

**No Right to Vote for *Stranieri*:  
The Practical Alternatives and  
Limitations of Immigrant Activism  
in the City of Rome**

Maria Alessia Montuori  
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Maria Alessia Montuori, *IPRS*

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# **No Right to Vote for *Stranieri*: The Practical Alternatives and Limitations of Immigrant Activism in the City of Rome**

## **Summary**

It is likely that legal foreign residents in Italy will sooner or later be granted their right to vote, like it happens in other countries in Europe and in other continents; in the meantime, how do migrants organize themselves in order to focus attention on their needs and proposals? How do they – both as individual citizens and organized groups - react and perceive themselves as a part of the host society? How do they become politically active in the City? The aim of this paper is – through the critical analyses of migrant activism and associations in Rome during recent years - to address the following questions: is diversity already affecting public life in the City of Rome? Is diversity good or not for local politics? Is a citizenship based on residence rather than on nationality helpful in civic life in order to increase everyone's well-being?

**Keywords:** Diversity, Political and Social Rights, Activism, Civic Participation

*Address for correspondence:*

Maria Alessia Montuori  
IPRS  
Rome  
Italy  
E-mail: [alessiamontuori@libero.it](mailto:alessiamontuori@libero.it)

## 1. Aim and methodology

In this paper I will discuss the issue of participation by immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees<sup>1</sup> in public life within the city of Rome, starting with the point that according to the law, no political representation through the right to vote and to be elected is possible for non-European immigrants (*stranieri*) neither at national, nor at local level. After a decade's and more debates and initiatives in smaller cities, however, Rome has approved in 2004 a change in its regulations (*Statuto del Comune di Roma*<sup>2</sup>), that enables legal foreign residents to vote in order to elect four additional foreign council members with consultative functions at the Town Council, and one at each municipal<sup>3</sup> council, and a consultative assembly composed by the first of the non-elected for each "ethnic community" (*Consulta cittadina delle comunità straniere*). This provision has upheld the request of an alliance of immigrant and anti-racist organisations, that has been acting as a lobby at city level during last fifteen years, and that proposed this track "step by step" intended to end up with the full right to vote at local elections. Despite that, maybe because this goal seemed to have been achieved with a decade's delay, or maybe because local politicians have not been able to convince that it was not a top-down concession without practical consequences, these elections seemed not to be an appealing solution to the problem of participation and political activity by foreign residents.

The aim of the paper is trying to offer a first and incomplete overview and typology of such political activities and participation, that have been ignored for too long, in order to assess – beyond the rhetoric of "multiculturalism" or "inter-cultural dialogue" – how diverse Rome already is in the field of representation from the bottom-up, and to verify if a "different tale", paraphrasing a statement by Monisha Das Gupta (2006) "can be told", that goes beyond a nationalistic/traditional approach to citizenship and residence, sounding more or less like what I will call "citizenship on the grounds of residence".

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<sup>1</sup> The Italian word used in the title, *stranieri*, means literally foreigners, and includes all these categories of people; in relation with law, it means only non-EU foreigners.

<sup>2</sup> The article is number 20, for the complete *Statuto* see <http://www.comuni-italiani.it/statuto/058/091/>

<sup>3</sup> For the meaning of *Municipio* please see note n. 10.

In order to do that, I will analyse different examples and actions, and try to set up a simple classification of the different types of political expressions that have taken place in the city of Rome, giving examples which I will take from my personal involvement in pro-immigrant and refugees activities during the last fifteen years, taking advantage from informal conversations with immigrant leaders and activists engaged in associations, political parties, trade unions and movements, from articles in the local and national press, and from written leaflets and Internet forums.

This exploration will take examples from a period dating back to first 1990's, to focus and concentrate particularly on the last five years (2003 up until present time). At the end, I will try to understand better who are those migrants more active and participating, looking at their activism – even when conflicting – as a positive and sustainable in reclaiming their rights (and sometimes obtaining them) and stimulating new ways of experiencing citizenship not in a nationalistic approach (*ius sanguinis*), but with a residence approach (*ius soli*), more diverse, pluralistic and inclusive even if more complex.

## 2. Context

Italian laws at national level grant no political rights to third country nationals<sup>4</sup>, except for freedom of expression and freedom of association. The right to vote and to be elected – even if limited to local elections – was proposed for the first time in 1995 by a nation-wide migrant and anti-racist network of associations, the so-called *Rete antirazzista nazionale*<sup>5</sup>, through a bottom-up initiative to approve a proper law proposal, and since then introduced by different parties in various draft bills, but never approved until now. Italian political parties (even if they do not despise to use the argument against their respective political opponents) are – regardless of different ideological positions – the first to be reluctant to integrate third country residents in their organizations and in Italian politics, partly because they fear the loss of Italian supporters and votes if they do so, and partly because migrants are perceived as outsiders, temporary

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<sup>4</sup> EU residents have the right to vote at local election and at European elections.

<sup>5</sup> National Antiracist Network.

residents unless they do not get naturalized.

At city level, however, some measures have been adopted by local institutions (mainly *Comuni*, Town Councils, but also some *Province*, Provincial Councils) to encourage diverse representation at least at the local level: the first town to change its own regulations (*Statuto*) to elect a foreign council member with no right to vote within the City Council was Nonantola, a small village in Emilia Romagna, in far 1994. Since then, many other City Councils – the largest among them is Rome, the capital city - adopted different elective consultative bodies in order to address the need and challenge of foreign residents to be represented and to take active part in local politics.

Rome is maybe one of the few cities in which an alliance of immigrant and anti-racist associations started a movement (see later, Chapter 3, the *Coordinamento romano per i diritti degli immigrati*) in early 1990's in order to push the local institutions to have this kind of representatives, seen as an intermediate step to the right of vote. As we have seen, in 2004 it was approved a *delibera* (a law approved by the Town Council which is valid within its territory) that established four elected foreign (*stranieri*) council members with no right to vote in the City Council, each representing a continent: the result has been a vote on ethnic grounds, which only superficially can appear “multi-ethnic and diverse”, while in fact is strengthening the ties within the ethnic community instead of creating bridges in order to become locals. Another negative aspect is that these consultative bodies are becoming associated only with migration and ethnic diversity, while democratic participation should address every aspect of public and civic life, from school to house policy, from traffic to urban plan and so on. The risk is that an effort to support inclusion could end in an increased marginalisation and stereotyping.

Speaking about different models of inclusion politics adopted by receiving countries, Ambrosini (2005:213) describes the Italian case as “an ‘implicit’ model of including immigrants, who have been ignored for a long time by official politics or who have been subject to limited or emergency actions”. Even

the process of naturalisation has been discouraged by Italian law<sup>6</sup>, which is based on *ius sanguinis* rather than on *ius soli*: ten years of continual residence, absence of penal criminal record and a sufficient income is needed to apply, but it is quite easier to acquire Italian citizenship for those who have an even far Italian ancestor from Argentina or Venezuela, even if they do not speak a word in Italian.

“If such a few people turn from immigrants into citizens, if there is not a law which grants the right of vote at administrative level to foreigners that reside legally and from a long time in Italy, we cannot be able to find in our political system relevant shares of constituency of immigrant origin. This forces us to abandon the usual subject when doing research on participation of immigrants, that is the electoral behaviour of the different ethnic groups. We have to imagine a new research field, which can be seen as extravagant at first sight: *the political rights of non-citizens*, the tools for participating that are available to foreigners, even of the irregular and undocumented” (Zincone, Lostia, Tomaino 1994:52).

An intermediate position between Italian nationals who hold all the rights expected, and the undocumented, who hold none<sup>7</sup>, is performed by those addressed to as *denizen* by Hammar<sup>8</sup> (1990): in Italy they can be assimilated to the holders of permanent long-term resident permit of stay, a status re-shaped recently according to European legislation, who are granted with the same social and economic rights of Italian nationals<sup>9</sup>, but still not with political rights, or the possibility to be employed by government bodies. Walzer (1987) talked about a *status* similar to that of *meteci* in ancient Athens, foreigners who could be accepted until they were carrying out the hardest works and tasks, but who were excluded from the decision-making process, subject to laws and rules that they were not in the condition to influence.

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<sup>6</sup> Legge 5 febbraio 1992 n. 91; see also Zincone 2006.

<sup>7</sup> People without papers can access only emergency aid (including pregnancy and treatment for some infective diseases). Children until 16<sup>th</sup> year of age can attend compulsory school, but no possibility to regularize their stay is available for those youth just on the basis of their presence in Italy, with the exception of separated children who from at least three years are in an educational programme.

<sup>8</sup> See also Bolaffi, Bracalenti, Braham, Gindro, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Including some social provisions from whom short-term residents are often excluded.

Monisha Das Gupta goes further, introducing the idea that a logic of exploitation underpins the power of establishing a juridical framework, which formally excludes a part of civil society (2006:13): “By using its constitutive feature of sovereignty, the state hierarchically orders rights by *codifying* immigrants into categories of illegal, legal but not resident, legal and resident but non-citizen, naturalized citizen, and native born. The legal nature of these distinctions *normalizes* the hierarchy, thereby making common sense the differential treatment of immigrants in these categories” (italics added). Das Gupta wants to give back to people (in her case South Asians in the United States) their dignity of subjects, breaking out of what she refers to as the *ethnicity paradigm* by Omi and Winant, for “telling a different tale, (...) [South Asians] are political agents, not just cultural actors. Their political engagement are enacted outside of the electoral arena. In this tale, South Asians have heterogeneous interests and politics because of their particular social locations in trans-nationally reworked hierarchies of gender, race, class and sexuality” (ibidem:22).

Hierarchies established by the State suppose different access to other rights (social, economic, etc...): a legal resident can access full health assistance, pension, treatment in case of injuries occurred at work, education for children, and so on, what Thomas Marshall (2002, or. 1950) called social citizenship and in the track described by him came usually after civil rights (freedom of speech and opinion, protection of private properties, right to justice, etc), and political rights (participation to power, as a voter or as an elected member of an assembly). When talking about immigrants, the sequence appears opposite (or it stops on the way): a reason to grant social rights even to non-nationals can reflect the intention to not put in competition Italians and immigrants in respect of the cost of labour. But if social rights do not travel on the same train together with political rights, are always fragile and revocable: the opportunity to influence public debate and obtain some crucial social rights and provisions reserved to Italian nationals only until now (e.g. support for rent, *una tantum* provisions like maternity allowance etc) is quite insignificant.

Besides that, a substantial part of Italian labour market is informal, and this prevents irregular workers to become legal residents, stopping them to be in the condition of claiming social rights because they do not exist for the law.

### 3. Some participation patterns of “non-citizens” in the city of Rome (A

different tale?”)

Penninx and Martiniello recognize the actors involved in the process of integrating migrants: “There are two main parties in integration processes: the immigrants themselves, with their varying characteristics, efforts and degrees of adaptation; and the receiving society, with its characteristics and its reactions to newcomers. It is largely the interaction between the two that determines the direction and the temporal outcomes of the integration process. As was persistently evident in our research, however, these two ‘partners’ are fundamentally unequal in terms of power and resources. (...) In addition to the immigrants and the receiving society, a third party may also exert crucial influence on the process of integration, especially in its early phases: the country of origin, or more precisely the government or other institutions in the sending country” (2004:142).

I will keep this distinction in mind when talking about political participation of *stranieri*, and will try to focus particularly on the first actor, the immigrants, in the City of Rome, with no claim to be exhaustive, but still giving some useful examples of how migrants become politically active in a framework heavily influenced by the hosting society (second actor) that in this case allows no voting rights like other European countries. The examples will be mostly initiatives that are directed towards Roman and Italian society’s public opinion and institutions, more than ties and activities related or directed to the transnational networks which they participate in as migrants, to focus of civic participation from bottom up in a diverse and particular city as Rome is. Of course it is not possible to separate clearly the two aspects in society: Sayad (2002) has made clear that an immigrant is at the same time an emigrant, so it is not possible to say that if a Kurdish asylum seeker is participating in an hunger strike to get his permit of stay granted by Italian Police, it is not giving us a message about his country, whether this is Turkey or Irak or Siria or Iran, and that he’s implicitly pointing his finger at the reality of prosecution that has lead him to escape, but also to other Kurds that did not take his same decision.

We will schematically outline a very simple threefold typology of different ways in which foreigners express their participation in the city of Rome:

## 1) Claiming/demanding/disputing

The main characteristic of this point is clearly the fact that immigrants activate themselves in order to ask to full enjoy civil, political, social and economic rights within the Roman and Italian context. Example of this date back to the second half of 1980's, with relevant rallies, public gatherings, press conferences and hunger strikes in different Italian towns, to ask for *sanatoria* (amnesty for undocumented people), which in two cases (1989 and 1995) were successful. In the Roman *scene*, you could find always on the front line migrants coming from the sub-continent, that is to say Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Indians and Sri-Lankans, together with some Latin Americans and Albanians.

Another important demand deals with the right to live in a proper house or in a welcoming place: the problem is particularly serious in a City like Rome, that attracts different kinds of people from all over the world, and that is a crossroads for migrants, tourists, ecclesiastics, diplomats, and so on. Until 2004, only one central Commission was responsible for deciding on asylum claims: as a result, all asylum seekers submitting their application in Italy were forced to come to Rome to hang on waiting the answer for their application.

Most crucial example are the squatting of *Pantanella*<sup>10</sup> in 1990, cleared out *manu militari* in 1991, an old factory where thousands of regular and not regular migrants from the subcontinent and from different countries of the Maghreb lived together lacking any alternative solution. *Pantanella* was an important and visible wound for the reputation of the *Città eterna*<sup>11</sup>, and divided Roman residents between those who sympathized and those who wanted the immigrants to go away. The response of the Local Authorities – in agreement with the National Authorities - was to dislocate the ones with permit of stay in residences outside the City, and the expulsion for those undocumented.

Most of the actual squats or the settlement made of self-built barracks (near the river *Tevere*, or in other green areas) remain invisible, like the most recent ones where people from Romania live. Only the bigger ones, or the ones leaded by Italian activists appear on the news, generally described under a negative

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<sup>10</sup> *Pantanella* is the name of the abandoned *pasta* factory that was taken as a home for thousands of undocumented workers who could not rent a proper house. Due to the presence of large windows (most of them broken) and wanting to be ironic about their conditions of living, some immigrants called it “Shish Mahal”, that in different Indian languages means “Chrystal Palace”.

<sup>11</sup>The eternal City, a common way to address to the City of Rome.

attitude. In recent times (2003 to 2005), the case of a squat of an abandoned warehouse near an important and central Railway Station (*Stazione Tiburtina*) became an important issue for the City: there were around 400 asylum seekers and recognized refugees from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan living there, and together with an Italian network of associations and NGO's they gave birth to an alliance (*Coordinamento dei Rifugiati a Roma Tiburtina*) that started a negotiation with the office of Mayor and with the railways (owner of the building) in order to obtain a proper alternative solution. In that occasion, not only the refugees asked for a decent alternative, but they refused the rhetoric of the "merciful victims", and proved to be conscious political actors in refusing the logic of big camps outside the City where social life is impossible, asking for smaller and semi-central places and putting themselves at disposal to do the renovations that appeared necessary. Unfortunately they were forced to "traditional" big camps without that their demands for autonomy be taken into consideration. More visibility attract squats led by Italian organisations, like *Action* (active in the last five years) and the *Coordinamento cittadino di lotta per la casa*, a network of left-oriented groups very active in Rome since thirty years ago, which now finds among its ranks more migrants than Italians. Sometimes illegal squatting are tolerated by institutions, because they are an alternative to their inability to find a proper solution: it is for example the case for *Ararat*, a self-organised centre where refugees and asylum seekers from Kurdistan (and Turkey in particular) since 1999 find a first accommodation, people speaking their language and free legal assistance.

More examples of this kind of mobilisation regarding economic rights this time can be found in the request by sub-continent shop-owners of the neighbourhood of *Esquilino*, known as the multicultural neighbourhood of Rome, to abolish some law that prevented them to exercise business properly: dating back to summer 1995 to abolish "*reciprocità*"<sup>12</sup>, until August 2008 with a lockout (*serrata*) of their shops to protest against the fact that, in their words, "Police does not protect our economic activities from theft and burglary"<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Reciprocity, a provision meaning that foreign residents in Italy could not run a business, or own a house if there wasn't a law in their country of origin that enabled Italian nationals to do the same, which is no longer in use.

<sup>13</sup> Il Messaggero, 10th August 2008.

Concerning political and other civil rights, an alliance of immigrant associations and solidarity and anti-racist organisations was active along all the 1990's in Rome; it was called *Coordinamento romano per i diritti degli immigrati*, and was composed among others by UAWA (United Asian Workers' Association), composed by Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Indians and Sri Lankans, by OMCVI (an organization of migrant women from Cape Verde, *Filipino workers in Italy*, associations of Latin Americans, and catholic organizations like *Caritas* and *S. Egidio*, non-religious anti-racist associations like *Senzaconfine* and *Casa dei diritti sociali*, proper sections of trade unions like *UIL immigrati* and *Celsi CGIL* and some *Centri sociali* (former factories, or military buildings, squatted by youngsters and political activists in order to have an alternative to the growing prices of rents, and to organize political activities and cheap cultural events like concerts and cineforum) active in Rome like *Villaggio Globale* and *Ex-SNIA Viscosa*. The coalition asked the candidates at the local elections during the electoral campaign in 1992 to engage in order to fulfil this way towards participation (first step: additional council members, then: right of vote at local elections).

## 2) Making aware/"sensitizing"

In this category I will put initiatives to support political actions directed to the country of origin, both directed to make aware Italian public opinion through the press, and to urge Italian Government to take actions with reference to the country of origin. Some examples for this are the demonstration that Kurds refugees from Turkey living in Rome organize every year to remember that the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1999 their leader, Abdullah Ocalan was captured in Kenya after leaving Italy, just some weeks before he was granted political asylum by an Italian court, and to make people know that he is still in detention under terrible conditions; or even the event on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, which is the Kurdish New Year, and that in addition to the cultural perspective, becomes every year a political event in order to circulate information on the Kurdish question.

More examples are the initiatives organised by the Darfurians in Rome against the Sudanese Government, and particularly during the "Global Day for Darfur", when on the same day (the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2007) demonstrations were organised to put attention on the situation in Darfur in 200 different cities in the world, but

despite of that “global” visibility, all the process of organizing the day on the side of the refugees was very Italian and Roman-based. In January 2006 they had already organized a sit-in in front of the local Government Office (*Prefettura*) to ask that Egyptian Police responsible for beating and killing several Darfurian asylum seekers in Cairo be forced to account for their violent attack against civilians.

In both cases (Kurds and Darfurians) the events were organised by sections of political groups acting in Italy, that were able to mobilize individual refugees and asylum seekers.

A different initiative was a campaign to collect signatures in order to propose from the bottom a law at the Town Council (*delibera di iniziativa popolare*) in 2005: the proposal aimed to extend the right to vote and be elected to non-EU residents at local level, and it was a way to sensitize<sup>14</sup> the population, both Italians and migrants, to the idea that a different kind of citizenship could be accepted, that is based on sharing a residence on a territory rather than on ethnic origin. Thanks to a change in the Roman *Statuto*, not only Italian, but also foreign residents could sign the law proposal. The campaign was the result of a common effort by organisations of immigrants and Italian solidarity associations, trade unions, NGO's; in this occasion, participation of migrants was more on an individual base (meaning that there was less involvement by organised migrant organisations).

### 3) Lobbying

This category is the less “visible” in a way, but it can be the one with more practical effects on the short time, because it can take advantage of the proximity of immigrant leaders to Italian politicians or policy makers that have the power to take decision. Unfortunately, it repeats a logic of dependence and paternalism, that does not recognize the migrant as a political agent and prefers to speak in terms of ethnic communities, with the complicity of individual migrants that try to take personal advantages for themselves at the price of accepting and reproducing the paternalistic relationship with the local Authorities.

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<sup>14</sup> The law proposal should be discussed by the Town Council assembly, but there are no sanctions if it fails to do so; the discussion of the proposal was never scheduled by the Town Council.

Examples of this “community-oriented lobbying” which echoes the multicultural Anglo-Saxon model, are represented by initiatives by women from Cape Verde, the Philippines, Latin America, that is to say some among the most old immigrants in Rome, dating the first arrival back to the '60s and before. For what I can know about Capeverdians, most important is that inside the community there is a lot of discussion and democracy, and that public image towards the outside is the result of vote or of an agreement (even in presence of conflicts) between the different components. There is also an alliance of “Foreign communities” (*Forum delle comunità straniere*), which is rather formed by small ethnic associations and led by an Italian woman, that is trying since almost twenty years to introduce itself as a speaker in front of the Local Authorities, criticizing the introduction of additional council members, and regretting the old *Consulta* (consultative body with co-opted members, not elected).

This stress on “communities”, however, seems an obsession more for the Local Authorities itself, with a consequent adaptation of the immigrants, because it is more easy to show that Rome is engaged in a diversity dialogue that can told the the public as a canonic tale, with definite characters and pre-fixed plots, possibly with an happy-end. This has been the case, to some extent, of the so-called “Politics for multi-ethnicity<sup>15</sup>” managed by the City of Rome particularly during the years between 2004 until the last elections in April 2008, that witnessed a change in the City's Government.

Under the category of lobbying I would like to add also the ethnic festivals and public cultural initiatives, often supported by the local *Municipio*<sup>16</sup>, which are occasions for reinforcing the proximity to the local or even the neighbourhood 's authorities, while giving an image of a good moral and compact community in the name of whom the leader is allowed to speak.

It is interesting to see that the ones who are more active are the ones that have much more to gain from their visibility, but that risk more then the others: the

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<sup>15</sup> Implemented by a special Counsellor appointed by the Mayor and by her staff.

<sup>16</sup> Subsection of the City Council. In Rome there are 19, and there is an additional foreign council member in each of them.

undocumented and the asylum seekers participate more visibly with protests and demonstrations, while “old” legal residents much more tend to prefer lobbying and direct contact with Italian politicians (that was recently to be seen during the discussion for the submission and approval of a regional law for immigration by *Regione Lazio*, the region where Rome is). An exception is to be found in many squats, but it must be considered that often the organizers themselves discourage undocumented migrants to take part, because they face much more risk, being squatting a crime (see also Demaio, in Caritas 2004).

Following Giovanna Zincone (Commissione per le politiche di integrazione:1999), we can speak of significance, or “thickness” (that echoes Clifford Geertz’s famous distinction between *thick* and *thin* description in ethnography) of a right on the basis of three characteristics: “*spreadness (number of people involved), pluralism (the possibility to choose between different options), the importance (impact/effect)*”. The first category is that of the maximum potential for spreadness and pluralism, but no predictable impact; the second category provides for spreadness limited to political activists, limited pluralism (it is difficult, even if not impossible, to see political opponents acting together in order to sensitize about their countries: a rare occasion happened in early 2004, after the tsunami in Asia, where for a limited period tamil and sinhalese of Sri Lanka living in Italy launched a joint call to collect money and aid for their country); the third category appears to be with little spreadness (can be limited to a small number of activists), limited pluralism, and medium impact in the short period.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

The right to vote is one pillar of western representative democracy, and is perceived in democracies by common sense – regardless of which political tradition one refers to – as the most important right that a person is supposed to exercise as a political actor, as a free expression of every individual. The balance, or the conflicts' arrangements that liberal democracy tries to establish between the majority and minorities deals with social, economic, gender diversity. Nonetheless, a *ius sanguinis* vision of citizenship of the Nation State stops the opportunity to give representation to a large sector that is *de facto*

member of local societies.

Even if non-EU foreign residents are excluded from the right of vote in Italy, we have seen that a lot of activism has been put forward in different periods and in different ways that accounts for differences in ethnicity, age, gender and length of immigration in Italy, and that shows the strong will of participation and desire to influence decisions at local level by immigrants and refugees, happening in the City of politics. Agreeing with the classification and with the examples we have given in the previous section of this paper, we should affirm that the situation for claiming rights by some groups of foreign immigrants in Rome is not fully developed, even if it is variegated and pluralistic; this is partly because of the lacking of the right to vote at local elections. With the expression “not fully developed” we do not intend that immigrants are not ready to act as political actors, but that the framework around them is not prepared to accept them as political actors, too often ignoring their will to participate and considering them either criminals or victims, without personal will and identity.

John Foot in his book on Milan (2003, or. 2001) argues that similarities between internal mass migrations in Italy from South to North which took place during the '60s, and contemporary international migrants prevail on differences; he also argues that despite the current idea that integration of migrants coming from the South to the industrialised North was easier because “they were all Italians”, was not true: the whole process of migration and integration (whatever was the sense that they gave to this word in that period) was very hard and opposed by severe racism ending up with the formation of *ghettos*. What really marks a distinction between the present condition of non-EU immigrants and the southern immigrants (referred to as *terroni*, a nasty and labelling word) during the sixties, was that “The Italian immigrants had the right to vote, today's immigrants (from outside Europe) do not, and this was a powerful incentive for the mass parties of the 1960s (which no longer exist) to recruit and appeal to the immigrants of the boom<sup>17</sup>” (2001:39).

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<sup>17</sup> The word “boom” (in alternation with “miracle”, *miracolo economico*) is used to refer to the rapid process of industrialisation and economic growth which started in Italy since the half of the fifties and took place along the sixties, giving impulse to mass internal emigration and made possible by the cheap cost of labour.

In this context, the elections for the additional foreign council members have been interpreted – despite the interest that they have raised among many foreign residents, as a cover, without any concrete possibility to impact on Roman politics. Besides that, the mechanism of the elections (one council member for each continent of origin) has stimulated a representation based on ethnic grounds, contributing to act as a compact community (despite strong internal competition between leaders) instead of giving room to the expression of individual opinion and interests (like it happens if there are different lists competing on the ground of their political programmes).

Regarding what states here about the less visible ways of participating (see n. 3, lobbying, co-opting of individual leaders, etc), this seems confirmed by a national survey (Carpo, Cortese, Di Peri, Magrin 2003), that coins the expression *modello formale eterodiretto* (something like *transposed formal model*, meaning that the pattern/s of political participation and activism involving immigrants in Italy is/are influenced by Italian politics' needs and perspectives rather than the migrants'). Co-opting individual leaders is convenient for Italian institutions or organisations, that can affirm to act in the name of or together with immigrants, while in fact they are substituting them in representation, controlling their potential and giving the false image that they have some kind of representation. Instead, this goes to immigrants' solidarity detriment, and undermines their own capacity to represent themselves, something that can explain why immigrant associations are so weak and isolated.

It will be naïve to think that the right to vote alone would be automatically the solution for the lack of representation: even in Italy, a country where traditionally active voters at elections represented one of the highest percentage in the European countries, participation during elections is now declining as long as disaffection is growing. But “even though the view of political participation as a ‘civic obligation’ is currently under attack, it is nevertheless still a vital element within the flow of political information or propaganda received by citizens” (Adamson:24), and not to grant the right of vote to non-EU foreign residents (differently from EU nationals, that are already enabled to vote at local and European elections) would mean that they will never be fully accepted even if they are *de facto* a part of the society.

Hammar's (cit.) concept of *denizen*, or Soysal's (1994:163) reflections about post-national membership in Europe with their reconsidering citizenship and the question of rights, so basically facing the transformation of the nation state in the contemporary globalized world, concern maybe only an *élite* of migrants in Italy's cities: but the mere existence of such diversity urges us to re-consider from the bottom-up the practical effects of excluding an important and active part of society from participation and decision, putting forward a careful consideration for a citizenship based on residence more suitable to the contemporary globalisation processes in the city, and more fair in an universal perspective.

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