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Migrants' Associations in Italy and the 2010 Migrants' Strike

SUMMARY

On 1st March 2010 a “Migrants’ Strike” took place in Italy as well as in other European countries. In Italy, its organisation relied on a wide network of migrants’ associations. Based on press analysis, participant observations and interviews, this paper focuses on the case study of the Italian Migrants’ Strike, aiming at exploring the political side of the migrants’ participation. After a short description of the event of the 1st March 2010 in Italy, the paper focuses on the migrants’ political and discursive opportunity structure. The analysis indicates that the 1st March event and more recent migrants’ strikes have several elements of similarity with other contemporary political movements. These elements are the search for effective political instruments other than the strike, the process of identity-building and the negotiation between different political cultures.

KEY WORDS: associations, political participation, migrants’ strike, migration

1. MIGRANTS’ STRIKE – A DAY WITHOUT MIGRANTS¹

On 1st March 2010 a “Migrants’ Strike” took place in Italy as well as in other European countries. Its aim was to focus public attention on the political and economic situation of migrants within the European hosting societies. Apart from raising public concern, this event testifies to the presence of forms of organisation and political participation of the migrants, as migrants within the host societies. Based on participant observation, short interviews, and press analysis, this article focuses on the Italian Migrants’ Strike in order to explore the political side of the migrants’ political participation.

The Italian “Migrants’ Strike” refers strictly to similar migrants’ strikes organised all over Europe on the same day as well as to other similar experiences;² it has been promoted by a group of women, both migrants and natives, and organised

¹ Thanks to Ilenya Camozzi, Chiara Marchetti, Timothy Peace, Enrico Pugliese, Michela Semprebon and Tommaso Vitale, for their useful comments.

² Specifically, the French initiative *La journée sans immigrés: 24h sans nous*.

through a wide and capillary of networking, aimed at linking and gathering together all the different actors engaged in migration issues – such as migrants' associations, grass-roots movements, political parties and concerned politicians. Websites and social networks have been important channels of participation, but the basic idea has been to rely on grass-roots associations and on their mobilisation capacity, since the event of 1st March 2010 was meant to be the first step towards a new migrant activism within Italian public life. The event took place in sixty Italian cities, with about 300,000 participants. Big cities showed the largest number of participants: 2 000 in Milan, 5 000, in Rome, 20 000 in Naples, 10 000 in Brescia – in the last one also several factories, which have a high rate of immigrant workers, were closed.

This report aims to contribute to the discussion over the political activism of migrants in Italy, being based on participant observation of local weekly meetings, organisational process, and publicizing activities (January – March 2010), and on short interviews with migrants³ on March 1st, 2010. The data collection also included the analysis of 168 daily newspaper articles dealing with the topic of the migrants' strike and political participation; the sample gathered articles from the most widely diffused Italian daily newspapers⁴ between January 2010 and March 2012. The second section focuses on the discursive opportunity structure of the migrants, while the third revolves around their political opportunity structure. Finally, the article draws some preliminary conclusions on the political dimensions of migrant activism in Italy.

2. ITALIAN DISCURSIVE OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE FOR MIGRANTS

Some scholars have recently argued that the analysis of migrant political participation should take into account the Discursive Opportunity Structure (Cinalli and Giugni, 2008; Koopmans et al., 2005; Koopmans, 2004; Koopmans and Statham, 2000). The discourses prevailing within the public sphere produce frames and discursive opportunities for the migrants' claims, protests and demands. Indeed, the discursive level affects the concrete opportunities for political involvement. I shall proceed from a qualitative perspective, briefly reviewing the literature on migrant images in Italy (see Kotic and Triandafyllidou, 2005); then, I shall discuss the results of press and frame analysis.

³ Twenty short interviews with migrants during the general strike, gender balanced.

⁴ The daily newspapers included four politically independent newspapers (*La Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa*, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*), two leftist newspapers (*Il Manifesto* and *L'Unità*), three rightist newspapers (*Il Giornale*, *La Padania* and *Liberò*), and one Catholic newspaper (*L'Avvenire*). The articles were sampled from the Italian Parliament newspapers archive.

In recent years, the discursive opportunity structure for migrants and foreigners in Italy has been increasingly reducing. Studies on political attitudes toward migrants have highlighted that left-wing parties are usually more concerned about the migration theme, promoting a “multicultural” and “integration” discourse, whereas right-wing parties see a division between nationalists and moderate conservatives. While nationalists focus on the cultural dimension, promoting restrictive politics toward migrants, the conservatives frame migrants just as temporary workers functional in the national economic sphere (Grillo and Pratt, 2002). The right-wing majorities (Lega Nord and Polo delle Libertà, now Popolo della Libertà) have often based their political campaigns on presenting migration as a matter of public security (Caponio, 2005). Especially the Lega Nord puts the struggle against undocumented migration at the very centre of its political discourses (Cousin and Vitale, 2006; Biorcio, 2010, 1997). Another important element is related to the migrants’ threat to Italian national identity. Religion especially has been re-interpreted as a cultural and identity marker for both migrants and natives. Moreover, migration is considered strictly connected to public security, firstly in relation to common criminality and illegal entries, secondly referring to the threat of “radical Islamic terrorism”.

Furthermore, a sort of disease affecting migrants is spreading in the public sphere (Naletto, 2009). Mass media, for instance, promoted a negative image of immigrants, often summarising the whole of migration under the label of “illegal entries” (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2005). Media have an alarmist and stereotyping attitude toward migrants, who are labelled as extra-communitarian, illegal undocumented (*clandestini*), immigrants (COSPE, 2003; see also COSPE, 2008 and CENSIS, 2002). There is a systematic super-estimation of the migrants’ numbers, especially when considering the undocumented (Binotto and Martino, 2005).

More broadly, Bordignon and Diamanti (2002) identify three main dimensions in the idea of migrants as a problem (see also Ruzza, 2008). The first dimension is the security threat, focusing on migrants as “invaders” and a source of “criminality”, especially in terms of individual security. The undocumented immigration is described in this frame as inextricably connected to criminal activities. The second dimension, the job threat, is related to the labour market and focuses on migrants as job competitors. Finally, the third dimension involves the threat to culture and religious identity. Within the public sphere, migrants are described, almost by definition, not only as foreigners but also as aliens, with different cultures. The difference has become a fact that has to be faced and the culture itself risks being transformed into a fact, as several scholars have noticed (see, for instance, Aime, 2004). This migrants-crime frame appears to be much diffused within the Italian public sphere.

As for the migrants' voice, Koopmans suggests taking into account three basic features of the migrants' political claims: "the degree to which migrants and their organisations participate in public debates and mobilisation around issues of immigration and ethnic relations; the degree to which the migrants' claims-making refers to the politics of their countries of origin (homelands) as against their situation in the country of residence; and the degree of proactive claims by migrants for integration, participation and rights in the country of residence" (Koopmans, 2004: 453).

Ruzza (2008) points out that the anti-racist movement in Italy focused on the migrants' human rights, justifying their access to public social services and political representation. Moreover, the anti-racist movement tries to counter-frame the exclusionary attitudes based on a mono-ethnic model and the perception of inter-ethnic rivalry (Ruzza, 2008: 57). Overall, the discursive opportunity structure is quite limited within the institutional channels: only a few political parties include migrant members; workers' unions include a large number of migrants, also as representatives, but they only account for specific job sectors (especially factories). Therefore, the migrants' associations are the most important channels for the migrants' direct voice. In any case, from an institutional point of view, these associations mainly operate at a local level (especially at the regional level) when they are organised on a country-of-origin basis. The migrants' strike has been the first case in Italy of a "migrants' discourse" promoted by the anti-racist movement with institutional and non-institutional migrants' associations (meaning that the organising committee also included the associations that usually have no voice). Given the limited discursive opportunity structure for migrants in Italy, it is interesting to understand which discursive strategy the migrants' strike develops.

We may draw some hypotheses on the effects of the discursive sphere on the mobilisation. First, given the diffused migrants-crime frame, we could expect that the mobilisation put it as a priority to counter-frame common sense, promoting a different idea on migrants. Second, because of the need for a broad consensus, it is likely that the actors focus on general issues, in order to achieve as much solidarity as possible. Thus, it also seems likely for the political themes to be at the border of the 1st March discourse, rather than at the centre, at least in a media perspective.

2.1. Media and the migrants – Discursive frames of the migrants' associations for the strike

This section focuses on discursive frames around the migrants' strike. Firstly, it takes into account the media sphere, and then it focuses on 1st March organisers' frames.

The Italian public and political context of the first months of 2010 was characterised by a tense situation as regards migration⁵ and by high media attention. From the press analysis, we can identify four different categories of actors dealing with the migrants' strike in the public sphere, promoting different frames. The first actor is the organising committee. Its public interventions were hosted by leftist and centre-left newspapers. Organisers intervened in the media sphere to explain the reasons for the strike, which included the opposition both to the institutional and popular racism, the defence of democracy, and the promotion of integration through a strike involving both migrants and natives. Organisers underlined the importance of the initiative, its diffusion and the networking activities.⁶ Specifically, they framed the migrants' strike as an antiracist initiative, a first step towards the migrants' full citizenship and integration within Italian society. The second actor is the wide galaxy of the Italian left, supporting the initiative. Among the political parties, while the support of the small leftist and centre-left parties (Federazione della Sinistra, Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà, Partito Socialista Italiano, Movimento Federalista Europeo, Italia dei Valori) was effective, the Partito Democratico (centre-left) gave quite formal support to the initiative, and that just a couple of weeks before the strike. This actor included leftist opinion leaders, various activists and activist organizations working with migrants, political organisations such as the youth of Partito Democratico, and the Blacks Out association (which included several other civic associations, such as ARCI and ACLI). This latter was organised around the homonymous fictional book to support a migrants' strike on the 20th March – it then co-operated with the 1st March initiative. This category also included leftist politicians who firstly expressed some concern about the political consequences of a strike failure, and then expressed their support. The supporters mainly insisted on two basic issues: the opposition to the institutional racism, and the support for the 1st March initiative as a grass-root event. Moreover, these supporters were the liaison between 1st March initiative and institutional actors such as political parties. There was also some criticism of the initiative, accusing it of being a movement organised on behalf of immigrants; but, to a broader extent, associations working with and for migrants supported the event. Supporters framed the 1st March either as a challenge, underlining the difficulties of migrant participation, or as an advocacy event, meant to make visible the invisible, against the growing xenophobia. A third important category of actors were the unions, characterised by several internal differences.

⁵ Specifically, at the national level there was a huge attention towards tensions among migrants workers after the protest that took place in Rosarno (south of Italy) on 7th–10th January 2010. Migrants workers involved in the oranges harvest, working illegally with low wages and no protections, rioted after a shooting.

⁶ See, for instance, Stefania Ragusa “Le ragioni di uno sciopero”, *Il Manifesto*, 13.01.2010, p.1.

Being highly involved in the migrants' strike initiative, unions were crucial actors in providing legal backup to migrant workers. Moreover, migrants appear to have a high rate of participation in workers unions, higher than the natives, and this keeps growing, even though there are still few cases of migrants as unions' leaders (see Carchedi, Carrera and Mottura, 2010; Marino and Roosblad, 2008; Pugliese, 2000). In turn, workers unions are important partners and supporters of migrant issues: they take part in and promote initiatives and demonstrations, act as a pressure group and sensitise public opinion – moreover, they have inner organisations that specifically address migrant workers (Marino and Roosblad, 2008). Workers unions support migrants as migrants and, at the same time, as workers, with a sometimes difficult balance between the rights to difference and the rights to equality (Pugliese, 2000). While the non-confederal unions were very supportive and joined the strike, the confederal unions' position was more nuanced, as mentioned. The leftist union CGIL was internally divided: the FIOM (factory workers sector) joined the strike at the national level, also urging CGIL to join. On the other hand, the official CGIL position was neither opposition, nor support. The secretary of the CGIL migrants' sector underlined that “you cannot joke about strikes” and that the call for strikes is a unions' task.⁷ Finally, the Christian-inspired union CISL declared its opposition to an “ethnic strike”, maintaining that it would trigger “worker ghettos”.⁸ Unions framed the strike as a strike, either underlining its risky and ethnic character, or supporting its importance. The fourth actors' category consisted of rightist newspapers and politicians. Among them, the Lega Nord position stands out as completely opposed to the strike, maintaining that there were no reasons for it, and that migrants are not important in the Italian economy – but that the strike could be an opportunity to arrest and eject irregular migrants.⁹ *Il Giornale* and *Libero*, on the other hand, mentioned the strike against the left, underlining the opposition of the leftist union CGIL, and disqualifying the initiative as being “political”.¹⁰ In other words, the right criticized the migrants' strike, either accusing it of being organised by the left and not by migrants, or accusing the left of being unsupportive.

The main topic at stake in the media discussion over the migrants' strike was the effectiveness of the instrument of strike for migrant protests. A primary problem

⁷ See Elisa Battistini, “Il web vuole lo sciopero”, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 16.01.2010, p. 4; also see Giorgio Salvetti, “Intervista a Pietro Soldini. Cartellino giallo”, *Il Manifesto*, 03.03.2010, p. 3.

⁸ See, for instance, Domenico Pesenti, “Sindacato edili. Integrazione e convivenza”, *Avvenire*, 22.01.2010, p. 31; Giorgio Paolucci, “Etnicizzare rovina la causa”, *Avvenire*, 02.03.2010, p. 2.

⁹ See, for instance, “Ora vogliono scioperare”, *La Padania*, 10.01.2010, p. 7; Giancarlo Mariani, “Intervista ad Alberto Brambilla. Le rendite finanziarie sono negative, inutile tassarle”, *La Padania*, 26.02.2010, p. 13.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Vittorio Maciocie, “Sciopero vietato ai negri”, *Il Giornale*, 21.01.2010, p. 1; Roberto Fabbri, “Una regia europea dietro lo sciopero degli immigrati”, *Il Giornale*, 01.03.2010, p. 12; Luigi Santambrogio, “Se la CGIL ruba lo sciopero agli immigrati”, *Libero*, 27.02.2010, p. 1.

underlined dealt with the numbers: some opinion leaders maintained that most migrants do not have a regular job, which is the basic condition to strike. Second, the political opportunity of a migrants' strike was at stake, since the use of migrants as a political category could trigger discrimination phenomena.

On the other hand, the organising committee mostly focused on the issue of making visible the presence and the importance of migrants within Italian society. The use of the strike category was meant as symbolic, the aims being to enhance the visibility of migrants, their unity as a public actor, and the counter-framing of prejudices. Therefore, the brochure distributed says: “You are not alone. You are not the only migrant who suffers when they claim you are a criminal. You are not the only Italian anguished over the increasing racism. [...] We should defend our rights and dignity”. First, there is a call for the migrants to join: you are not alone. Second, the main message refers to an anti-racist attitude. Therefore, the call for action argues for the importance of migrants as workers and citizens and maintains that: “The contrast between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘indigenous’ and ‘foreigners’ is destined to fail, giving way to the awareness that we are ‘together’, old and new citizens engaged for the future of the country” (as the A Day Without Us Manifesto maintains¹¹). Thus, the manifesto criticises the crime-frame for migrants addressing the three threats identified by Bordignon and Diamanti (2002). First, migrants are not criminals: indeed, they suffer because of this accusation. Second, they work for the future of the nation, as the Italians do. The discourse does not directly address the job threat argument, nevertheless it underlines that migrants “work hard” and that their work is essential to the future of the nation. In this perspective, the strike and the abstention from consumption aim to show the migrants' important role within Italian economy. Nonetheless, the organisers are aware of the non-possibility, for most migrants working in Italy, of a legal strike. In any case, they consider the 1st March 2010 as the day of the first event addressing a public concern, and in this perspective the organisation of the event, the networking activity and, above all, the commitment of diverse actors have more importance than the event in itself. Finally, migrants are not invaders. They are “fully part” of the Italian society and the 1st March discourse argues against “the instrumental use of cultural and religious roots in order to justify exclusionary policies”. The differences, and even the rivalries between national communities, are recognised, but the main discourse focuses on unity. This means that the migrants' strike main discourse does not directly address the topic of cultural and religious differences. Therefore, what emerges is a non-conflictual attitude, aiming at promoting a non-discriminatory frame within the Italian public sphere, against the migrants-criminal and security frames, perceived

¹¹ See <http://www.primomarzo2010.it/2010/01/il-nostro-manifesto.html>.

as dominating the public debate (as emerged during the meetings). Referring to the Koopmans dimensions (2004: 453) the 1st March initiative is an attempt at proactive participation in the Italian debate around migration issues, seeking to obtain better conditions in the country of residence. There is no reference to the country-of-origin situations nor to cultural or religious differences. The basic idea is that of unity between migrants and natives. Even though there is a diffuse awareness that migrant rights recognition is a political stake, the protest appears to be “depoliticised” in the media, in order to focus on unity, rather than on political divisions.

Overall, the 1st March 2010 initiative called for a strike, but the aim of the event was not to state an “absence”. On the contrary, the strike pointed at marking a presence within the Italian society. Activists decided to frame the 1st March event as a first attempt at gaining public attention and political legitimacy. Starting as an initiative claiming political rights, the 1st March 2010 event slightly changed into a more social one, in order to include a wide range of actors. Nonetheless, the political character, even if blurred in the media representation, still remains. A large proportion of the activists consider anti-racism as a discursive strategy aimed at consensus, as a first step in a political process. Indeed, they had two main objectives for the 1st March 2010: network-building and visibility. The discursive sphere had effects on the mobilisation, in that the political priority was to counter-frame publicly the idea of migrants as criminals and to affirm the migrants’ public presence.

However, we can find hints of politicisation among migrant activists, whose claims have a twofold character of a public as well as a political request for recognition. They are trying to gather together non-active migrants in order to have more voice in the public sphere. According to the activists, the legal and media frames are so pervasive that the priority is to persuade non-active migrants to have the right to claim (as an activist complains: “They often say: we are only migrants” – M. Mexican, *Todo Cambia*). Therefore, there is a group of politicised migrant activists and a large majority of non politicised migrants. The voices of migrants during the 1st March 2010 in Milan, for instance, mostly account for casual participation: while the event was successful in gathering already organised migrants, it seems to have failed in involving individuals who did not belong to associations and organisations.

3. ITALIAN POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

One of the reasons for the difficulties in involving non-organised migrants in the 1st March strike was the lack of channels for migrants' voices. Migration scholars focus on the Political Opportunity Structure to analyse to which extent political institutions of the host societies are receptive to claims by migrants groups (Koopmans et al., 2005; Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005). Citizenship and immigration regimes have a crucial role in the migrants' political participation (Koopmans, 2004). Broadly speaking, scholars agree on the fact that if the institutional channels of access to the decision-makings process are unavailable, challengers are more likely to resort to unconventional forms of political action. From a political opportunity structure point of view, Italian society is quite rejectional. Here, we can consider as basic indicators the access to direct political participation and the channels for political participation.

As for the access to direct political participation, it is worth mentioning that non-European migrants, unless naturalised, are actually excluded from political representation in Italy. As a consequence, the ways for foreigners to participate in public and political life are actually through involvement within either the consultative bodies, the mainstream Italian organisations (political parties, voluntary associations or workers' unions) or migrant associations (for a more general discussion from a comparative perspective, see Koopmans et al., 2005). In terms of inclusion within political parties and collective bodies, migrants are nearly absent, which is consistent with their lack of representation and a chance to vote.

The legal framework mainly focuses on the migrants' regulation and control, rather than on their integration. The last migration law introduced the principle by which immigrants can enter Italy only on a temporary basis and for work purposes, thus connecting foreign presence to the labour market. At the same time, migrants are largely employed within the labour market in the "three-d jobs" – dirty, dangerous and demanding (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2005). Furthermore, as Kosic and Triandafyllidou (2005) underline, a considerable part of the migrant jobs, not only in the southern regions, is included in the underground economy. Except for this, there is hardly any secure legal framework for the migration phenomena. Therefore, the presence of migrants within Italian society is mainly limited to the (unskilled) job sphere. Italian migration scholars agree on the analysis of a lack of an institutional long-term perspective: the laws on migration can be defined as "emergency laws",¹² without a scheme of migrants' support policies (Caponio, 2005; Kosic and

¹² Laws on migration: L. 943/1986, which considered migration as a transitory phenomenon; L. 190/1990, so-called "Martelli law", which introduced the "migrants flows regulation" and ruled over migrants' family reunifications, updated by the "Dini decree" (1995); L. 40/1998, so-called "Turco-Napolitano law", the first comprehensive law on migration, regulating immigration as well

Triandafyllidou, 2005; Ambrosini, 2001). Since the process of citizenship acquisition is quite complex, several regularisation programmes have been enacted (some sort of “amnesties”). Moreover, Italy is the only EU state without a framework asylum law (Marchetti, 2006).

In this frame, a specific model of integration took shape in Italy, which basically relied upon a wide network of Italian voluntary associations that supported the arrival of the migrants in the country (Camozzi, 2006; Ambrosini, 2001; Zincone, 2001). There are two main networks of voluntary associations, which rely on the wider networks established during what the Italians consider as the first Republic (1948–1992): one is Church-related and led by Caritas, the other consists of left wing NGOs and associations (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2005). Thus, because of the exclusion of migrants from other forms of participation, associations have also become important places for socialisation and recognition (Camozzi, 2009).

The definition of the “migrants’ association” is complex and under discussion, and several open questions should be taken into account when considering what a migrants’ association is (Busso, 2007; Camozzi, 2009; Moya, 2005; Shrover and Vermeulen, 2005).¹³ Migrants’ associations in Italy are mainly composed of few members, are often informal and show a low degree of stability over time, and this affects the effectiveness of keeping track of them (Carpo et al., 2003; Carchedi, 2000). Moreover, it is difficult to track the kind of involvement and participation they require, whether active or passive. Not surprisingly, one of the most important difficulties in migrant participation in associations is related to occupational insecurity (Meli and Enwereuzor, 2003).

The development of migrant associations in Italy is strictly connected to the institutional framework that rule over the different waves of migration (Camozzi, 2009): the laws ruling over migration (L. 943/1986; L. 39/1990; L. 40/1998) have introduced (1) the possibility for migrants’ associations to receive funds by regions under certain conditions and, (2) different migrants’ consultative committees at national, regional and local level (Caponio, 2005; Zincone, 2001). The committees were meant as a key place of discussion over migrant issues between the State (in its different territorial articulations) and the migrants themselves (for a discussion on migrant involvement in consultative committees see Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2005; Meli and Enweurzor, 2003). The migrants’ associations acted as intermediaries in migrant participation, so that the migrants’ representatives were identified

as integration processes. It was later modified by the current L. 189/2002 (so-called “Bossi-Fini”), which is more restrictive and promotes a repressive policy toward undocumented migrants. Moreover, a recent law introduced the crime of “illegal immigration” within the context of Security laws (L. 94/2009).

¹³ For a discussion see Giorgi, 2010.

within “the most representative” migrant associations and it was only in the late 1990s that migrants’ representatives came to be directly elected by migrants themselves (Camozzi, 2009; Asgi – Fieri, 2005; Caritas/ Migrantes, 2005 and 2004; Meli and Enwereuzor, 2003). The migrants’ organisations were used by the government to gather migrants into communities organised according to their country of origin; in this perspective, migrants’ organisations were held responsible for migrants having the same national origins (this seems to be typical of all the hosting societies; see Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005). This form of recognition affected associations, mainly stimulating them to improve their institutional relations and to gather together on a country basis and, not least, triggering them into a competition in the resources dynamic (Carpo et al., 2003; see also Bloemraad, 2005). More broadly, it is important to underline that the organisational behaviours and the patterns affect the forms of migrant participation (Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005). As Caponio underlines, these changes in the opportunity structures impressively increased the number of official migrant associations in Italy.

The migrant associations development in Italy consists of four phases (Camozzi, 2009), which are related to the variations of the Italian migration policies (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2005): from homeland-oriented and “exile associations”, as Moya defines them (2005: 851) at the end of the 1970s, to the growth of migrant associations in fields like culture, leisure and solidarity, and growing forms of engagement for women, since the end of the 1990s. Nowadays, associations are fragmented by origin and religious affiliation (Camozzi, 2009) and there seems to be a lack of networks and coordination (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2005; also see Mantovan, 2006; Carpo et al., 2003). The overwhelming majority of associations that involve migrants are cultural associations promoting identity and preservation of traditions, or providing primary support for newcomers. Thus, they are rarely involved in politics. Moreover, when their primary focus is the promotion of social rights, the leadership is often Italian, whereas in cultural associations migrants are more commonly the leaders (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2005; CNEL, 2001).

Back in the 1980s, migrants’ associations expressed forms of local political involvement to some extent: they were able to give migrants access to public housing and to found an umbrella organisation (Coordinamento Migranti) aimed at promoting the migrants’ political participation at municipality level (Caponio, 2005; Murer, 2000; Palidda, 2000). Diverse results came of this pressure, the most important being the Foreigners’ Centre, established in 1989, but, since the first electoral victory of the Lega Nord in 1993, the migrants’ associations have been more and more marginalised (Caponio, 2005: 939–940). Nowadays, it seems that we are in a new phase. Even though the majority of associations basically have promoted an

anti-racist movement, some actors have a more political attitude that directly refers to the current political and social frames that criminalize migrants. Since migrants' consultative committees do not seem to offer a real opportunity structure for the voices of migrants to be heard (Ambrosini, 2005; Grillo and Pratt, 2002), associations are the medium for the migrants' political participation. Literature suggests that this participation was firstly promoted by Italian associations and found independent channels only later (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2005: 25). Moreover, the Italian voluntary sector is involved in the official consultation on migration policies (Danese, 2001).

The mobilisation of the 1st March Migrants' Strike may signal a new phase in the migrants' associations' activities, which includes political as well as social claims. We can wonder whether there is a turning point in migrant association development. On the contrary, it could even be an emergency reaction to a crisis, as already happened when the last (and quite restrictive) migration law was passed (the so-called "Bossi-Fini" law, L. 189/2002). In this perspective, the migrants' associations appear to be the only channels for the migrants' political participation. Therefore, we may expect the migrants' associations to have an increasing political role.

Of course, government policies have a key role in supporting the migrants' organisations and, as Bloemraad finds through a comparison study, the migrants' associations rely upon government funds and policies to a higher degree than mainstream indigenous organisations (Bloemraad, 2005). Furthermore, the mainstream political actors as well as the community leaders (Martiniello, 1993) have an important role in activating the public and political potential of the migrants' associations (Bloemraad, 2005). Therefore, it is crucial to focus on the role of collective actors and their narratives in order to get in depth into migrant mobilisation.

3.1. Associations and migrants' strikes

Lombardy is characterised by a higher number of migrant associations than other Italian regions (CNEL, 2003; Caselli, 2008; Camozzi, 2009).¹⁴ The majority of associations have been established over recent years (since 2002) and they are organised on a country-of-origin basis, while there are only a few examples of multi-nationality associations. In any case, this has changed over time and single-nationality associations often have become multi-nationality. The most active groups are Peruvians, Senegalese, Ecuadorians and Romanians. Milan migrant associations have mainly "cultural" aims (promotion, integration, preservation) and they often act as community representatives. Moreover, they have strong relations

¹⁴ Also see the ORIM project, ISMU-Lombardia (<http://www.orimregionelombardia.it/>), that monitors migrants and migrants' associations in Lombardia.

with Italian associations engaged in migration issues (Caselli, 2008). On the whole, women turn out to be more active than men, especially when coming from Europe, Latin America and Asia. The most active are the younger ones (28–39 years old) with a medium-high level of education, mostly working in care activities or as cultural mediators (Camozzi, 2006). Almost all the associations tracked were engaged in the 1st March event, at least mobilizing activists and national communities if not directly participating in the organization of the activities. During the organisation of the 1st March 2010 event, there has been an increasing politicisation of the activists, who described their action as “political”. Thus, the networking activity, the negotiation between different actors committed in the field of migration, and the practical organisation of the event has become an important moment of political awareness for the people involved. At the same time, the definition of what was at stake included an in-depth discussion about the migrants’ situation within Italian society, as well as a focus on the political strategy.

The weekly meetings in Milan, which took place in a migrant association office, involved different actors: organisers, representatives of local migrant associations, representatives of other grass-roots associations, and other participants (both migrants and natives). Representatives of bigger national organisations (such as Emergency, or Amnesty), which joined the initiative, did not participate in the local meetings. At the first meeting, organisers presented the initiative to their audience, mainly composed of migrants involved in the hosting association activities and representatives of local associations dealing with migrants. In the following meetings, the presence of non-migrants and local activists involved in grass-roots political associations and organisations increased. The meetings topics ranged from organisational activities and involvement strategies to the initiative itself: especially local activists of grass-roots associations raised political concerns, while migrants and representatives of associations dealing with migrants were more focused on the actual organisation of the 1st March event. An important element for discussion was the involvement of ethnic communities: while the foreigners who participated at the meetings identified themselves as members of migrant associations, they underlined the necessity of involving local ethnic and national communities. Different political cultures emerged, from a political interest in advocacies to a pragmatic necessity for recognition and willingness for political activities. A long process of negotiation took place, as well as of political socialization.

During the meetings and the activities for the organisation of the 1st March event in Milan, different strategies and attitudes emerged over the wide network of different actors involved. Political grass-roots associations, whose activities usually involve migration issues (such as free Italian language courses), were especially

focused on a general promotion of social and political rights for both migrants and natives, who should act together against the “repression policies” (see <http://www.cantiere.org/shockpress/0001>). Other voluntary associations, especially the Catholic ones, assumed a more advocacy-based attitude, supporting the claim for the recognition of rights to migrants. A similar supportive attitude characterised centre-left political parties.

On the other hand, the migrants' communities and migrants' associations firstly claim a social and political recognition of presence, against racism, and for the right to work and to live in the country.

Multi-nationality associations and some community groups (Latin-America and North Africa) promoted a more political attitude, maintaining that migrants should act as a group in obtaining their political and social rights. Indeed, the first version of the 1st March brochure was more focused on job conditions and the need for a migrant gathering: “You are not the only migrant anguished because they pay you less. You are not the only one who demands a change. [...] We are 4.8 million migrants, let's join together!”. The most active migrants among the organisers maintained that they should overcome their differences and join together in the struggle for their rights as migrants. In this perspective, they promote a more self-organising attitude. Even though Italian associations are perceived as important partners, a few migrant actors maintain that migrants should have their own voice. They criticise the fragmented attitude of certain communities (such as the Chinese one) advocating common action against racism and for the promotion of rights.

Two paths of organisational activities were set up: while organisers met institutional associations and local politicians, taking care of the networking, activists engaged in flyer distribution and publicizing activities. Nonetheless, it was the networking activity that gave more results in terms of presence. Indeed, during the 1st March event, migrants interviewed were either involved in associations or participants by chance. While the first underlined the political character of the events, the others highlighted its festive nature. The organisers acknowledged that participation mostly relied on organisations. For instance, Muslim communities in Milan joined the 1st March initiative, without participating in organisational meetings. When asked about the reason, the organisers were perplexed. “We told them about the initiative, and they agreed. We distributed brochures after the Friday worship, people promised to come to the Duomo, they appreciated. [...] They did not participate in the organisations... Indeed, they are not associations...” as S. affirmed (student at courses of Italian language). To the contrary, the Chinese community did not take part in A Day Without Us. The 1st March 2010 was welcomed as a success by the national and local organisers, but despite the efforts and the time-consuming

organisational activities it did not overcome the migrants' community fragmentation.

4. SOME ELEMENTS FOR DISCUSSION

The analysis of the 1st March 2010 migrants' strike led to different outcomes, and we can trace some elements for further analysis. First, we can evaluate the migrants' strike effectiveness. The aims of the initiative addressed both the political and the discursive opportunity structure, in order to support the migrants' political voice and challenge media and political frames of "the migrants issue".

Even though the 2010 event was considered a success, in the following years, the 1st March strike gathered increasingly less participants, and media attention decreased (two newspapers articles covered the event in 2011, and only one in 2012). *A Day Without Us* seems to have failed in its aim of changing the terms of the public debate over migrants. Political campaigns neglect the issue of migrant political participation, and the "security threat" frame seems to be still widely diffused in the public sphere. As for the political side, the 1st March 2010 event has been an important turning point for the migrants' associations. It has improved the relations among different actors, characterised by different political cultures: migrants' associations; natives' associations addressing migrants; and, grass-roots leftist political organisations. Moreover, regular migrants actually went on strike. Nonetheless, when considering the migrants' working and living conditions and the political activities of migrant associations, there have been few improvements.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that since January 2010, and especially in the last two years, while the regular migrants went on strike as workers together with the unions, irregular migrants, exploited in unskilled and irregular jobs especially in the farming sector, have been protesting, asking for regularization and decent working conditions. This new kind of migrants' strike seems to be completely self-organised by migrants, who act as a political subject. In this perspective, this arena of activism seems to be an important area for further analysis of the migrants' self-organised political activism.

Finally, the 1st March event and the more recent migrants' strikes show several elements of similarity with the analysis of other contemporary political movements. First, in terms of the basic political challenge of organising the disorganised. Migrants are fragmented as well as other political subjects who actively play a role in political arenas, such as the "precarious workers". Even though focused on different claims, the discussions over the common field of action for highly diverse actors face the same difficulties as other contemporary movements, such as the search for

effective political instruments other than the strike, the process of identity-building and the negotiation between the diverse political cultures. They also show similarities in their repertoires of actions, such as the use of the Internet as a way of organising fragmented activists. Thus, the analysis of the migrants' political participation can be included in the broader analysis of contemporary political activism.

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Migrantske udruge u Italiji i štrajk migranata 2010.

SAŽETAK

Dana 1. ožujka 2010. dogodio se štrajk migranata u Italiji i drugim europskim zemljama. Njegova organizacija u Italiji našla je uporište u širokoj mreži migrantskih udruga. Na temelju analize tiska te opažanja i intervjua sudionika rad se usredotočuje na studiju slučaja talijanskog štrajka migranata s ciljem ispitivanja političke strane sudjelovanja migranata. Nakon kratkog opisa događaja od 1. ožujka 2010. u Italiji, u središtu članka nalazi se struktura migrantskih političkih i diskurzivnih mogućnosti. Analiza pokazuje da događaj od 1. ožujka te sljedeći štrajkovi migranata dijele nekoliko sličnih elemenata s drugim suvremenim političkim kretanjima. Ti su elementi potraga za drugim učinkovitim političkim instrumentima osim štrajka, proces izgradnje identiteta i pregovori između različitih političkih kultura.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: udruge, političko sudjelovanje, štrajk migranata, migracija