effective local and national mobilizations. Perhaps the main impact of the transnational mobilizations explored in this chapter is that they created a sense of solidarity among 'irregular migrants' and their supporters. Their transnational character remains limited, however, given the difficulty of mobilising transnational solidarity but also the continuing importance of the national migratory regime in defining who is included and who is not.

In the current climate, the price of being categorized as 'illegal' remains really high. At the time of writing this chapter, images circulating on social media show a two-year-old girl who was separated at the US-Mexico border from her mother, who

was considered to be an 'irregular migrant'. Such images are extreme, but at the same time they help highlight the extent to which some politicians seem willing to go to develop 'harsh immigration regimes' in the current environment. The violence that underpins current migration policies—which has led to deaths during the journey, to the criminalization of migrants and to emotional trauma for them and their children by separating them—leads in many ways to the dehumanization of those caught up in the process. In this environment, mobilizations by migrants and their supporters will necessarily play an important role in questioning and perhaps limiting these restrictive trends. This is why, as we have argued in this chapter, it is vitally important to try to make sense of the on-going mobilisations that are taking place both nationally and transnationally. The current restrictive situation makes it even more important to continue to mobilize locally as well as transnationally in order to highlight the need for a global approach to migration involving sending countries, countries of destination and migrants themselves.

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