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Ambivalent Resonance: Advocacy for Secure Status for Migrant Farm Workers in Spain, Italy and Canada during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT *Drawing on insights from scholarship on contentious action frames, this article examines the framing of demands for social justice for migrant farmworkers in Spain, Italy and Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. We focus particularly on how activists in each country aligned their action frames with prevalent public discourses on the essential contribution migrants make to agricultural production, the need to guarantee "health for all," and "increased vulnerability" of migrants' lives during the global health crisis. Using these diagnostic frames, activists in the three countries called for secure legal status for all migrants. Drawing on the literature on contentious action frames, we then analyze if action frames advanced by activists during the COVID-19 pandemic "resonated" with the understanding of these issues by policymakers. We challenge an approach to understanding resonance in binary terms as either present or absent. Instead, we introduce the notion of "ambivalent resonance" to draw attention to the fact that some frames are accepted only partially or only by some policymakers but not the others, as was the case in the three countries under study. We then situate this ambivalent resonance in the context of immigration priorities and recent trends in immigration policy development in these three countries and suggest that activists can build on ambivalences to advance migrant rights to status.*

KEYWORDS migrant farm workers; secure status; advocacy; frames; ambivalent resonance; COVID-19; Spain; Italy; Canada

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In the last half century, global food production has grown reliant on the cheap and readily available labour of migrants and asylum seekers, some of whom are recruited on an employer-tied temporary contract, while others may be employed without legal authorization to reside and work in these countries (Palumbo et al., 2022). In Spain, Italy, and Canada, the three countries discussed in this article, reliance on migrant labour in agriculture has become a structural element, with migrant workers constituting between 25 and 35% of the total labour force (Casella, 2021; Spanish National Institute of Statistics, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2022). In most countries, migrant farmworkers who are denied permanent residency are excluded from rights and protections in the countries that receive them (e.g., Palumbo et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many preexisting problems these migrants faced (e.g., López-Sala, 2022; López-Sala & Molinero, 2022; Molinero & Avallone 2021; Vosko et al., 2022), while simultaneously revealing how indispensable these workers were for the economic survival of the agricultural sector. The health crisis made visible what had been previously hidden from the public eye: the deplorable working and living conditions among migrant farm workers, which were further exacerbated by the new challenges. Highlighting the deteriorating working environments for migrant farmworkers and the growing number of COVID-related deaths and illnesses among them, activists pressed for change, underscoring the structural embeddedness of these conditions, particularly, migrants' insecure legal status either as temporary guest workers (whose stay in the country is contingent on their ability to comply with employers' demands, no matter how excessive or unfair) or as "deportable" migrants living in irregular migratory conditions. At the same time, the visibility that migrant farmworkers acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for these migrant rights activists to call for change by aligning their understanding of these issues with the representations that seemed to have gained acceptance in the general public, and to a certain degree, among the policymakers.

In this article, we offer illustrations from three countries, namely Spain, Italy, and Canada, where each of the co-authors has conducted research on migrant farmworkers, agriculture, and migrant and pro-migrant activisms (e.g., López-Sala, 2022; López-Sala & Molinero, 2022; Molinero & Avallone 2021; Vosko et al., 2022). Each country employs workers with precarious legal statuses (e.g., undocumented migrants, asylum seekers awaiting decisions on their claims, or guest workers on a temporary visa), and their working and living conditions are seen by many grassroots activists as socially unjust. During the COVID-19 pandemic, activists used social media to voice their concerns and organize action.

Drawing on insights from research on contentious action frames (both "diagnostic" and "prognostic"; see Snow et al., 2019, discussed below), we examine how during the global health crisis, activists articulated specific demands for social justice for migrant farmworkers (particularly, demands for secure legal status) by aligning their frames with the main concerns and issues

that emerged at that time in public discussions. In particular, activists articulated three action frames that were particularly relevant at that time, namely, "essentiality," "health for all" and "increased vulnerability." Using these three themes in their diagnostic frames, activists in these countries framed some of their demands for change (or their prognostic frames) as status for all migrants. However, as we illustrate below, advocacy for status for all migrants who are illegalized or without secure status has not *resonated fully* with the ways policymakers understood these issues, although certain debates and policy initiatives seemed to indicate some congruence between advocates' demands and policymakers' views. Critical of binary depictions of persuasive resonance characteristic of some analyses of contentious action frames, we introduce the notion of *ambivalent resonance* to highlight both agreements and disagreements in how the two sides view certain issues. We then explain why this resonance is ambivalent at best by situating state responses in the context of specific trends in immigration policies in these countries, namely the strong preference for "orderly" and "regular" migration, especially when geared towards certain economic sectors, as well as temporary, rather than permanent, admissions for workers in "lower-skilled" occupations, such as farm work, while simultaneously recognizing the essential contributions that migrants make to these economic sectors and the advantages of having a stable labour force in them.

The analysis presented in this article relies on extensive research that draws on reports, public statements, websites, the press and secondary literature. In the case of Spain a thematic analysis of press articles published in the newspapers *El País*, *El Diario*, *Público* and *El Salto* was conducted. These newspapers provide consistent coverage on migration issues and especially on seasonal migrants working in agriculture. The analysis covered all the news published between April and September 2020 and March and July 2021, the periods of greatest intensity in the seasonal harvests of the agricultural sector and during which the highest information intensity occurs. In the case of Canada, analysis was based on news articles related to migrant farmworkers published by the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) online. Additionally, a search was conducted on the newspaper database on proquest.com using such keywords as "migrant farm workers" and the names of three main advocacy organizations, namely, the MWAC (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change), J4MW (Justicia for Migrant Workers), and UFCW (United Food and Commercial Workers Union). The database search covered the period between March 2020 until May 2022. Furthermore, tweets by MWAC, J4MW and #statusforall on twitter.com were reviewed to identify main advocacy campaigns. In the case of Italy, three sources were analyzed: online archives of the daily newspapers *La Repubblica*, *Il fatto quotidiano* and *Il Manifesto* focusing on articles published between March and September 2020, that is, the period of intense debate on status regularization; official online sources listing national laws and European directives on migration issued during 2020; and

the Melting Pot Europa website (www.meltingpot.org) that posts announcements by migrant and pro-migrant advocacy organizations.

Triangulating insights from media analyses with in-depth interviews with the activists could have made the analysis richer, although it would have been extremely difficult during the COVID-21 restrictions on face-to-face research. For instance, we could have asked the activists to provide insights on the reasons why particular frames were adopted. Similarly, instead of relying on the media coverage of political debates and new regulations, we could have sought views and reflections by policymakers on debates, agreements, and disagreements that occurred during the debates on these issues. However, recognizing that migrant activists, grassroots activists, and policymakers were facing extraordinary demands and challenges during the first year of the pandemic, we chose not to impose an additional burden on these actors by requesting virtual interviews.

The article starts with the discussion of migrant farmworkers' conditions in Spain, Italy, and Canada. It highlights the increasing dependence on migrant workers employed in agriculture and the measures taken by the three states during the health crisis to ensure the provision of workers to farms. Following a brief outline of the concepts of framing and persuasive resonance, the article turns attention to activism and, particularly, the way advocacy for secure legal status for migrant farmworkers (status for all) was framed by activists in the pandemic context by drawing on three prevalent discourses, namely the essentiality of the migrant labour, the need to secure health for all, and the increasing vulnerability of migrant farmworkers. We then outline government responses to these claims, demonstrating that the resonance between activists' framing of the issues and the government understandings of them was ambivalent. Finally, we situate this ambivalent resonance in the context of immigration policy priorities in these three countries.

Migrant Hands in Agriculture: Pre-pandemic Activism for Migrants' Access to Social Justice

In each of the three countries under study, agricultural production has grown dependent on migrant labour. Harsh working conditions, insecurity, seasonality and low wages, as well as the low status of agricultural work has produced the progressive exit of native-born populations from the sector, which have been to a large extent replaced by migrant workers, whether those brought to the country on temporary contracts or working in agriculture without authorization (Avallone, 2017; Basok, 2002; Corrado et al., 2017; López-Sala, 2016; Satzewich, 1991).

In Spain, seasonal production relies heavily on migrant labour composed of some migrants from the European Union (mainly from Romania) who require no legal authorization to work in Spain, temporary migrants mainly from Morocco and recruited through bilateral agreements between Spain and the

sending countries who are tied to specific employers and are required to return to their home countries at the end of the season, as well as migrant farmworkers without legal status, mainly from sub-Saharan African countries and Morocco (Basok & López-Sala, 2016; Guell & Garcés, 2020; Hellio, 2014; López-Sala, 2016; Moreno-Nieto, 2012). With the exception of EU migrants, all other farmworkers find themselves in insecure status, with their presence in the country being contingent on employers or immigration authorities.

In Italy, migrants have been employed in agriculture since the 1980s (Colucci, 2022); today, 10.5% of the agricultural labour force are migrants from EU countries and 23.5% are from non-EU countries (Casella, 2021). Migrants from EU countries (particularly Romania, Poland and Bulgaria), as well as some non-EU migrants employed on a work visa (*Decreto Flussi*) from such countries as Morocco, India and Albania, have been working in Italian agriculture for many years, often on the same farms. In addition, contingent workers including Sub-Saharan asylum seekers and other immigrants who lack residency permits are widely recruited to work in agriculture, and they constitute the most unprotected component of the migrant agricultural workforce exposed to the worst working and housing conditions and informal labour brokering (Caruso & Lo Cascio, 2020; Dines & Rigo, 2015; Peano, 2021).

In Canada, the vast majority of migrant farmworkers are recruited through the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP). Tied to specific employers by temporary work authorization visas, these migrant workers are precluded from circulating freely in the labour force and without this mobility they are deportable (Basok et al., 2014; Vosko et al., 2022).

In each of these three countries, academic researchers have provided ample evidence that documents difficult conditions, characterized by low wages, workplace harassment, occupational health risks, pressures to increase productivity, widespread irregularities, deplorable living conditions and social marginalization among these workers (Basok et al., 2014; Güell & Garcés, 2020; Hennebry et al., 2015; López-Sala & Molinero, 2022; Palumbo et al., 2022; Pedreño et al., 2022; Perry, 2018; Pugliese, 1993), and grassroots activists have called for change, including status regularization. In Spain many civil society organizations have been calling since the 1990s for an improvement in the living conditions of seasonal migrant workers and have called repeatedly for status regularization (Ambrosini, 2015; Gabriel & Macdonald, 2011; López-Sala & Molinero, 2022). As we will demonstrate below, during the pandemic the calls for secure legal status were often framed in relation to three themes that emerged during the pandemic, namely the essential nature of the work that migrant farm workers provided (or what we call the essentiality frame), the link between the health of these workers and the health of the entire community (or what we call the health for all frame) and the increasing vulnerability of these workers (or the vulnerability frame). Prior to discussing these frames, we will review main contributions of the framing perspective to understanding contentious action.

Mobilizing for Change: The Framing Perspective

Contentious action can be analyzed from a variety of theoretical perspectives, including organizational and financial resources, political opportunities, the role of leaders, or diffusion of ideas, to name a few (see e.g., Della Porta & Diani, 2014). Emphasizing interpretive meaning constructions, some analysts hone on the manner in which demands for change are framed by activists (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow, et al., 2019). To be effective, a call for change must be rooted in the analysis and interpretation of social conditions deemed to be unjust. Diagnostic framing therefore transforms material conditions into grievances. Prognostic framing, on the other hand, advances a solution to the social injustice by identifying specific changes that need to be made to improve the situation of the disadvantaged people (Snow et al., 2019). The purpose of collective action frames is to motivate action, solicit support from bystanders, neutralize opponents (Snow et al., 2019), and ultimately, we would argue, convince those responsible for reproducing injustice at the structural level, such as policymakers, to enact change, as pro-migrant activists attempted to do in Spain, Italy, and Canada.

Analysts of contentious action underscore the dynamic nature of frame construction. Often collective action frames draw on the principles and values embedded in such master frames as human rights, civil rights or environmental justice (Snow et al., 2019), and at times, activists consider it necessary to modify their frames and align them with specific interests, values, and interpretations of social events by potential adherents and resource providers, as happened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collective action frames are regarded as effective if they resonate with the framing of the issues in question by the intended audience (Snow et al., 2019) whether it be ordinary citizens or policymakers. In analyzing migrant rights advocacy campaigns, in particular the relevance of resonance between the way activists frame issues and the interpretations of these issues by the broader society, the media and the political actors has been underscored. Frames employed in advocacy for migrant rights, including the human (or civil) rights, economic contribution, and family unity frames have been highlighted in the literature, and the degree to which they resonate with the views and opinions of the general public or policymakers has been assessed (e.g., Basok & Piper, 2013; Bloemeraad & Voss, 2020; Cook, 2010; Fujiwara, 2005; Voss et al., 2020).

Drawing on this literature, in this article we examine the framing of the issues by activists who organized to improve working and living conditions of migrant farmworkers in Spain, Italy, and Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. We show how at that time, activists aligned their diagnostic collective action frames with specific issues, concerns, and interpretations with the themes that were prevalent in public discussions. Three themes in particular tended to surface frequently in both the media and discourses put forward by activists demanding change, namely, the essential contribution migrants make

to agricultural production, the need to protect migrant workers from the spread of the COVID-19 virus as a way of protecting the health of all citizens, and the deterioration of the migrant workers' living and working conditions. Employing these three themes in their diagnostic frames, many activists then advocated for secure legal status for all migrants (or what we call the status for all prognostic frames), as discussed in the section that follows. We then demonstrate in the section that follows that their prognostic frames produced an ambivalent resonance with the understanding of the issues by the policymakers. We thus question the binary portrayals of resonance, prevalent in the literature mentioned above as either present or absent, and argue that it can be both, as the concept of ambivalent resonance we employ in this article captures.

Framing Demands for Secure Status: Essentiality, Health for All, Increased Vulnerability

To contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, at the onset of the global pandemic most countries, including Spain, Italy, and Canada, closed their borders to travelers. However, agricultural producers soon warned that these measures would lead to labour shortages in agriculture. To guarantee the supply of workers for this economic sector, exceptional measures were deemed necessary. In Spain, following the March 30, 2020, declaration by the European Commission on waving restrictions for seasonal agricultural workers (Molinero, 2021), the government deemed these workers "essential" and took specific action to recruit farmworkers. In April 2020, the Spanish government issued a decree to encourage migrant workers whose residence permit expired between March 13 and June 30, 2020, unemployed people that could combine unemployment benefits with a job contract in the agriculture, and asylum seekers to take jobs in agriculture (Güell & Garcés, 2020). Other special measures included the renewal of work permits granted before the pandemic to some seasonal workers, such as those from Morocco, and temporary permits for unaccompanied migrant minors and young workers between the age of 18 and 21 willing to do agricultural work. Finally, mobility restrictions on Romanian seasonal workers were also removed (Güell & Garcés, 2020.

The Italian government also took action to guarantee the supply of migrant farm workers, including the so called *Cura Italia* (Save Italy) Decree, approved on March 17, 2020, that extended to December 31, 2020, all residence permits for seasonal work that had expired or were due to expire between February 23 and May 31, 2020. In addition, article 103 of the Law-Decree 34/2020 (the so-called Relaunch decree, issued on May 19, 2020) provided a six-month renewal of the residence permits that expired on October 31, 2019, or later. In fact, according to data reported by IDOS (2021), in comparison with 2019, total working days in agriculture in 2020 decreased by 0.6% (p. 282). The working days of Italian agricultural workers decreased by 1.6%, while the working days

of foreign-born agricultural workers increased by 1.8%. Recognizing the essential contribution of migrant labour to some "essential sectors," the Relaunch decree also authorized the regularization of undocumented workers, as discussed below.

Even though Canada closed its borders on March 16, 2020, just four days later, migrant farmworkers were exempted from the travel ban under pressure from the Canadian growers who claimed that without migrant farmworkers the food industry would not survive (Basok & George, 2020). By exempting migrant farmworkers from travel restrictions in March, 2020, the Canadian government (similarly to the governments of Spain and Italy) affirmed that these workers were of vital importance to the wider society (Harris, 2020).

Activists in these three countries seized the opportunity that the global health pandemic presented to argue that being essential for the economy was one important reason why these workers deserved to receive secure legal status. The *essentiality frame* appeared in many statements made by the activists in these countries. The awareness of migrants without legal status as essential subjects crystallized into a political struggle around access to a full legal status through the #RegularizaciónYa movement in Spain. This social movement viewed the health crisis as a historic opportunity to present demands for status on the basis of the migrants' indispensability. During the spring of 2020, the press reported multiple statements from agricultural migrant workers demanding regularization not foreseen in the government's measures. As an agricultural worker employed in the province of Huelva stated, "they consider us of little use and if we don't pick fruit, there is no food for anyone. We are indispensable" (Sánchez, 2020a). The spokesman for irregular agricultural workers in Huelva Seydou Diop linked their indispensability to the demand for status regularization:

> During this pandemic, the agricultural sector has been essential for everyone in this country who wants to access food. Spain has no right to deny us regularization. I do not understand why the current progressive government does not want to accept the fairness of this campaign. I think it is a disgrace and has no legal justification. (Diop, 2020)

By emphasizing the essentiality of the workers in framing calls for status regularization, Spanish activists are thus realigning their earlier frames based on human rights and on their economic contributions (Santi, 2018) to the themes that became prevalent during the pandemic.

In Canada, activists similarly lobbied the Canadian authorities to grant permanent residency status to non-status migrants by framing their advocacy in relation to the workers' indispensability. In her interview with the press, Evelyn Encalada Grez, a founder of Justice for Migrant Workers (J4MW), underscores the vital contribution of migrant farmworkers to the Canadian society when she questions why the government has not granted these workers status:

> What we see now [is that] migrant workers are part of the dialogue around essential workers… I don't know what it's going to take. If it's not a pandemic, what else is it going to take for the Canadian government to recognize migrant farm workers and their families who have been part of our communities? They're the ones that put their lives at risk constantly to feed us. (Baylon, 2021).

The second frame, *health for all*, was an outcome of pervasive debates on the adequacy of health measures and protections. Arguing that the health of all depended on the health of migrant workers, activists suggested that status regularization was a way to improve the latter's access to health. In Spain, social organizations such as Caritas, one of the organizations that works the most in supporting migrant seasonal workers, advocated for the regularization of migrants and emphasized that seasonal workers were victims, not the cause of the spread of the virus (Caritas, 2020). As Fernando García-Benavides, professor of Public Health at the Pompeu Fabra University and former president of the Spanish Society of Epidemiology, put it, "the pandemic has highlighted the problems of irregular immigration, which cannot continue as irregular." He therefore concluded by saying, "giving them an identity and papers is urgent and we are behind schedule" (Ramón, 2020). As Blanca Garcés, an expert in migration, also indicated to the newspaper *Público*, "public health policies cannot be implemented to control a pandemic when thousands of people excluded from the system are sleeping on the streets" (Vargas, 2020b).

Similar discourses were prevalent in Italy. For instance, Intersos, an Italian NGO active in health care in rural ghettos in Apulia, and the Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration sent a letter to the Regional Administrations calling for *inclusive* health measures to be put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in this region (ASGI, 2020). Italian migrant rights advocates linked the need to include migrants in protection measures to their legal status. On March 20, 2020, a network of NGOs, joined by hundreds of grassroots activists, researchers, academics and others, appealed for amnesty for migrants without legal status framing this demand in relation to health for all (Lasciatecientrare, 2020). As activists pointed out:

> The coronavirus makes government intervention all the more necessary and urgent, because now in addition to other good reason to offer an amnesty, there is the need to protect collective health, including that of the hundreds of thousands of migrants without residence permits, who have no access to public health. (Lasciatecientrare, 2020)

As was articulated in the appeal, it was necessary "to 'engage' these hundreds of thousands of people as well: to contain their risk of contracting the virus, so that they can access public health services without fear when they experience symptoms, so that they do not become vectors for transmitting the virus despite themselves" (Lasciatecientrare, 2020).

In Naples, using the slogan "no more amnesty swindle" (Il Mattino, 2020), activists within the immigrant and refugee rights movement clearly articulated the connection between status and the need to protect the health of all citizens and migrants when they argued:

> Faced with a pandemic, the government has failed to protect the collective health of Italians and foreigners; it has focused mainly on providing labour for certain economic sectors, particularly the large-scale food distribution industry, while forcing some people to become clandestine and invisible; it does not think about the collective health of citizens. We think this is very serious. The health of Italian and foreign people should come before profits. (Pupia Campania, 2020)

In Canada, similar arguments were voiced by activists calling for immigration reforms. For instance, in their May 26, 2020, Presentation to Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, MWAC characterized a status regularization program as the only effective response to the COVID-19 crisis (MWAC, 2020).

The third theme that was adopted in migrant activists' diagnostic frames was the *increasing vulnerability* of migrant workers during the pandemic. Ignored for many decades through a policy of indifference (López-Sala & Molinero, 2022), the deplorable conditions under which migrant farmworkers toil the land and live came into the spotlight in the three countries during the pandemic, triggering broad social and political debate. Despite regulations put in place to protect labour from the spread of the virus in workplaces (e.g., Government of Ontario, n.d.; Ministerio de Sanidad, 2020), the pandemic posed severe risks to the lives of the migrant workers. In Spain and Italy, for example, many farmworkers were forced to live in informal settlements in substandard accommodations or abandoned facilities where they were particularly vulnerable to the spread of the virus (Güell & Garcés, 2020; López-Sala & Molinero, 2022; Tagliacozzo et al., 2021). Even though the Spanish Ministry of Health and the National Institute for Workplace Accident Insurance in Italy introduced health protocols and guidelines that applied to all workers, including farmworkers (Casorri et al., 2021; Ministerio de Sanidad, 2020), these measures proved to be insufficient, and outbreaks among migrant workers became rampant (e.g., Corrado & Palumbo, 2022). In Spain, many COVID-19 outbreaks among migrant farmworkers were attributed to the difficulties of maintaining hygienic conditions in the settlements and on farms in such provinces as Lleida, Huesca, Huelva or Albacete (Calzado et al., 2020; Güell, 2020; Pedreño et al., 2022; Vargas, 2020a). Social tensions between migrant and local residents that resulted from these outbreaks were denounced by grassroots activists who underscored the link between the outbreaks and chronic conditions of legal and social precariousness, compounded by the indifference to migrants' misery by the administration and employers (Garcés-Mascareñas & Güell, 2021; Molinero, 2021). Although there have been no cases of COVID-related deaths among migrants working in agriculture in Spain, the deterioration of their working conditions, attributable for the

pandemic, did gain prominence in the press, especially after the death of an irregular Nicaraguan worker in Murcia (Garcés-Mascareñas & Güell, 2021). In July 2020, the Ombudsman called on all administrations, agricultural employers and agricultural organizations to seek a coordinated and urgent solution to put an end to "the situation of degradation in which seasonal agricultural workers live in various areas of Spain" (Defensor del Pueblo, 2020).

In Italy, journalists, activists, and grassroots organizations also highlighted the appalling health conditions in the so-called rural ghettoes especially in Calabria and Apulia during the pandemic (e.g., Camilli, 2020). Quoting Francesco Piobbichi of Mediterranean Hope, a project for migrants and refugees implemented by the Federation of Evangelical Churches, a *Redattore Sociale* article highlights "a total absence of a public response to an issue that risks becoming an emergency within an emergency from the point of view of health, namely, living in tent cities and ghettos means living in precarious and highly vulnerable conditions" (Camilli, 2020). In its report, the Research Centre for Agricultural Policies and Bioeconomy of the Council for Agricultural Research and Economics, a department within the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, laments that the government failed to consider the realities of the migrant workers' living conditions in their COVID-19 health emergency measures, pointing out the lack of "any specific preventive action on the part of institutional bodies in these highly risky contexts" (Macrí, 2020, p. 114).

Similarly in Canada, the coverage of deplorable living conditions of migrant farmworkers was widespread (e.g., Baum & Grant, 2020; Nolan 2021). Despite certain measures adopted on farms, such as masking, disinfecting, and distancing, outbreaks soon followed. In Ontario, the province that receives the largest number of migrant farmworkers, 12% of the migrant labour force tested positive for the COVID-19 virus, and three migrant farmworkers died in 2020. In 2021 and 2022, despite testing, vaccinations, and other precautionary measures, both infections and deaths continued (Caxaj, 2022). The spread of the COVID-19 virus among migrant farmworkers was attributed mainly to overcrowded housing conditions in employer-provided compound housing, as well as poor enforcement of health regulations (Mojtehedzadeh, 2020; Tasker, 2021).

Critical of these conditions, activists used the "increasing vulnerability" frame to call for status regularization. In different parts of Spain, migrant agricultural workers protested the terrible living conditions they had suffered for years and the dangers to their lives and health during the pandemic, arguing that a legalization process would allow them to improve their living conditions and continue to perform their essential work with dignity. For example, in the province of Albacete, protesting the confinement of 400–500 workers in perilous conditions in an abandoned factory in response to a COVID-19 outbreak (with at least 23 migrants testing positive), African workers called for status regularization (Espinosa, 2020a, 2020b). Similarly, in the town of Lepe

(Huelva) following the fire that destroyed accommodations in a shantytown that housed hundreds of migrant workers in summer 2020, protesters voiced demands for status regularization (Pedreño et al., 2022; Sainz, 2020a).

In Italy, a network of NGOs and trade unions called for "an amnesty against the coronavirus" (La Repubblica, 2020) citing exploitation and the illegal intermediation of farmworkers as the main reasons why an amnesty for irregularized migrants was urgently needed:

> The institutions can finally give substance to the will to leave no one behind in this emergency. The amnesty for all irregular foreigners is indispensable to allow them access to care and work, at a time when ghettos are a potential health bomb and agriculture is facing labour shortages. But this must not be an opportunity to supply the primary sector with cheap labour at a time of economic shock: alongside regularization measures, we call for a stronger commitment to combat undeclared work and *caporalato* [labour brokerage mafia]. (La Repubblica, 2020)

In Canada, at rallies for status for migrants and other public events, pro-migrant activists frequently highlighted the apparent contradiction between being "essential" yet "expendable" (Carter, 2021). Syed Hussan and Karen Cocq from Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, and Chris Ramsroop from Justicia for Migrant Workers appeared frequently on radio and television highlighting deplorable conditions of the workers during the pandemic, calling for stronger protections from the virus in workers' compound dwelling and at work, income replacement supports for workers injured at work and those unable to return to their homes due to the pandemic, among other issues. In most cases, having exposed specific problems, these activists called for permanent residency status for migrant farmworkers (e.g., Tymczyszyn, 2020). Summarizing their position in their May 26, 2020, written submission to Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, MWAC stated:

> Migrants are doing essential work now, and always have been. But they are unable to access decent work, equal rights or family unification because they do not have full immigration status. This is why we are calling for a regularization program to immediately extend full immigration status to all non-permanent residents in the country without exclusions. (MWAC, 2020)

By aligning their diagnostic frames with three burning issues relevant to migrant farmworkers during the pandemic, activists then called for status regularization as the only viable solution to these problems. In the next section, we will explore how status regularization was viewed by policymakers in Spain, Italy, and Canada, and the initiatives that were introduced to grant status to some migrants, showing that at best the prognostic frames advanced by the activists resonated only partially with the understanding of these issues by the state, producing no more than what we call an ambivalent resonance.

State Discourses and Measures: Dissonances, Resonances and In-between

In each of the three countries, Spain, Italy, and Canada, granting secure status to migrants was discussed at the political levels, but the resonance between migrant activists' demands and the positions adopted by government officials was ambivalent, that is, both present and absent. In Spain, this issue provoked an internal debate producing what we call horizontal ambivalence. In Italy and Spain, initiatives to regularize status were launched, yet by far, these measures were short of what activists proposed. We call it vertical ambivalence.

In Spain, broad sectors of civil society, the majority of trade unions, as well as several political parties of the Parliament, supported the demands for status regularization of seasonal workers. In multiple statements to the press, Pablo Echenique, spokesman for Unidas Podemos in Congress, clearly defended a regularization for migrants in an irregular situation and sought different Parliament supports to be able to carry it forward (Díez & Casqueiro, 2020). Many of the most important social organizations working in the field of migration not only advocated for status regularization, but also made an explicit demand to the government during their participation in the so-called Commission for Economic and Social Reconstruction of the Congress, a commission created in Parliament in 2020 to generate policy proposals in response to the health crisis (Europapress, 2020a). This demand was also supported by several mayors, such as Miquel Pueyo, mayor of the city of Lleida, a city located near the agricultural enclaves of the Segriá region that receives thousands of foreign seasonal workers every summer (Congostrina, 2020). In fact, when the #RegularizaciónYA movement drafted and submitted a non-legislative proposal for regularization in the Spanish Parliament in June 2020, several political parties of the Parliament, including Unidas Podemos, a member of the coalition government, spoke in favour these changes. Yet, despite the recognition of the essential nature of migrant's farm work and support by some parties, the government ruled out "papers for all" and the implementation of a status regularization campaign as a solution (Sainz, 2020b). As can be seen, the issue of irregular immigration produced wide tensions within the government with some politicians supporting this measure and others expressing strong opposition. Despite the support by others in government, the ruling Socialist Party refused to carry out a status regularization campaign. The Minister of Social Security and Immigration, the government spokeswoman, as well as the Secretary of State for Immigration, reiterated repeatedly their opposition to this proposal (Europapress, 2020b).

In Italy, as mentioned earlier, the government introduced a regularization program through the Relaunch Decree in 2020 (Perrotta, 2022). This regularization was defended by the Minister of Agriculture, Teresa Bellanova, as a measure to make "the invisible less invisible." As she explained, "those who have been exploited in the countryside… will not be invisible, they will have access to a residence permit for work, and we will help them to regain their identity and dignity" (Adnkronos, 2020). However, this program was

highly selective. The Interior Minister, Lamorgese, a proponent of this policy, explained his rationale for this measure at a hearing before the Chamber's Constitutional Affairs Commission as follows: "we are not talking about regularizing all irregular migrants present in the country, but those who are needed and can meet requirements" (Il fatto quotidiano, 2020). In other words, the government responded mainly to the fears raised by agricultural entrepreneurs about the expected labour shortages, and not to the calls for status for all framed by the advocates in relation to health for all, migrants' essentiality, or increasing vulnerability (Ippolito et al., 2021). In fact, only a few agricultural workers without status were able to obtain a residence permit under this program. Of the 220,000 migrants who applied for amnesty, only 15% were employed in agriculture (the remaining 85% were employed in personal care). Regrettably, the vast majority of migrant farmworkers without status (estimated to be 150,000 workers) were not able to improve their legal conditions (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

In the case of Canada, many of the criticisms launched by academics and activists against the Canadian temporary workers' program are recognized by the general public or the federal government, and certain initiatives (alas, insufficient or inadequate) have been put in place to protect migrant workers (Vosko et al., 2022). However, whereas many activists call for status for all, the Canadian government, similarly to the government of Italy, chose an approach that grants status to some migrants who meet certain criteria that, in the eyes of the Canadian state, would make them more deserving of Canadian citizenship.

In 2019, a three-year agri-food pilot project offered a pathway to residency for some migrant workers employed in this industry. However, the ceiling was set low: a maximum of 2,750 principal applicants employed in the Canadian agri-food industry and their family members were to be granted status. Furthermore, successful candidates were to be non-seasonal workers (that is, those employed in 12-month operations or food processing) who could meet relatively high education and language proficiency requirements (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019).

On April 14, 2021, Canada announced a new pathway to permanent residency for over 50,000 essential workers (20,000 in healthcare and 30,000 in other selected essential occupations, such as construction, transportation, and agriculture) and 40,000 for international students who graduated from Canadian institutions who were actively contributing to Canada's economy. All candidates had to meet requirements for proficiency in one of Canada's official languages and general admissibility requirements, in addition to holding an authorization to work in Canada and working at the time of the application (Government of Canada, 2021). The spots for international students were filled within days of the announcement, while very few applications were submitted by health care workers and other essential workers (Nolan, 2021). In fact, according to a survey of 3,000 migrants conducted by the Migrant Rights Network, almost one-half said they would not be able to meet the requirements,

including the high costs of application and language proficiency testing, as well as proficiency in official languages and a certain length of work in essential jobs in Canada (Baylon, 2021).

While migrant advocates continued to rally throughout 2021 and 2022 in support of status for all upon arrival as the only socially just solution to address migrants' vulnerabilities, the Canadian government took a step in the opposite direction by announcing a program on April 4, 2022, that makes it easier for employers to hire migrant workers under the TFWP and allows longer contracts for more workers. It is noteworthy that the announcement of the new program includes promises related to Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) intentions to strengthen the TFWP compliance regime to protect the workers through an improved inspection regime, a tip line to allow workers to report situations of abuse, and some pathways to permanent residency (ESDC, 2022). However, given fear on the part of abused workers to report abuses given their insecure status in Canada, and the limitations of previous initiatives to grant permanent residency to temporary workers, these promises may not be sufficient.

Discussion and Conclusions

As the discussion presented in this article illustrates, migrant activists in Spain, Italy, and Canada articulated their demands for secure status for migrants (or what we called the status for all prognostic frame) in relation to one or two of three main diagnostic frames, namely essentiality, health for all, and increasing vulnerability. In including these themes in their diagnostic of the problems, activists aligned their frames with the topics that received broad coverage in the media and public debates. Yet, their prognostic frame that called for status for all remained somewhat misaligned with the prevalent visions among government administrators and policymakers, although in each of these countries certain debates took place, and measures were taken to address the need to grant permanent residency to migrants without status. While Italy and Canada introduced some small-scale or temporary status regularization programs, their main objectives were to meet urgent demands for labour in agriculture (and other sectors), instead of improving the rights of migrants. As such, these initiatives were restricted only to some migrants and not others, short-lived, and poorly executed. They were far from the visions put forward by the activists. Thus, these measures revealed that a utilitarian approach to migration (that is, ensuring that the labour demand for low-wage jobs was met) by far prevailed over concerns for these migrants' rights to live in dignity.

The three cases analyzed highlight the importance of visualizing resonance (both its presence and absence) in relative, rather than absolute terms or as binary opposites. In the case of Spain, the resonance was ambivalent because it revealed tensions, conflicts, and disagreements among policymakers representing different political parties as well as within the coalition

government itself. In the case of Italy and Canada, the resonance was ambivalent because certain status regularization initiatives corresponded to the demands of the activists; however, they did so only partially. The first type of ambivalent resonance may be characterized as horizontal and the second as vertical. Seeing the first type of resonance as only partial, we concur with other studies that postulated that a frame that resonates with only some policymakers but not others may not be sufficient to bring about policy changes (Basok & Piper, 2013, p. 259) and that analyses of policy outcomes must "be sensitive to the cleavages and divisions in power structures and recognize those internal divisions" (Basok & Piper, 2013, p. 268). With respect to the second type of ambivalent resonance, we suggest that when resonance between activists' and policymakers' visions is partial or ambivalent, some political discourses and administrative changes may appear to correspond to activists' demands; yet this semblance may be illusionary, and in fact, many policies based on ambivalent resonance with the advocate's demands generally fail to address fundamental causes of social injustice, as we saw in the case of the three countries under study.

Our analysis reveals that even in exceptional times characterized by serious social and health crises, states have been largely reticent, and in some cases openly opposed to expanding the rights of migrants with precarious statuses, thus consolidating the approaches toward managing migration that are blind to social justice concerns articulated by activists. In the case of migrant farmworkers, the health crisis revealed a social justice paradox: without secure status these workers are simultaneously recognized as essential yet condemned to the worst social and economic conditions that put their lives in danger (Pedreño, 2020; Torres & Pérez, 2022).

These responses are in line with the recent trends in immigrant policy developments in these countries. In both Spain and Italy, the anti-regularization rhetoric has been prevalent in public debates on migrants without status in the last few decades. This rhetoric reflects the centrality that the fight against irregular immigration has acquired on the political agenda in both countries. Their location at Europe's external border means that both are the countries of first arrival for migrants travelling by sea. The discourse around a regular, safe and orderly migration is an expression of an implicit opposition to irregular migration. This discourse has shaped migration policies in these countries and is responsible for the reluctance by these states to address the needs of migrants without status (López Sala & Godenau, 2017; Molinero & López-Sala, 2022). Both countries draw a line between deserving migrants (i.e., those who arrive in the country through legal channels) and undeserving migrants (those using irregular channels). Both adopt policies that (re)produce illegality by denying access to membership and benefits to those who have arrived through irregular channels, thus reinforcing on a daily basis the distinction between legal and illegal migrants (Palidda, 2009; Quassoli, 2013). The official intolerance toward irregular arrivals was amplified during the pandemic, when states adopted measure to further secure their borders from any new arrivals. If

anything, Spain reconfirmed its preference for regular recruitment channels for the sectors experiencing labour shortages by strengthening extant channels (e.g., the employment of Romanian and Moroccan migrants; see Sánchez, 2020b) and expanding its labour mobility schemes to other geographic areas. A new pilot seasonal labour program for farmworkers from Ecuador and Honduras, introduced in 2021, is another step towards diversifying the sources of recruitment for agricultural work (España & Sainz, 2021). These seasonal migrant labor schemes are widely supported by the public and by various governments as a preferred strategy for securing labour for the agricultural sector on a seasonal basis.

In Canada, temporary, contract-based migration has been displacing permanent residency migration in the last few decades (Lenard & Straehle, 2010; Nakache & Kinoshita, 2010). Since 2007, temporary migrants have been on the rise and today temporary visa arrivals outnumber the number of immigrants with landed immigrant status (Akbar, 2022). Canada's priority has been to supply the labour force to the sectors that face labour shortages by recruiting flexible and mostly cheap workers from other countries (Akbar, 2022).

These trends are detrimental to migrant lives, and as such they have been opposed by migrant rights activists. However, given the deeply entrenched intolerance toward irregular migrants in southern Europe (and elsewhere) and the strong preference for managed migration in Canada, Spain and other countries, the governments of these countries are likely to show little sympathy for demands by activists to grant status to all migrants, and if any measures are taken, they are not likely to benefit migrant farmworkers in any significant fashion. And yet, as we argued in this article, some of the actions taken by governments demonstrate *some resonance* between demands put forward by the activists and state policies. What these actions illustrate is that governments in these countries do recognize that migrant labour is essential, at least in some sectors such as agriculture, and a more stable labour force may, in fact, be advantageous. Activists can build on these small openings and lobby for more changes. The challenge for activists in the migrant rights movement is to advance diagnostic and prognostic frames that employ the language that would resonate more fully with the interpretation of these issues by policymakers. As struggles for migrant farmworkers' rights continue, additional research, using diverse methodological approaches, is needed to enrich our understanding of action needed to bring about social justice for migrants working in the agriculture sector.

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