

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

THE LEFT AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE 'NEW IMMIGRATIONS'



It is hard to discuss the politics of identity, multiculturalism, 'otherness' and 'difference' in abstraction from material circumstances and from political project

David Harvey, 'Class Relations, Social Justice and the Politics of Difference', 1993

It is only through specific case studies that we can analyse how integration and multiculturalism are worked in different ways in different local and national settings, or explore what a new politics of multiculturalism looks like

Tariq Modood, 'Introduction' in *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe*, 1997

Karim Hassan was one of the first immigrants I met among the run-down huts of the residential centre for Moroccan workers that the left-wing municipality of Bologna had opened in the early 1990s. After a difficult start, when he showed no interest in collaborating with me and the other NGO action researchers the City Council had hired to improve the centre's deteriorated living standards, Karim and I rapidly built rapport and trust. As a result, Karim told me about his migratory and settlement experience. In particular, he mentioned the difficulties of pursuing left-wing politics in his home country and his involvement with the Left in Bologna as a volunteer at the *Festival dell' Unità* and at the Immigrants Office of the CGIL trade union. However, Karim also pointed out to me how his direct experience of the immigrant policies of the Council had made him progressively disillusioned with the Left. The poor treatment, neglect and abuses

to which he and his fellow residents at the centre had apparently been subjected by the Council authorities and their subcontractors were seen as strongly contradicting the egalitarian and inclusionary ideals typical of the Left. This experience played a strong role in making Karim reach the conclusion that little difference actually existed between Left and Right and that – as he once bitterly put it – ‘Socialism in Bologna is bollocks!’

Karim’s negative views of the Left initially came as a surprise to me as they contrasted with the inclusionary and pluralist self-representation that the Left had put forward in relation to immigration and multiculturalism. His views surprised me also because they contrasted with the good national and international reputation that Bologna had achieved for its ‘progressive’ policies towards the working classes, female and gay populations. What was going on? Were Karim’s views exaggerated or unjustified? Or did they reflect an actual ‘problematic’ treatment of immigrants on the part of the Left in its showcase city and perhaps more generally?

The discrepancy in representations of left-wing politics towards immigrants that were coming, on the one hand, from the Left itself and, on the other, from immigrants like Karim pointed to the need for empirical and systematic research to address the following questions. What did the politics of the Left towards immigrants actually look like? Of what discourses and practices was it made? How were immigrants being ‘treated’ and categorized in and by such discourses and practices and with what implications for their ‘integration’? How did the contemporary Left’s politics towards immigrants compare with that the Left in the 1970s? How does such politics fit in with the wider transformations that have characterized the Left in recent decades? And finally, was the politics of the Left challenging or reinforcing the boundaries of inclusion/exclusion being set up by the Italian state and the European Union?

The ‘new immigrations’ of people fleeing poverty and oppression in search of better living conditions in Europe constitutes an important and much debated phenomenon (see Castles and Miller 2003). The incorporation of immigrants does not take place in a homogeneous and simple social environment but in one characterised by heterogeneity, divisions and conflict. It becomes important for research to consider the variety of responses to immigration that such environments provide. Indeed, as Cole has pointed out, ‘improved understanding of European reactions to immigrants – whether hostile, ambivalent, or supportive – must take into account the role of everyday experience and the interaction of ideologies within changing contexts of power’ (1997: 133). Whereas considerable scholarship has gone into the analysis of political institutions (e.g. Shore 1997, 2000; Shore and Black 1994) and the political Right (e.g. Stolcke 1995; Shore 1997; Holmes 2000), we know less about how the egalitarian side of the political spectrum, commonly referred to as the Left (Bobbio 1999), has been responding to this phenomenon. This is a real lacuna in the literature because the Left represents an influential political, social and cultural player, whose attitudes and

behaviours in relation to immigration are important to chart. Furthermore, the Left is often unproblematically assumed to be supportive and even representative of immigrants, partly because of the multicultural and inclusionary rhetoric it often deploys and partly because of the support it has traditionally given to disadvantaged categories.¹ A focus on the Left permits the formulation of more comprehensive and accurate generalizations about Europe's response to immigration. Looking at the Left also leads to a better understanding of the behaviour of various other political and social actors, as what one political actor does is often connected to the behaviour – actual or potential – of another. Finally, examining the Left in the context of migration is important to stimulate reflection, political action and policy intervention aimed at the achievement of greater social justice.

With regard to the political Right, Verena Stolcke (1995) has suggested that its exclusionary discourse in the context of migration and multiculturalism has moved from racism (exclusion on the basis of racial and biological difference) to cultural fundamentalism (exclusion on the basis of alleged cultural incompatibility).² In this process of 'politicisation of culture' (Wright 1998), often called *cultural racism*, immigrants from poor regions of the world are considered undesirable and detestable not because of their alleged biological inferiority but because they represent embodiments of irreconcilably different cultures and, as such, they pose a formidable threat to the cultural integrity of the supposedly homogeneous national communities of Europe. Douglas Holmes (2000) has shown vividly, through a multi-sited European ethnography, how anti-immigration together with opposition to Europeanization and fast-capitalist restructuring constitute crucial elements in the 'counter-enlightenment' battle of the radical Right in defence of the supposedly original and authentic ethnic communities, cultures, identities and traditions of the continent. With regard to the EU, Cris Shore (1997; 2000) has drawn attention to how much of its efforts to develop a European identity involve the creation of a European 'Other'. This process of 'othering' is carried out through the strengthening of the physical and symbolic boundaries, the political technology of citizenship, as well as through the circulation of an idea of Europe as 'a distinctive bounded region set apart from others by race, religion, language and habitat' (2000: 62). Shore has described this process as follows:

... creating the 'European identity', as depicted in EU discourse, entails a degree of exclusion of the Other. Identity formation ... is essentially a dualistic process involving fission and fusion as new boundaries are created to distinguish categories of 'us' and 'them'. 'European identity' tends to become meaningful only when contrasted to that which is not European. As Europe consolidates and converges, and as barriers between European nation-states are eliminated, so the boundaries separating Europe from its Third World 'Others' have intensified – and Islam (particularly 'fundamentalism') has replaced communism as the key marker for defining the limits of European civilisation. (2000: 63)

All that indicates that Western Europe is pervaded by a hegemonic ethno-nationalist discourse which both in its illiberal and anti-EU version (Right) and in its neo-liberal and Europeanist one (EU) prescribes congruence of culture, community and territory and considers immigrants (especially if Muslim) as outsiders, if not dysfunctional aliens. In other words, both pro-EU state apparatuses and anti-EU ethno-nationalist organizations seem to coincide in their unwillingness to consider immigrants as part of their respective ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983; Chavez 1991; Carter 1997).

The aim of this book is to provide ethnographic perspectives on how the mainstream Italian – and to an extent European – Left has been constructing the question of immigration. The book highlights how such constructions have changed in the recent past, how they relate to the wider transformations that have occurred in left-wing politics in the same period, and how they compare with those of the political forces and institutions considered above. Italy was chosen for fieldwork, and specifically the left-wing city of Bologna, to provide a case study characterized by both a strong political Left and a significant presence of ‘new immigrants’.

Left-wing politics in Italy will be examined by analysing how the mainstream Left (comprehensively conceived as consisting of a national party, civil societal organizations and local provincial and regional governments) has applied to new immigrants its traditional commitments to redistributive struggles and its more recent claims to represent the interests of a plurality of ‘new subaltern social subjects’. This book also contends that identity politics is not to be considered as the exclusive domain of the so-called ‘new social movements’. Other collective actors can also act as articulators of such politics, and the empirical study of identity politics must encompass a broader range of actors including not only social movements, but also political parties, civic associations, non-profit organizations, trade unions and public authorities. Such collective actors often have blurred edges vis-à-vis each other and such complex overlapping and intermingling is to be included in (rather than left out from) the examination. Furthermore, this book crucially looks at these collective actors not only in terms of their cultural politics but also in the context of governance, i.e. in their relation to the production of public policy discourses and practices as well as to the state at various levels.³

From Socialism to Postsocialism: Shifting Configurations of Class and Identity

Usage of the terms Left and Right in politics dates back to the French Revolution.⁴ Since then, equality – i.e. the effort to remove obstacles of class, gender, ethnicity and so forth that render men and women less equal – has been the crucial constant that distinguished the historical movement referred to as the Left from its counterpart (Bobbio 1999: 73). This loose and relative definition of

the Left is useful to our purposes because it is broad enough to accommodate historical and geographical variations, at least in the European context.

In the twentieth century, at least until the mid- to late 1960s, left-wing politics was essentially synonymous with class politics. With class referring to 'structured economic inequality' (Coole 1996: 17), class politics came to represent activity in defence of the interests of the working classes against the conflicting and exploitative practices of the capitalist elite. The basic aim of class politics was to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth and power across classes so as to improve the worse-off on the socioeconomic ladder. This project was to be achieved in different ways according to different strands in left-wing thought and organizations. For example, while orthodox communists favoured Soviet-style revolutionary change, social democrats were for reform and regulation of the market within a democratic context.

In recent years, the most significant transformation of the Left in Western Europe has been its 'postsocialist' turn. The Left started distancing itself from the socialist project in the early 1980s (Meiksins Wood 1998) and this process accelerated exponentially after the collapse of communism in 1989. The postsocialist turn has been developing while European society has increasingly been permeated and transformed by a neoliberal 'ethos' that rendered it more deregulated and characterized by a shrunk state apparatus, privatized state-run enterprises, cuts in public and welfare spending and by greater inequalities. As pointed out by a number of commentators (e.g. Meiksins Wood 1998; Moschonas 2002), the mainstream Left responded to these neoliberal transformations by accepting and even enabling them. Gerassimos Moschonas (2002) captured well the link between the postsocialist Left and the neoliberal transformation of society, which he describes as follows:

[T]he governmental left has, despite its social discourse, departed in practice from the defence of the interests of wage earners, and particularly the 'poorest of the poor'. Social Democracy has thus been transformed from a political force for the moderate promotion of equality within a socio-economic system that is by definition inegalitarian, into a force for the *moderate promotion of inequality* in the face of forces that are even more inegalitarian. (2002: 293)

Interestingly, by deciding to go along with and even promote the neoliberal transformation of society the Left has, to an extent, been digging its own grave. In fact, by helping to reduce the possibilities of state intervention in the economy the mainstream Left has weakened one of its main tools for articulating egalitarian and redistributive politics and policy. As Moschonas writes:

In effect, in its conscious and explicit adhesion to a moderately but clearly neoliberal mode of regulation, social democracy has made the decisive ideological leap: for the first time so openly and systematically, it has elevated the market and devalued the utility of the economically active state. (2002: 293)

This postsocialist turn has been quite noticeable in Italy where the largest communist party of Western Europe – the Italian Communist Party or PCI – terminated its socialist experience to begin a new – postsocialist – one with the creation of the Democratic Party of the Left (or PDS-DS).⁵ The PDS-DS intended to represent better the plurality of egalitarian demands coming from Italian society. Of course, postsocialist transformations in left-wing organisations were by no means restricted to Italy; the U.K. for instance witnessed a similar transition (though perhaps less radical or eye-catching than in Italy) with the decision of the Labour Party to eliminate clause 4 of its constitution (which stated the party's commitment to collective ownership) and transform itself into New Labour.

This postsocialist turn has also coincided with a growing concern on the part of the Left with questions of institutional reform, economic rationality, efficiency, governance, law and order, democracy, citizenship, identity and cultural difference as some of the main ways to pursue greater development and social justice (at least, this is what has been repeatedly claimed). However, preoccupations with identity and difference in left-wing politics – the main concerns of this book – did not suddenly take centre stage in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall, but are to be traced back to the mid- to late 1960s (Hall 1992: 290; Mercer 1992: 425; Rowbotham 1998: 43).

The Rise of Identity Politics

Since the mid- to late 1960s what is now referred to as *identity politics*, i.e. the struggles around 'gender', 'generation', 'race', 'ethnicity', 'environment' and 'sexual orientations' that were articulated by the so-called 'new social movements' and civil societal organizations, acquired prominence, at least in the West. First they sidelined and then overtook the struggles around class which until that point had defined the Left and had been articulated through political parties (and the trade unions). These 'new' struggles were considered as ultimately irreducible to issues of 'class' but, at least initially, they were often considered as inseparable from them.⁶ On the origin of identity politics Stuart Hall has written:

What is important about this historical moment is that:

- These movements were opposed to the corporate liberal politics of the West, as well as the 'Stalinist' politics of the East.
- They affirmed the 'subjective' as well as the 'objective' dimensions of politics.
- They were suspicious of all bureaucratic forms of organisation and favoured spontaneity and acts of political will.
- ... these movements had a powerful cultural emphasis and form. They espoused the 'theatre' of revolution.
- They reflected the weakening or break-up of class-politics, and the mass political organisations associated with it, and their fragmentation into various and separate social movements.

- Each movement appealed to the social identity of its supporters. Thus feminism appealed to women, sexual politics to gays and lesbians, racial struggles to blacks, anti-war to peaceniks, and so on. This is the historical birth of what came to be known as identity politics – one identity per movement. (1992: 290)

Thus, the basic premise of identity politics is that all members of a movement or group 'have more in common than the members have with anyone outside the group, that they are oppressed in the same way, and therefore that they all belong on the same road to justice' (Anner 1996: 9).

The coming into being of the so-called 'new social movements' (or NSMs) often entailed a critique of the class politics of the 'old' Left for developing 'class analysis *against* any politics associated with gender and ethnicity; ... [and] the tendency to disparage the "merely" cultural as of negligible significance in a world structured by economic exploitation' (Phillips 1997: 145). Identity politics is held to have the capacity creatively to renew the political by 'contesting a universalism which denied social and cultural difference' (Rowbotham 1998: 43), and by developing decentralized and multifaceted ways of engaging with political issues (Hale 1997: 580). This type of politics has brought to the fore more subjective dimensions and perceptions of oppression which previously had no place in or were excluded from the realm of formal politics (Rowbotham 1998: 44; see also Hale 1997: 581). Most importantly, identity politics came into being in order to compensate for the economic reductionism which affected class politics to the extent that the 'primacy once accorded to class is no longer defensible. It is now all too apparent that the practice of an exclusively class politics overrode crucial differences of experience associated with gender, ethnicity, or race' (Phillips 1997: 145).

Critical Reactions

Of course, not everybody within the Left has given a positive reading of identity politics. The main and fundamental critique has come from the 'orthodox' Left, i.e. those from whom the identity politics advocates broke away. This criticism has signalled the intrinsic problems of identity politics which include: neglect for the fundamental dimension of injustice and oppression which is 'material' *rather than* 'cultural'; fragmentation of the Left vis-à-vis the capitalist forces; the failure to raise the conditions of the weakest and most disadvantaged groups in society. The way forward is identified in the return to the 'safer waters' of class politics.⁷ As in the case of the identity politics advocates, the front here is broad and heterogeneous and at the level of intellectual debate includes authors as diverse as A. Sivanandan (1989), Alex Callinicos (1993) and Eric Hobsbawm (1996). One example of these attitudes can be seen in the comments that Callinicos has made on the identity politics deployed by the Labour Party in early 1980s London:

In the absence of large scale struggles against oppression, the oppressed themselves tended to fragment into smaller groups, each tending to highlight their different 'identities', the particularity of *their* oppression compared to those of others – blacks of African origin versus Asian, black women versus gentile white women versus Jewish white women, gays versus lesbians versus bisexuals. This kind of fragmentation can only weaken any real struggle against the system which produces all the different forms of oppression. (1993: 50)

Sivanandan depicts identity politics as 'inward-looking, navel gazing exercises' (1989: 28), and its main U.K. advocates – the contributors to the journal *Maxism Today* and the book edited by Stuart Hall and Martin Jaques (1989), *New Times* – as follows:

What New Times represents, in sum, is a shift in focus from economic determinism to cultural determinism, from changing the world to changing the word, from class in and for itself to the individual in and for himself or herself. Use value has ceded to exchange value, need to choice, com-munity to i-dentity, anti-imperialism to international humanism. And the self that new timers make so much play about has become a small, selfish inward-looking self that finds pride in lifestyle, exuberance in consumption and commitment in pleasure – and then elevates them all into a politics of this and that, positioning itself this way and that way (with every position a politics and every politics a position) into a 'miscellany of movements and organisations' stretching from hobbies and pleasure to services. A sort of bazaar socialism, bizarre socialism, a hedonist socialism: an eat, drink and be merry socialism because tomorrow we can eat drink and be merry again ... a socialism for disillusioned marxist intellectuals who had waited around too long for the revolution – a socialism that holds up everything that is ephemeral and evanescent and passing as vital and worthwhile, everything that melts into air as solid, and proclaims that every shard of the self is a social movement. (Sivanandan 1989: 23)

Eric Hobsbawm's rejection of identity politics stems from the universalist foundations of the Left:

The political project of the Left is universalist: it is for all human beings. ... And identity politics is essentially not for everybody but for the members of a specific group only. ... That is why the Left cannot base itself on identity politics. (1996: 43)

Reconciling the Divide

With the 'economic' and the 'cultural' so rigidly counterpoised, we stand before a major controversy in left-wing politics.⁸ Indeed, this basic culture/economy dichotomy seems to be accompanied by a series of other 'sub-dichotomies', which have been listed in Table 1.1.

This polarized situation has recently begun to be perceived as an impasse and a growing number of attempts to reconcile the two dimensions are emerging. Charles

Table 1.1 The economy/culture-related dichotomies

economic	versus	cultural
material	versus	discursive
livelihood	versus	lifestyle
class	versus	identity (ethnic, gender ...)
parties and unions	versus	New Social Movements and 'civil society'
redistribution	versus	recognition
sameness	versus	diversity
objective	versus	subjective
general	versus	specific
modern	versus	post-modern
community	versus	self
society	versus	individual
structure	versus	agency

Hale (1997: 570) has referred to this dichotomized and crystallized situation as an inward-looking debate between postmodern innovation and materialist reassertion. He has argued that these polarised positions 'often allow the real subject of analysis – people struggling from the margins to gain voice and power – to vanish into thin air' (Hale 1997: 570) and that the time has come for scholarship to move forward and try other paths, leaving behind the all-absorbing preoccupations with the establishment of theoretical supremacy. Hale identifies new 'postmodern' identity politics as: the expansion and diversification of the very meaning of doing politics; the concern with subversion as interstitial politics – rather than as 'conspiring against the system'; and the naming of forms of inequality that previously had no place in the realm of politics (Hale 1997: 580–582). He suggests it would be sensible to take on board the contribution offered by post-modern identity politics and combine it with what he calls the 'hard questions posed' from the other side. Such hard questions include insistence on the analysis of the material consequences of material constraint, what Schepers-Hughes (1995) has called the 'political economy of suffering'. His aim is for postmodern identity politics and political economy to converge on a new and more productive approach, which he calls 'critical modernism' (Hale 1997: 583–584).

Of particular interest for this book are the reconciliatory attempts of some intellectuals coming from a social movements background (especially feminists), whose dissatisfaction and frustration with the 'classless' character of identity politics has led them to explore ways of retrieving concerns with material justice within an identity politics framework. Most notably, Iris Young (1990; 1997) and Nancy Fraser (1995; 1997; 1998; 1999), even if disagreeing with each other on the appropriateness of distinguishing between the 'economic' and the 'cultural' in the

analysis and development of egalitarian politics, agree that ‘material’ oppression must be brought back into focus since it is not less crucial than the ‘cultural’ one. With reference to the Young/Fraser debate, Ann Phillips has written:

Both theorists have been notable for their persistent attention to issues of socio-economic equality, and both have rung the alarm bell at various stages when colleagues have lost interest in matters of economic privilege and economic oppression. Both are also – if to varying degrees – attached to what Fraser calls the politics of recognition and Young the politics of difference; both, that is, see contemporary societies as characterised by a combination of economic and cultural injustices, and neither makes any explicit claim about one being more ‘fundamental’ than the other. But where Young stresses the continuity and mutual reinforcement between what might be deemed ‘economic’ and what might be deemed ‘cultural’, Fraser insists on an analytic distinction in order to highlight tensions between these two. (Phillips 1997: 147)

Anne Phillips herself subscribes to a reengagement with economic equality which, although it is not all that matters, is something that definitely counts in most struggles for greater equality and recognition.

My working assumption is still that most struggles for equality will depend on some modification in economic conditions: to put this starkly, that aboriginals in Australia need hospitals as well as recognition, that Muslim minorities in Europe need better schools as well as Islamic ones, and that women everywhere need the right to reclaim paid employment after maternity leave as well as to be valued for their activities as mothers. (1999: 129)

This debate between culturalists and materialists has important implications for how the Left frames the ‘new immigrants’, a group of people that is both culturally and materially disadvantaged. How has the mainstream European Left, in its Italian articulation, been constructing them? Has the Left succeeded in articulating a ‘balanced’ politics capable of representing both the ‘material’ and the ‘cultural’ interests of the immigrants? Or has it fallen into reductionism and privileged one of these dimensions at the expense of the other? These are some of the questions the book will address ethnographically after reviewing how ethnographic research has engaged the question of identity politics in the field of migration and multiculturalism.

Left-wing Politics, Multiculturalism and Ethnographic Research

Although sophisticated, stimulating and forward-looking in their efforts to combine culturalist and materialist approaches to social justice, the reconciliatory positions outlined above present – from an anthropological point of view – some limitations. They are at once theoretical and over-universalizing, i.e. they tend to

make general claims that are, in fact, specific to the Anglo-American context and they do so without grounding their arguments in a sustained empirical examination. Thus, even if I am sympathetic with these reconciliatory efforts, I think the analysis requires more grounding in specific social contexts to be selected from a greater variety of world regions.

However, if social theorists have overlooked issues of cultural specificities and relativism as well as everyday practices, anthropologists on their part have been slow to tap into this debate, and especially to provide empirical and detailed case studies in which to ground theoretical discussions, as Terence Turner (1994) has highlighted with regard to multiculturalism. The need to examine identity politics and multiculturalism in specific everyday contexts is not only felt in anthropology (see for example Hale 1997; Però 2000; Grillo 2002) but also in cognate disciplines such as human geography and sociology. David Harvey, a geographer, has pointed out that, 'It is hard to discuss the politics of identity, multiculturalism, "otherness" and "difference" in abstraction from material circumstances and from political project' (1993: 41), while Tariq Modood, a sociologist, has suggested that, 'It is only through specific case studies that we can analyse how integration and multiculturalism are worked in different ways in different local and national settings, or explore what a new politics of multiculturalism looks like' (1997: 5).

Accordingly, this book intends to provide critical insights into left-wing politics that are ethnographically informed, politically engaged and that reject 'the twin orthodoxies that forced us to choose between class as the last-instance answer to all analytical questions, and class as the analytical question that never gets asked' (Hale 1997: 580). In other words, this book seeks to move away from the abstract and inward-looking polarization existing between material and cultural supremacists by offering a concrete, detail-rich, historically and geographically informed case study that concerns a non-English-speaking country, Italy. Indeed, this book contends that given the significance and interconnected nature of the cultural and the material, one possible way out of the impasse between culturalists and materialists is to be found in the empirical interrogation of a specific historical situation. Rather than seeking to establish in advance and in abstract whether it is class or ethnicity that should determine left-wing politics towards immigrants, I make an ethnographic examination of a specific historical situation to determine empirically which element or combination of elements should be used to develop such politics, and this is what this book sets out to do in the Italian context.

Researching the Left and Immigration: Approach, Strategy and Fieldwork Methods

The approach underpinning this book has been characterised by a distinctive and comprehensive definition of the Left as a 'field of study'. Such a field has been conceived as comprising a number of different yet interconnected, interacting

and at times partly overlapping dimensions. These dimensions included official party rhetoric and ideology, discourses and practices of party grassroots and civil societal organizations, and policy discourses and practices of local authorities. This approach has involved a 'tracking strategy' that has followed the circulation of ideas, attitudes and practices about immigrants through the multidimensional field just described. This strategy was operationalized by participating in a number of initiatives and episodes involving the Left in its various articulations so as to gain a more comprehensive and grounded understanding of how this political sector 'frames' immigration.

Another distinctive trait of my approach is that this 'tracking strategy' has been applied not only in relation to space but also to time. In fact, I have also sought to follow and make explicit how left-wing ideas and practices about immigrants, ethnicity and difference have been transforming since the 1960s and 1970s, a time when the Left was still firmly characterized by a 'socialist' nature. This research project would have been harder to accomplish if I had simultaneously focused on a single site of investigation (say a party branch, a municipal immigration office, or even a neighbourhood or 'community') rather than on a multiplicity of different but interconnected, spatial, temporal and conceptual dimensions. Indeed, this multidimensional nature of my ethnography has enabled the achievement of more comprehensive and dynamic perspectives on the relationship existing between a complex, multifaceted and changing sociopolitical and cultural sector – the political Left – and some of the subaltern groups – immigrants and refugees – whose interests this sector claims to represent.⁹

In developing the research upon which this book is based I have also been influenced by the 'anthropology of policy' approach theorised by Wright and Shore (1995; see also Shore and Wright 1997). This is a particular form of political anthropology which recognises the field of policy as one of the fundamental pillars of the architecture of contemporary societies and therefore considers it as strategic for conducting anthropological studies. Given that policy constitutes a nodal point of intersection and articulation of ideologies, practices, power, contestation and accommodation, it becomes crucial for political anthropologists to include this ambit in the scope of their research and shift their approach 'from "studying down" and a distanced study of "a people" ... to "studying up" and a committed study of policy' (Wright 1995: 73). Accordingly this book has paid much attention to the policies of left-wing authorities, with special reference to how they were operationalized in practice and 'received' by the immigrants.

This book has also been informed by a critical and transformative ethnographic approach to focus on how the Left – a political sector that claims to be committed to social justice – has framed the question of the 'integration' of immigrants and undertaken the representation of their interests.¹⁰ This means that this research aims not only to contribute to academic knowledge by providing first-hand empirically based insights into the above question but also to identify and analytically describe good practices as well as contradictions and shortcomings so

as to contribute to more inclusionary social change. This approach implies that the positivist myth of value-free, detached and objective research is not subscribed to here. In fact, not only is the latter unable to guarantee the scholarly standards of 'scientific rigour', but it often undermines them by ignoring, obscuring and legitimating existing oppressive power relations.¹¹

Part of the transformative character of this research derives from providing insights on 'progressive' immigrant politics and policy that are of direct relevance to a wide range of social and political actors (including political parties, public administrations, NGOs, social movements, civic associations, individuals and so forth). Another part of this transformative character is also the result of my taking up explicit position roles in the local policy and political processes while conducting my fieldwork. Some examples of such roles were those connected to the daily political activities of one particular PDS-DS party branch and included the occasional collecting and affixing the daily *L'Unità* on the pin boards of the neighbourhood, the opening of the party branch when the designated person had other commitments, co-organizing events that were not necessarily linked to migration issues (e.g. the meetings a newly formed youth group), taking part in the activities of the urban planning subgroup or in those of the branch congress. In addition, and as illustrated in Chapter 8, during fieldwork I also became part of an NGO hired by the Bologna City Council to solve – through participatory action research – a problematic situation that had developed in some of the municipal residential centres for immigrants (or CPAs) it had set up. All these roles, but in particular the latter, facilitated both my access to a variety of crucial sites, situations and subjects (ranging from immigrant residential centres to policy meetings and from immigrant to local authorities informants) and my contribution to alleviate the conditions of marginalization and isolation affecting a group of documented immigrant workers.

Methodologically speaking, this transformative approach has involved taking advantage of the synergies that developed between my participatory and action research on the one hand, and my participant research on the other, so that they could benefit and cross-fertilize each other. The insights, knowledge and social capital I had acquired locally through months of participant observation were drawn upon to make participatory research more effective, while the observations that were being made possible by the participatory action research crucially complemented those I was acquiring through participant observation. The characteristic transformative approach of my research rests on the assumption that 'research' and 'action' need not always be mutually exclusive but can be profitably combined when ethnographers have a civic (as well as academic) commitment to a particular cause, and provided that such combination is articulated in an informed, conscientious and responsible way that does not endanger the well-being of powerless, hence vulnerable, groups.¹²

Fieldwork was conducted at various intervals during the second half of the 1990s with the largest period running from autumn 1994 to autumn 1995. On

the whole it involved a combination of research techniques that varied according to the different contexts and stages of the research. These techniques included, first, participant observation in party sections and federations, social and civic centres, NGOs and trade unions, the headquarters of the municipal immigration services of Bologna (or ISI), immigrants' and refugees' residential centres and camps, and a wide range of public events and initiatives. Second, the research involved participatory action. As anticipated, I was employed for approximately eight months by a municipal subcontractor (an NGO) to work in a project to 'empower' immigrants in a municipal residential centre. Third, the research involved structured and semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with political activists, local authority officials, union delegates, academics, members of immigrant and pro-immigrant associations and NGOs, as well as 'ordinary' people from both Italian and immigrant background. Fourth, the research entailed a certain amount of archive research, especially in the archives of some left-wing organizations.

In my relationships with informants my identity as an academic researcher was always at the forefront, indicated by the constant presence of my notepad. Of course, this was not the only way in which I was seen; there were others (some of which I am probably not even aware of). Among these further identities, those that played a significant role in my fieldwork were 'left-wing sympathizer', 'municipal consultant' and 'independent outsider'. In several instances being seen in these ways facilitated considerably the building of rapport and trust and access to crucial contexts and information. For example, certain insights on left-wing grassroots discourses reported in Chapter 4 would have been more difficult to acquire had I concealed my political affiliation or sympathy. Similarly, many insights on the policy discourses and practices of administrators, officials and social workers reported in Chapters 5 and 6 would have been harder to gain without being seen somehow as part of the municipal apparatus. At other times, especially in relation to the inhabitants of the municipal residential centres for immigrants (the CPAs), being an 'outsider' too (not being 'Bolognese', having come from the U.K. for a Ph.D. research, having myself migrated and lived 'abroad') often enabled me to be seen somewhat more favourably than many of their habitual Italian interlocutors, possibly as more independent and external to local political dynamics, and 'receptive' or 'sensitive' to the specificities of living in a foreign country.

On the whole, in methodological terms this book represents a distinctive application of 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus 1995)¹³ in three ways. Firstly, it has used this type of ethnography to study the politics of 'progressive' political organizations. Secondly, it has deployed this methodology in a diachronic way – by extending the exploration of the Left across different historical periods. Thirdly, it has applied it in a transformative fashion, one which has entailed combining ethnography with direct political and policy action.

Book Outline

In addressing how the mainstream Left has been constructing the question of immigration and multiculturalism and has treated refugees and immigrant workers in Italy this book has adopted the following structure. Chapter 2 provides the reader with the necessary background on Italian political and migratory history since 1945. It highlights the profound divide between Catholics and Communists that permeated all levels of Italian society from the end of the fascist regime to the outset of the 1990s. The chapter also highlights how Italy is not merely a country of emigrants rapidly turned into one of immigrants, as much of the contemporary literature on migration implies, but one of internal migrations too. In fact, between the late 1950s and the early 1970s millions of southern Italians left their poor and rural place of origin to resettle into the very different context of the industrial north. This massive internal migratory movement means that Italy is not new to issues of immigrants' integration but has had previous experience in accommodating ethnocultural difference, and such experience is one that deserves socio-anthropological attention for it can help to locate contemporary politics towards immigrants in historical perspective. In addition, Chapter 2 provides background information on Bologna (the location in which fieldwork was carried out) a city internationally known for its university, cuisine and – most importantly to this book – 'progressive' politics.

Chapter 3 focuses on one aspect of Italy's previous experience with the integration of migrants by exploring the politics of the 'socialist' Left of the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, it examines how southern Italian migrants – the 'typical' migrants of that time – were constructed in the ideology, policy and grassroots discourses of Italian communists. The findings of this chapter form the basis for a subsequent historical comparison with those emerging from the ethnography of the contemporary 'post-socialist' Left – the object of the subsequent chapters – and will enable the tracing of the main transformations of left-wing politics in the context of migration.

Chapter 4 begins the examination of the contemporary Left with an overview of the postsocialist ideology of the Democratic Party of the Left, the heirs of the Italian Communist Party. It then goes on to examine both its current official discourses about immigrants and multiculturalism, and those found among its grassroots militants of Bologna. Drawing on the still rare texts authored by immigrants, the chapter also reports their views on the Left.

Chapter 5 continues the exploration of the contemporary Left by analysing the policy practices of the administration of Bologna with special reference to housing – the main area of immigrant policy intervention. The analysis is based on the ethnography of some typical municipal residential structures for immigrant workers and refugees and will discuss the underlying assumptions that have oriented policy makers in setting up such structures; the nature of the buildings; the social relations and quality of life in such structures; the different

management policies to which the centres have been subjected; and the relationships the migrants had with the municipal administration and the local polity at district level.

Chapter 6 focuses on another important set of progressive municipal policy practices, those aimed at fostering and facilitating the political participation of the immigrant residents of Bologna. The chapter provides an overview of the policy initiatives in this field, especially those concerning the creation of an official consultative channel of participation (called the Forum), assessing the extent to which such policy has been able to promote immigrants' political inclusion.

Chapter 7 extends the analysis of the postsocialist Left to include the political practices that 'progressive' civil societal organizations (such as committees, NGO, and cooperatives) deploy in everyday processes of governance and policy making concerning immigrants and refugees. At a time when political parties have lost a significant part of their relevance as channels of mobilization in favour of civil societal organizations, focusing on the latter becomes crucial to gain comprehensive perspectives on left-wing politics.

Chapter 8 completes the ethnography with a story that illustrates how all the components of the Left individually examined in the previous chapters – i.e., official and grassroots discourses, policy and civil societal practices – interconnect. By telling the story of a project of participatory action research that the NGO in which I worked carried out on behalf of the Municipality of Bologna in one of the residential scheme for immigrants, this chapter provides 'thick' ethnographic material on how local policies are operationalized by a range of administrative, civic and political actors, as well as how they are experienced by the migrants themselves. Chapter 8 also provides a vivid and extensive illustration of how the critical and transformative methodology that I developed by combining participant and participatory approaches has enabled me to gain crucial insights into the politics of the Left towards immigrants, while simultaneously contributing to the betterment of the latter's conditions.

Chapter 9 concludes the book by juxtaposing the findings on the contemporary postsocialist Left with those on the Left of previous decades, highlighting both the transformations that have occurred and the implications these had for the framing of immigrants and the promotion of multiculturalism. The chapter will also compare the findings on the Left with the attitudes towards immigrants of the EU and the Right. The book will end by indicating some questions for further research that the current return of assimilationism in public discourses about the integration of migrants and minorities is posing for the Left.

Notes

1. The Left has traditionally been at the forefront in voicing class and later – with the emergence of the New Left and New Social Movements – also other forms of social injustice.

2. Drawing on her U.S. ethnography, Ong (1996) has argued that culture has not replaced race in exclusionary constructions but has developed alongside it.
3. In this book, I will be using identity politics in a broader sense than that which associates it solely with the activity of the 'new social movements'. In fact, 'identity politics', while being historically associated with and predominantly used in connection with, single-issue movements and so-called 'civil society', need not necessarily remain restricted to them. This is because in some cases, the use of the term 'identity politics' seems to apply also to the examination of party politics. For instance, when we encounter contexts in which 'movements' are weak and the sphere of civic associations (the so-called 'civil society') is in a position of 'subordinated intermingling' with political parties, and/or when we are before situations in which political parties have been making strong claims about identity politics and/or they have reconstituted themselves also with the intent of pursuing identity politics (as in the case of the PDS-DS in Italy), we are, I think, required to broaden the application of this term.
4. For a discussion of the origins of such usage see Eley (2002).
5. Since the PDS subsequently changed its name into Democrats of the Left (or DS), in this book I will refer to it as PDS-DS.
6. This was the situation characterizing most of the groups of the Italian 'movementist' Left of the 1970s (see Balestrini and Moroni 1997 [1987] and Lumley 1990).
7. A second, less influential, rejection of identity politics seems to come from the 'populist' U.S. Left. Here, identity politics is rejected as incapable of challenging the logic of the system, but not in favour of 'the last instance' (i.e. what really counts at the end of the day is class and the struggle against capitalism) of the previous case, as that instance is also considered 'infamous'. The way out being suggested here is the devolution to the 'community' of an extreme autonomy and an entitlement to rule itself (e.g. with regard to immigrants, ethnic minorities, homosexuals, etc.) apparently without any pre-declared commitment to social justice. Advocates of this position include Paul Piccone (1996) and other contributors to the journal *Telos*. Here is a sample of their 'anti-identity politics' attitude:

'Desperate to locate anything resembling a revolutionary subject to carry out the projected historical task ... the Left has tended to latch onto whatever segment of society seemed at odds with the system, no matter how contradictory their political objectives might have been. At various times during the past three decades it has embraced women demanding *universal* equality, feminists vindicating gender *particularity*, civil rights demonstrators seeking to abolish *segregation*, black nationalists advocating *separatism*, upwardly mobile Afro-American professionals defending affirmative actions, homosexuals fighting, first *ostracism*, and seeking *protected minority status* later, illegal immigrants, farm workers, the homeless – any group complaining about something. Far from resulting in any "rainbow coalition" able to challenge the logic of the system, such an opportunistic, indiscriminate approach may have resulted in a few tenured positions for Left ideologues scavenging "cultural studies" for real or imagined subversive elements, but it has destroyed whatever there may have been of a coherent Left perspective' (Piccone 1996: 152).

8. Even though anthropologists, perhaps more than others, have argued that such fields are all but disconnected from each other, e.g. see Narotzky (1997). With regard to the link existing between identity and class, and in particular the identitarian dimension of class, see Pratt (2003).
9. In fact, I started from a PDS-DS party branch of the district in which I was living to gain a sense of the everyday grassroots views and activities of the Left but soon realized that not much was happening there, especially at the outset, in relation to immigration and that I should simultaneously find other sites and follow other routes. However, the fieldwork in that section was to continue throughout my stay in Bologna, and to contribute very significantly to achieving a sense of the 'position' that immigrants occupied in grassroots views, discourses, and everyday or ordinary activities of the party base (and later to achieve a broader comprehensive

picture), but also to gain access directly or indirectly to the crucial sites, people, events and dynamics (which were often outside the neighbourhood and the district) that would enable me to gain a more encompassing and comprehensive perspective on the Left and immigration (e.g. including policy, governance and civil societal dimensions). These people and places are briefly mentioned in the following section but will reappear in a more contextualized way in the ethnographic chapters.

10. On the strengths of ethnographic research see Okely (1994).
11. The problematic nature of (supposedly) objective and neutral research has been well expressed by Charlotte Aull-Davis: 'The vast majority of research that does not have an explicit value commitment does in fact have an implicit value orientation and political position in support of the status quo of existing power relationships. ... Critical theory ... is research that is grounded in a concern to overcome social oppression, particularly those forms that are characteristic of advanced capitalism' (1999: 61).
12. On the combination of participant and participatory research see also Però (1996).
13. The notion of 'multi-sited ethnography' was initially developed by George Marcus (1995) to refer to ethnographies that seek to 'examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space ...[and] that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation' (p. 96). Marcus also provides a useful typology of different instances of multi-sited ethnography compiled on the basis of existing work but he explicitly recognizes it to be both incomplete and open-ended as 'there are many more concepts and visions for doing multi-sited ethnography than there are achieved exemplars' (1995: 103). Insightful perspectives on multi-sited/local ethnography are also found in Hannerz (2003).