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***Beyond Aesthetics of Pity.  
Italian Media Representation  
of Migrants and Emotional  
Audience***

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## **Beyond aesthetics of pity. Italian media representation of migrants and emotional audience<sup>\*</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Public debates on migration oscillate between two conflicting claims: on the one hand, compassion and protection, on the other hand, rejection and fear. Both representations are more focused on emotional reactions (Castells, 2009) than rational reflections (Habermas, 1962, 1992, 1996a, 1996b, 1999).

The media hyper-simplification concurs to a social representation of migration that is currently distorting real-life experiences to such an extent that the spectacularization of migrants brings about problems in terms of their negative self-representations. Furthermore, information about migrants reported by media is usually decontextualized (Marletti, 1995; Faso, 2008; Ghirelli, 2005; Maneri, 2001; Musarò, Parmiggiani, 2014), worsening this state of affairs. Media do not encourage the audience to give evaluations about specific topics, thus framing an agenda of issues to reflect on, so that the presentation of a topic does not cause prejudice or influence a course of action, but favour its contextualization (Shaw, 1979). Consequently, the complex phenomenon of migration is concealed in many degrees and ways by the Italian media system.

Starting from this assumption, we argue that these kinds of representation do not allow the audience to understand the complexity of the question, indeed feeding populism and influencing European and national policies to manage migration. In particular, emotional representations conceal the central issue of the potential breaking of fundamental rights claimed in the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights (Ambrosini, 2015).

**Keywords:** Media representation, Migration, Audience, European integration

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<sup>\*</sup> The three authors planned the paper together but A. Cava wrote the paragraphs “Marginality represented: the Italian case”, “Conclusive remarks”; M. Parito wrote “Introduction”, “The crisis of the European Union and the challenge of migration”, “Between insecurity and suspicion”; F. Pira wrote “Media deontology”, “Social networks”, “Spectacularization, fear and emotion”.

## Introduction

The enormous increase in migratory flows towards Europe since the last months of 2013 has brought the issue of migration in the public debate through the *frame* of the crisis and emergency. But, the movement of people towards the areas of the world, such as the European countries, with high standards of wellbeing and safety, are certainly not a novelty; with economic problems, migration can be considered, “the other crisis” in Europe, and even its “most important chronic problem” (Giddens, 2014, p. 123). The economic-financial crisis had already caused fear, uncertainty and mistrust in European citizens, so the increase of migratory flows has activated reactions against the European Union and the public debate focused on some of the founding elements of integration process such as the Schengen treaty and the rights foreseen by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The management of migratory flows challenges the issues of multiculturalism (which is affected by the fear of Islamic-fundamentalist terrorism) and of social solidarity (which is affected by the weakening of the welfare system), both founding principles and values of European integration. The need to manage forced migration from a European viewpoint and not exclusively from a national one acknowledges the concept of reciprocal interdependence: the number of people who realize they live in a context of *de facto* integration is rising, nevertheless, a lack of culture in the concept of «solidarity among strangers» (Habermas, 1999) does not facilitate the pathway of common solutions.

Considering this scenario and using a normative approach, this paper proposes a reflection regarding the sensitive issue of migration and its central role in the European integration. The migration issue, indeed, involves values and principles at the core of European Union, in the way stated in *The Charter of the Fundamental Rights*. We argue that the media representation regarding the migration, focused on the opposite emotional rhetoric of pity and rejection, denies the recognition of rights and risk not allows the public to understand the complexity of the question, fuelling instead nationalistic populism. We argue that the representation of migratory flows which emerges through the media contributes to public debate and could negatively influence European and National policies on migration. The paper

hypothesis is explored using a constructivist sociological approach and data from surveys and previous researches. In the paragraphs 1 and 2 we will explore the link between migration issue and the crisis of EU; in the paragraphs 3 we will analyze the media representation of migration in Italy; in the last paragraphs we will focus on the responsibility of the newsmedia in the building of the migration issue, considering, in particular, the impact of the spectacularization and the tendency to use emotional frame.

## **1. The crisis of the European Union and the challenge of migration**

The issue of migration intercepts a crucial and unresolved issue in the process of European integration: how should a collective identity be intended and constructed in order to be considered European. Dealing with migration obliges political and institutional actors to think about the issue of borders (inside/outside) and the relationship with the other (us/them), so it is not only a question of establishing how to manage the umpteenth “emergency” but of deciding which European Union one wants to build, what its finalities are, what its collocation in the era of globalization and the cosmopolitan society is (Parito, 2012). The migrations contribute to the erode the traditional borders among languages, cultures, ethnic groups and nation States; challenging national identities and the autonomy of the political institutions contributes to the decline of sovereignty of the nation-state (Castels, 2009). The countries which place greater emphasis on a common culture at the base of the myth of nation building have the most difficulty in facing migration.

The *Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union* establishes a system of rights and principles and at the same time defines a symbolic nucleus of values which qualifies the identity of the Union and its position on the geopolitical global scenario. The Preamble states that «the Union is founded on the indivisible and universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity», in addition, «the enjoyment of these rights entails responsibilities and duties with regard to other persons, to the human community and to future generations». In addition, the European Commission

intervened with a Communication on October 19, 2010 (COM/2010/573) which states that «the action of the Union on the subject of fundamental rights extends beyond internal politics» and that the Charter also applies to its «external action». It reformulates the way of interpreting migration, as Rodotà writes (2012, p. 28): «another place has truly been created, another space has been created, another idea of borders has emerged, spatial and temporal». The explicit reference to the “others”, to the “human community” in its entirety and to the “external” relevance of its action expands the responsibility of the Union beyond its borders: «expanding horizons is coherent with a cosmopolitical projection of solidarity, from which the consistency and the concrete opportunity which it offers to universalism can be deduced. The issue of the migrants immediately regards how to show solidarity towards them, which can be seen more extensively within the perspective of the rights of persons having freedom of movement» (Rodotà, 2016, p. 91).

Nevertheless, since the end of 2013, the increase of migratory flows towards the Mediterranean shores of the Union has triggered a public debate and a managing of migrants which often goes in the opposite direction from that stated in the Charter of Nice. The focus on the rejection of the migrants has caused a fracture between the recognition of fundamental rights within the borders of the “Fortress Europe” and outside the same borders, revealing the contradictions between formulation and procedure, between the intended Union and the real Union. The containment barriers which some governments have raised on the borders of Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Austria in order to obstruct the mobility of the refugees along the Balkan route and the debate concerning the suspension of the Schengen Treaty have not only denied recognition of fundamental rights to non-European citizens, but have also opened a debate on the principle of freedom of movement among member States which is central to the project of a united Europe.

The nature of the migratory phenomenon toward the European countries has changed over time. It has taken on peculiar forms in relation to the characteristics of the people arrived and the motivations which have driven them to move; in addition, the ubiquity guaranteed by the media is an important element (Giddens, 2014). The flow of persons is a significant phenomenon of



globalization and of the modernity which links with the opportunity and expectations promoted by the simultaneous circulation of symbolic flows (Appadurai, 1996). The intertwining of culture, value systems, lifestyles becomes an experience which more and more people face daily.

For the purposes of this article, it is useful to underline that the definition and the classification of the migrations do not respond to objective criteria but are social constructions: «they are the result of the state policies, introduced in response to economic and political objectives and to the attitudes of the public» (Castels, 2009, p. 45). The interpretation of the migratory phenomenon reflects the system of the expectations and of the interests of the society of destination, which establishes who can be included in this category of persons and with which form of recognition, desirability, safeguards (from the seasonal worker to the illegal immigrant to the refugee).

In the social construction of migration, the media system has a significant role, contributing to forming the public representation of the “other” as well as the agenda of the issues and the problems perceived by the citizens and brought to the attention of public decision makers. The media system and the political players participate in the process of the social construction of the migrant giving origin to forms of labelling (extra-communitary, refugee, clandestine, etc.) which conditions the citizens' perception of migrants (Boomgaarden e Vliegenthart, 2009; Gemi,Ulasiuk and Triandafyllidou, 2013).

The concept of mobility also has a markedly constructive connotation: «to define a movement requires drawing a line and agreeing that it has been crossed. *Where* the line is geographically and administratively drawn is substantially a social and political construction» (Massey, 2002, p. 47). The right to cross that line is generally established by the States, with various forms of regulation which make the right to migrate one of the less equally distributed rights among the various areas of the world. (Wihtol de Wenden, 2015).

European integration has defined an innovative and at the same time contradictory scenario. The project united Europe has made the borders between its States fluid, to the point of allowing the annexation of Countries with different Histories and cultures and by encouraging mobility by the citizens of the member States. The

Schengen Treaty has created a single space in which to circulate, removing borders and barriers and actively stimulating the transnational circulation of its citizens. But border control has been moved to the outside and defended rigorously: «it could be defined as the paradox of Europe of the moving borders: while the borders between Europe and non-Europe are made *mobileas* in no other continent in the world, as an actual novelty on the world history scene, while at the same time in order to assure the borders, social integration is so to say, reontologized and transformed into a modality of exclusion» (Beck & Grande, 2004, p. 228).

The movement of persons towards the areas of the world with higher standards of wellbeing and safety make up one of the central dimensions of globalization and the modalities through which these flows are articulated are connected to geopolitical, demographic, environmental, economic, social and cultural changes. The circulation of the symbolic flows is also involved, and was aided, firstly by the electronic media (Appadurai, 1996), and then by digital and interactive technology. It influences the configuration of the migratory flows impacting the representation of the different parts of the world and of itself, of the system of expectations and opportunities. The profile of the people who have moved toward Europe in the last twenty-five years has therefore changed: first the immigrants looking for work, then their families and children for reunification, more recently, students and, above all, asylum seekers (Wihtol de Wenden, 2015).

From an economic perspective, the analysis of the causes of international migration and its impact on the wealthy nations hypothesizes an increase of flows caused by the divarication of income, nevertheless, the Unchr data seems to suggest a different scenario. In the last years, 15 conflicts have exploded or exploded again, 8 of these in Africa, causing millions of refugees who in part flee toward Europe. The Unchr (Global Report, 2016) reveals that in 2016 in the world there were 65.6 million people forcibly displaced, the highest number since the UN started collecting this data; the number is even higher in 2017: 68,5 million (Global Report, 2017). The growth was concentrated between 2012 and 2015, driven mainly by the Syrian conflicts along with other conflicts in the region (Iraq, Yemen) as well as in sub-Saharan Africa (Unchr Report 2016). The

UN updated *World Populations Prospect*, which analyses the situation until 2017, reveals that the demographic asymmetries among countries will probably continue to generate international migrations but the movements of refugees are profoundly influencing the migration numbers faced by some Countries, in particular those involved by the Syrian crisis.

The Unchr estimates a strong increase of refugees towards Europe in 2015 and 2016; but if in 2016 Europe hosted 10,2 million of people, including 6,6 asylum seekers and refugee, the 2017 was a year of transition and relative stability (Global Report 2017).

Considering the arrivals by sea, the comparison in the years, shows the phenomenon (Unchr Operational Data Portal): in a timeframe starting in 2008, the lowest number of arrivals were in 2010 (9,654), the highest in 2011 (70,412). In 2014, were registered, 216,054 arrivals, quadruple the number of the previous year, which had turned the reflectors above all on the tragedy of 3,500 dead or missing during the sea crossing. In 2015 there were 1,015,078 arrivals, to which 3,771 missing or dead must be added. It is an unprecedented increase: which justifies extraordinary attention. The migration became an “emergency” issue, with politicians, institutional players and citizens split placing attention on the humanitarian aspects or on the fear of the foreigner. Since 2016 there was a degrowth: the arrivals by the sea were 362,753 and in 2017 only 172,301, (but missing or dead were, 5,096 in 2016 and 3,139 in 2017), anyway the migration issue remains strong in the public debate.

Faced, first, with the impact of the exceptional flow of arrivals via sea, and, then, with citizen’s concern fed by national-populist actors, the reaction of the European Union and of the member States has been slow, often insufficient, characterized by a combination of ambiguity and contradiction which derives from the way in which the process of communitarization of the migratory policies has come about. Until the end of the '90s of the past century, in fact, the European policies on immigration were based on the idea of the “European Fortress” and on the attempt to contain the flows (Zanfrini, 2007).

The managing of arrivals in the last years seems to be, more, an attempt by the governments to contain national public opinion, than,

a willingness to take effective action. It is useful to remark that the exceptional number of arrivals via sea does not mean a total increase of migrants towards Europe: the *World Population Prospect* of the United Nations estimates a migratory flow of less than half (4,123,000) for the period of 2010-2015 as opposed to that of the preceding five years (8,495,000). The European institutions and the States repropose the attitude which had already come up with respect to the economic-financial crisis: “decide not to decide” (Beck 2012a,2012b; Habermas 2012, 2014); or they address just some episodes or single aspects of the problem where it is possible to reach an easier agreement, without solving the whole problem.

The migratory policies repropose the issue of the relationship between the supranational structure and the resistance of the member states that try to keep their sovereignty, in particular regarding sensitive issues which involve public opinion. As Sayad noted (2002), national associations, or sometimes even nationalistic ones, which characterize the «State thought» and a social, economic, cultural and political way of looking at immigration lead us to see the immigrant as an intruder who disturbs the social order by confusing the separation between that which is national and that which is not and undermining the integrity, the purity and the mythical perfection of this order.

## **2. Between insecurity and suspicion**

During periods of crisis, people who feel their lifestyles threatened can falling back on local and national identities and migrant become another source of tension. Eugen Weber noted: «the dissatisfaction and widespread fear can focus on the Others who are then accused of taking jobs from the people, the food from their mouths, jeopardizing the safety of the streets, wasting money paid in taxes. In this environment neighbours become enemies and the occasional episode of nationalism is transformed into xenophobia of us against them (...) The rights of man are only those which someone grants to someone else (...) Democracy often expresses the prejudice of the majority and not only its better sentiments and aspirations» (Weber, 2013, p. 3-4).

Especially during periods of malaise, the local communities address intolerance and annoyance on migrants and unit against the outside threat. The migrants are observed through the lens of “us” which defines “the other”, often implicating an interpretation of the phenomenon as a problem (Dal Lago, 1999). In this situation, the risk of the ethnic-cultural fracture, beside the political-civil one, raise, with the spread of forms of national-populism (Martinelli, 2013).

In many countries immigration is among the main worries of its citizens. According to the Eurobarometer (Standard, n.84) survey carried out in September 2015 (the year with a huge rising in arrivals), it represents the main concern at national level involving a total of 47% of citizens surveyed, immediately following unemployment (49%). The comparison with the data from June 2013 shows the extent of the perception of the problem: in fact there was an increase of 33%. In two years, the issue of unemployment, of “social inequality”, “of the public debt”, of “the entrance into the workforce for young people”, of “insufficient development” underwent a decrease in interest, whilst there was a significant increase only in “immigration” and “terrorism” with an increase of 15%, it was a fundamental issue for 26% of the sample. In 2016, immigration fell to 36% among the concerns of the citizens of the 28 countries of the Union, however it remained the second most deeply felt problem together with “social inequality (36%) and followed “unemployment” (45%). In the 2017 (Eurobarometer Standard, n.88), immigration is again considered the most important issues facing the Eu (39%), before terrorism (38%) and economic situation (17%).

According to Bauman (2015), in a fluid society, flagellated by the fear of failure and of losing one's place in society, the migrants represent «collateral victims» of the forces of globalization, once they are turned into nomads without a home, the truth behind the fragility of our comfort and the security of our place in the world is revealed: the principle unforgiveable sin of the migrants is to be«walking dystopias».

The perception of national public opinion regarding the extent and impact of migration makes up an inescapable restriction which governments and political players must take into account in order to define policies of intervention. National politicians and institutional

players negotiate between themselves and with the European institutions with a constant eye to the need for electoral consensus, but there is the risk that, fears and uncertainty on the part of the citizens feed the growth of national-populist movements and parties. There is the risk that migratory policies and interventions end up being divergent with respect to the system of principles and rights defined by the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union and the Treaty of Lisbon.

The climate of fear and uncertainty erodes the credibility of the refugees. If it was once easy to be supportive of dissidents of the oppressive regimes of the recent past, the same support is not set aside for those who flee the war in Syria: «those who seek protection are suspect, guilty, until proven otherwise, of trying to enter the global North by way of the service entrance of humanitarian protection. Even when the reasons for openness prevail, heroic political opposers to oppressive regimes are not being welcomed, but rather seen as traumatized victims. Victimization erodes the rights of the persons welcomed (...) The treatment of refugees by a society that aspires to a certain standard of democracy oscillates between repression and compassion » (Ambrosini, 2015).

### **3. Marginality represented: the Italian case**

The research carried out in Italy leaves no doubt as to the portrait of immigration presented (Belluati, Grossi, Viglione, 1995; Faso, 2008; Ghirelli, 2005, Brighetti, 2006; Maneri, 2012; Calvanese, 2011). The look in the eyes of the immigrants is almost totally blank, crushed by the focus on concepts of legality, deviance, safety, criminality, clandestinity.

[...] terms like emergency, invasion, disembarkation, criminality, desperation, and terrorism are constantly found in reference to immigration. The vocabulary used refers to military and “law enforcement” language (blitz, fight, intervention, evacuation, search) as well as to a “water” image of migration (flow, wave). These also vary according to the issues discussed: if, when we speak of arrivals and disembarkation the term clandestine is reiterated, on the “internal front” many recall deviance and social marginality (drugs, prostitution, safety, overcrowding, ghetto, degradation) (Solano, 2014, p. 112).

Apocalyptic tones from which unjustified anxiety and a political and social climate that translates into intolerance for the foreigner. In his research, Maneri (2001), for example, fully examines the media activation which takes on the character of moral panic, in other words, emotional waves in which an episode or a group of persons – the immigrants in this case – are defined as a threat to the values of a society. The so-called tragedies of the Mediterranean and the arrivals on the Italian coasts have catalysed the attention of the media, of public opinion thus feeding a distorted image of the new arrivals.

Solano's monitoring (2014) of the news stories regarding immigration published on the Ansa website – the principle Italian news agency – in 2010, show how the most recurring issue is “arrivals and disembarkation” (20.8% of the total), followed by “immigrant crimes” (18.2%).

The issues which could be acknowledged negatively by public opinion (“arrivals and disembarkations”, “immigrant revolts”, “immigrant crime active subjects” and “expulsion and clandestinity”), which implicitly suggest a vision of immigration as dangerous and problematic are equal to 51.7% of the total number of news stories, without counting the declarations and the stories that report political issues which often give an alarmist vision of the phenomenon. Regarding what happens to the foreigners when they are already within national borders, the dimension of the emergency is diminished in terms of its problematicity (criminality, social marginality, degradation).

The problematicity of the interaction between media and immigration emerged in Italy with all its force in the Spring of 1997: for the first time the “Albanian emergency” resounded from medium to medium as an echo feeding itself. TV News and the Press start to describe an “invasion” which jeopardized the public order; emotional reactions to the crimes and problems connected to the Albanian presence were stoked (Carzo & Centorrino, 2009). The violence and misery represented induced anguish, fear and dread of seeing one's world turned upside down. And then *pietas* vanished leaving indifference and refusal of immigrants in its place (Cava, 2011).

Since that distant 1997 not much has changed. Gariglio, Pogliano & Zanini (2010) reconstruct thirty years of history of our collective

imagination through the analysis of the photojournalism of immigration. A discouraging scene emerges: in the 80's the story of poor workers was told with compassion; in the 90's we moved on to spectacular mass arrivals described with tones of desperation and threat; the new millennium should then have started to narrate of the pathways to integration, but the normality of immigration doesn't make headlines and we continue to prefer extreme icons which label the immigrant as victim or delinquent, and the stereotyping continues to feed on the same image repertoires. On the contrary, the increase in the number of people of different religions and of minors of foreign origin in the schools seems to have magnified fear, danger and increased the number of problems to be solved. To these same results add the national research on immigration and asylum in the Italian media directed by Morcellini (2009): the image of immigration provided by the means of information appears to be frozen and motionless, anchored to the same narrative styles. Desperation and the absolute misery seem to be therefore the icons of immigration (Binotto & Martino, 2004) and this type of visual rhetoric made up of men and women who are always on the edges, whose human rights seem to be constantly denied, risks producing cognitive shortcuts which damage the migrants' lives (Pogliano & Solaroli, 2012).

It is known that media coverage has the ability to create fascination, expectations and beliefs regarding the issues concentrated on.

With respect to immigration, inadequate language and content define a rather controversial scenario in Italy. After all, the media do not push to assign value judgements on certain topics, but provide the *agenda* of the issues which will be evaluated according to the content (Shaw, 1997).

In 2012 The National Institute of Statistics in a report on migrants in Italians' everyday lives, revealed how 60% of those interviewed think that the attitude of the Italians towards immigrants is suspicious, when not openly hostile (7%), or indifferent (16%). Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of those interviewed considers it effectively difficult for immigrants to find their place in society (80.8%) if not impossible (2.4%) while only 16.8 % easy. The tendency to be suspicious and disinclined is not unilateral though,



since the attitude of the immigrants towards the Italians is prevalently described as suspicious (53.2%), indifferent (20.9%) or openly hostile (9.6%).

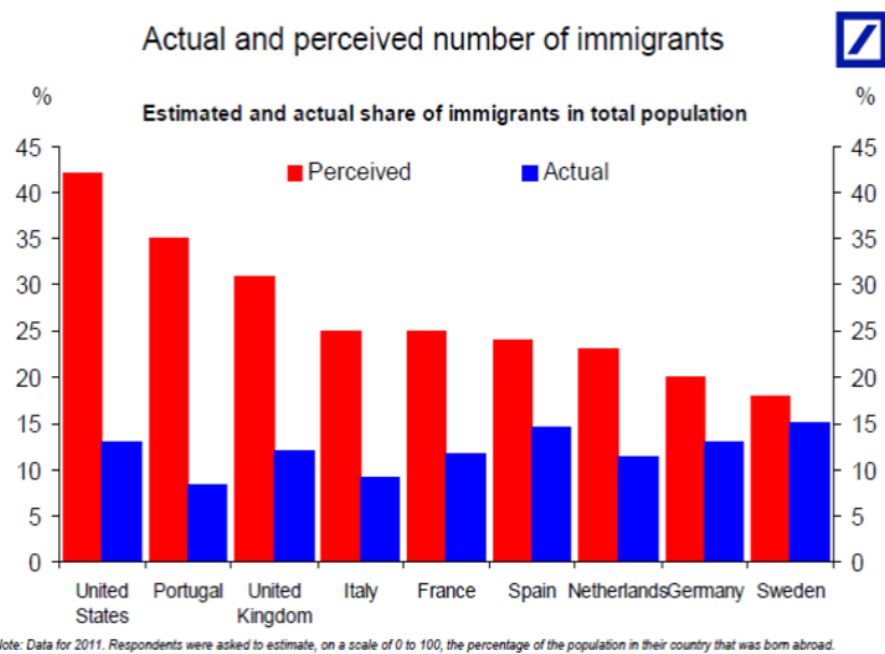
Many are the Italians who associate the presence of the immigrants in Italy to a worsening of some aspects of the quality of life, such as the degradation of their neighbourhoods(79%), an increase in criminal activity (72.3%) and the problems with public order and violence (48.4%). 62% of those interviewed consider the immigrants who live in Italy today to be too many, over 40% believe that they distract the attention of the politicians from the problems of the Italians and evaluate negatively the impact that the constant arrival of new immigrants has on the demographic balance of our country. As regards the religious aspects about 40% state to agree strongly (17.8%) or sufficiently (22.9%) in thinking that cohabitation of different religions is a danger for our country. About the same percentage (41.1%) declare to be against the opening of a mosque near their home. The consequences that worry Italians the most who express an opinion against, regard above all the problems of safety and public order that would arise (28.3%): in addition, this opinion reflects a sort of revenge towards the “Muslims who are intolerant and would not allow the construction of a Catholic church in their Countries” (26.6%). In third and fourth place are, the possible increase of immigrants in the area (18.3%) following the opening of the mosque, and more generally, the loss of the identity of our country which is Catholic so that «the immigrants have to conform to our religion»(16.3%), followed by a general intolerance for different cultures, expressed by the statement, «their religion and culture are different from ours» (7.8%). Finally, the opinion of the interviewees with regard to the use of clothing that covers the face for religious reasons worn by Muslim women: the vast majority of responders thinks that they should not be allowed to use it in Italy (80.7%). A significant 19.2% however thinks that the use of the hijab should be allowed in Italy as well.

These numbers shows how only too often, when we speak about immigration we lose sight of the story and the actual dynamics of such a structural phenomenon for the economy and for European political construction, rather preferring a reconstruction with a strong emotional impact.

The reason why interviewed people responded that way is probably related to data about actual and perceived number of immigrants.

Italy is one of the countries with the lowest number of immigrants among those considered by Oecd but the number of immigrants alleged by the people is much higher (Charter 1).

*Charter 1*



Source: OECD 2011

We have an actual immigration and an immigration we create into the imagery. Italians don't know the number of immigrants and they are sure that they are way more than they actually are (Ambrosini, 2015b). The numbers doesn't really matter, the perception is really important.

In this way immigration is no longer a geo-political number to reflect upon but only a problem to be contrasted therefore betting on the fear of invasion and degradation (Chebel d'Appollonia, 2012).

This aspect is decisive today more than ever in light of the close symbolic association between immigration and insecurity and the media attention focused on Islamic fundamentalism. In the last few years a collective fear of Islam has grown and settled. Sociologists Abdellali Haggat and Marwan Mohammed (2016) define under the expression “islamophobic” actions and emotions of prejudice against Muslims or suspected ones. The vision of Islam through international events shown by the media clouds the image of real Islam. Muslims representation shown by the media creates and promotes stereotypes about this complex cultural universe. The concern generated by public strengthening of Islam is developed overtime into a compact feeling made of mistrust, rejection and fear (Massari, 2006; Bruno, 2008).

These discursive practices end up influencing how the public approaches suffering, another aspect, which as we have seen, is connoted with the identity of the “media immigrant” portrayed in a pitiful way. A desperation made up of violation of human rights, of extreme poverty. The marginalization of these outcasts finds in the refugee, identification or expulsion centres, the preferred Italian media space.

This emotional construction defines the interaction between migrant and host society. A wonderful essay by Musaro (2014) investigating the shipwreck on the night between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2013 off the coast of Lampedusa in which more than 360 people lost their lives, questions the very cognitive and emotional levers which induced public opinion, the media, and the institutions such as the EU or the Italian government at that time, to invoke respect for human rights while cracking down on legislature concerning immigration to the point of criminalizing the “irregulars” (De Swert, Schacht & Masini, 2015). A short circuit therefore between compassion and a compulsion for safety (Bruno, 2015). Concerning this very issue Cuttitta underlines the prevalent stories which oscillate between safety rhetoric and humanitarian rhetoric describing how an island – Lampedusa – can be transformed into a border and this border a proscenium. In this case two processes interface: the borderization and the spectacularization. In reality, the island of Lampedusa has for some time appeared as the incarnation of the idea of border in the mind of both Italians and Europeans.

[...] if we only try to list the main issues which in the last few decades have enlivened the debate concerning the control of immigration and of the borders (on an academic as well as a political front), it would appear evident that Lampedusa is a more than privileged observatory of the phenomenon in question. Whether it is to evaluate the real volume of irregular immigration via sea or the number of people who lost their lives in an attempt to cross the European borders; whether to study the changing clandestine voyage routes or the developments of the collaboration between the countries of destination, countries of origin, and countries of transit in controlling migratory movements; whether to verify the conformity of control policies with the obligations on the subject of human rights or to put a spotlight on the subjectivity of migrants; whether to analyse the paperwork concerning asylum and humanitarian protection or the nature and functioning of detention centres; whether we face the issue of the criminalization of clandestine immigration or that of the *multi-level governance* of migration: whatever the perspective adopted, Lampedusa is an ideal field of research to observe the meeting (and the dynamics which arise from it) between those two specular phenomenon which are migration, on the one hand and the control of the territorial borders on the other (Cutitta, 2012, p. 187).

In the last few years the “emergency frame” has moved from common criminality to the spectacularization of the control policies at the borders (Boltanski, 2000; Hóijer, 2004) and the dramatization of Islamic terrorism (La Rocca & Torvisco, 2017; Marzo & Tramontana 2017).

An example? The media's favorite topic about immigration concerns the illegal landings on our shores: easily shown during the summer or during shipwrecks, it's often introduced alongside issues such as security, criminality and presence of illegal immigrants. That brings us to imagine the sea as the way in of irregular migrants [...] Yet, according to the Ministry of the Interior, one out of eight illegal immigrants (12 percent) come through the sea, most immigrants reach Italy by plane on tourist visas. Therefore when we think about illegal migration we should bear in our mind the image of Rome's or Milan's Airports, not Lampedusa's port (Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2014, p. 12).

The exceptional nature which until now has characterized the stories of the lives of the immigrants has become the daily routine of the description, causing what could be defined as the aesthetics of pity (Chouliaraki, 2006; 2012). And the aesthetics of pity cannot but produce a sentimental public used to this “hypervisibility of pain”. Dal Lago (2012) invites us to contextualize the behaviour of

those who witness the spectacle of pain. Tracing a path which brings order to the modulations endured by the sight of atrocities over the course of History, and comes to define the indifference of today's public towards cruelty.

#### **4. Media deontology**

Following what has been described until now the terminology which is reiterated with insistent frequency when defining the frame of immigration is still: emergency, humanitarian crisis, criminality, terrorism. All these elements are pieces included in the identification of the frame which has prevailed in the perception of the European public, fear. The 2017 Report on Social Security and Insecurity in Italy and in Europe highlights: «The European insecurity agenda confirms what emerged in 2016: an alignment of the narrative on global challenges, especially on the issues of immigration and terrorism . In 2017, the first item of the insecurity agenda in Germany, with 54%, is immigration; as well as in France where terrorism occupies, with 19%, the top position in the ranking. [...] Even in the countries of the Mediterranean area - Italy and Spain - the themes of global insecurity are at the top of the ranking. So, the 2017 detection confirms a convergence of the European media storytelling on the same areas of global insecurity» (Demos&PI, Osservatorio di Pavia, Fondazione Unipolis, 2017). In this context, the recovery of the central role of the information system, of its mediation and interpretation of the fact has become an urgent necessity.

The advent of the Web and the radical transformation of the communication flows from linear to reticular is what has caused a crisis in the institutional information system, which constantly tries to pursue the audience, to construct a more *marketing oriented* news rather than a *factual oriented* one. In this way the crisis of values which has involved society as a whole, seems to have contributed to enormously fragilizing that collective European identity which reference is made in the first part of this paper. This is what has generated the strongly individualistic and self-representative connotation of society. The collective instances are transformed into individual and pseudo corporative, referring to Bauman's vision of one's own "safe garden" (Bauman, 2015, p. 86).

The imperative - not to be excluded - causes that the critical consciousness is often threatened by the prevailing of the need to be accepted and live in a condition of apparent security. This is why the deontological issue must have a central role in the storytelling of immigration and terrorism.

In the Italian media system – as we have seen – the narration oscillates between the accountability of disembarkations and a portrait of a society facing from years of an economic crisis which shows no sign of abating. The thousands of migrants are represented as potential rivals to benefit of the few resources and services of a weakened social assistance system.

Now the primary task of the information system is that of revealing fact reality and not of making real that what is plausible, because it is exactly from how reality is interpreted that depends the ability of each person to understand events. Lippman (1922) underlined how knowledge is the result of individual research and of the will to acquire information.

Knowledge doesn't come from the conscience, but from the environment the conscience deals with. When men act based on the principles of research and investigation, they go to look for facts and to gain wisdom. When they neglect this, they withdraw into themselves and find only what they have inside. So they elaborate their prejudices instead of expanding their knowledge (Lippmann, 1922, tr.it. 1999, p. 395).

When this principle fails, the risk of manipulation becomes more evident. As Gili (2001) states: the media influences the individuals, their way of interpreting reality and forming an opinion.

The complexity of the influence of the media is in the fact that they always present – often in an inextricable way – the two dimensions of informative and legal credibility: on the one hand they inform us about the world, on the other they always propose a “vision of the world”, of the ways to present and considering events, people, problems (Gili, 2001, p. 77-78).

The possibilities to manipulate information have become more subtle and difficult to be pinpointed, because they are often based on images rather than on words. We are convinced that the lens does not lie, so we tend to attribute a truthfulness to the image which sometimes does not have; as the technology which allows us to

access to thousand information is the same that we can use to manipulate images, to construct a narration based on a realistic imaginary.

Migration presents multiple critical aspects: a high level of complexity of narration, the same news if not accurate and in-depth can cause an altered or partial vision of the worlds. It is fundamental to define the geopolitical, cultural, social context and also to employ an appropriate and correct terminology in the description of individuals and situations of evident drama.

The Italian press system is regulated by a professional Association authorizing the professional practice. Over the past twenty years it has adopted different self-regulation instruments in order to provide a set of ethical rules to guide the news making process. One of the last codes endorsed in order of time is the Charter of Rome, approved in 2007 which invites Italian journalists to:

pay close attention in treating information concerning asylum seekers, refugees, victims of human trafficking and migrants on the territory of the Italian Republic or elsewhere and in particular: a) to adopt the appropriate legal terms in order to give the reader and the user strict adherence to the reality of the facts, avoiding the use of improper language; b) to avoid the spread of imprecise information [...]; c) to safeguard those seeking asylum, the refugees, the victims of human trafficking and the migrants who choose to speak with the journalists, adopting the necessary precautions regarding their identity and images in order not to allow their identification and expose them or their families to reprisals [...]; d) to consult experts and specialists whenever possible in order to provide the public with the information in a clear and complete context which also takes into account the causes of the phenomenon (Charter of Rome, 2007).

The drafting of the deontological code represents, in the intention of its promoters, the necessary instrument of intervention in order to respond to the evolution of the social and cultural framework, to provide professionals with rules that allow them to correctly manage the organizational process, news making, which is at the base of the production of information and avoid involuntary distortions or manipulations. The news relevance take in account of some elements such as: its negativity, drama; the dimension and number of people involved; all these contributes to the news making and its spreading across the media. This process reinforce the spectacularization of the events leading a growing personalization of

the political and social processes and an evident fragmentation of the reality represented.

In the information production process the world must be modified to be adapted to the logic of the media and at the same time to answer to the public's expectations. By consequence the events are decontextualized, isolated from their meanings and causes in order to be arbitrarily recontextualized in a new *frame*– the media format – on the base of association and relations that are totally external to the events (Altheide, 1976, p. 24-28). This particular structure of information does not allow individuals to understand the development of the events, the previous, the context, the possible scenarios, and also prevent from understanding their logic and direction (Gili, 2001, p.191).

The immigration issue perfectly accords with Gili's claim, to the point that the same Charter of Rome systematically verifies the level of application of the rules it contains and, in the fifth Report published in October of 2017 (Osservatorio di Pavia), outlines point by point how the migratory issue is represented through TV and the press.

The first element which emerges from the 2017 report regards the increase of alarmist news: «In creating titles and in the political-editorial choices on migration issues , in the way of selecting and hierarchizing, even more than in the way of making up and offer the news. [...] they are often served to the reader as exotic "dishes". Non EU-news on non EU people. With the result of consolidating the idea that immigration, and immigrants, are not a structural fact, that must be governed, but a permanent emergency that must be stopped. In this way the common sense of prejudices is strengthened and the soil on which the bad plant of xenophobic prejudice and hate speech germinates». The migration issue occupies the agenda of the Italian press throughout the 2017; the analysis carried out on the first pages of 6 Italian newspapers (Corriere della Sera, Il Giornale, l'Avvenire, l'Unità, la Repubblica, la Stampa) and local and national press titles from January to October highlight some elements.

- The migratory phenomenon confirms its centrality on the front pages of newspapers, even if we register a slight decrease compared to the same period of 2016.



- Top news in 2017. The management of migratory flows (44%) and the crime and security (16%). Both these macro areas double in percentage compared to the previous year.
- In 2017 there is again a significant increase in the use of alarmist tones: almost 20 points more than the previous year, from 27% in 2016 to 43% this year. 4 titles / news on 10 have an anxiogenic potential. The remaining 57% is divided between the reassuring component, 5%, and neutral, 52%. It is interesting to note is the erosion of reassuring titles that they are reduced of 50%, from 10% in 2016 to 5% in 2017.
- The words of immigration: the protagonists of 2017. Migrant and refugee, without surprise, stand out among the terms most present in the titles, respectively used 2,455 (17%) and 1,322 times (9%). With a little surprise, the fourth word most used by the Italian press in its titles was Ong (623 times, 4%) (OdP, 2017).

Migrations and migrants have had a high relevance in the prime time editions of the TV news programs of the 7 Italian generalist networks (TG1, TG2, TG3, TG4, TG5, Studio Aperto and TgLa7).

In 2017, the news regarding the phenomenon of migration in TV news have increased: 3,713 news in 10 months, (+ 26%) compared to 2016.

2017 confirms the hypothesis of the existence of a correlation between the narrative frame of the phenomenon and migrants' perception of citizens. The peaks of insecurity recorded between 2007 and 2008 (because of the combination of immigration and crime), seem to return: from January up to November of this year there is an increase in the fear sentiment of Italians towards migrants and refugees (43%, ten points more than in 2015), related to the increase of news on crimes and the migration flows from Africa coasts.

The attention on the issue of migratory flows increases: almost 1 news of 2 concerns the management of arrivals in the central area of the Mediterranean sea. Also the dimensions of crime and security grows: almost ten points more than in 2015. In contrast there is a significant reduction, of a third, compared to 2016, of news on migrants reception.

One aspect continues to emerge from the report with compelling force, relative to the subjectivization of the migrant. Despite the issue's constant presence in the daily newspapers and major news programs, the migrants remain in the background, they are almost never the subject but the object of the story. They only have a voice in 7% of the stories.

2 times more than in 2016. But still invisibles, if we consider that, on the whole of all journalistic reports, including those not related to the migratory phenomenon, they are interviewed only the 0.5%.

The impact on the public shows us a strong weakening of the ability to inform and provide instruments to interpret reality. The fears of the individuals continue to grow, to the point that the X Report on Safety in Italy and in Europe (2017) shows that in third place in the rank of citizens' uncertainties is «the affirmation of alarmism with respect to immigration, to globalization and to the threat to identity (17%)». This of course reverberates on social media which become the sounding boards of fear and emotion rather than of reflexion and proposals. Especially Facebook and Twitter, as shown by the Report on the Charter of Rome, appear more permeable to intolerance. The language used, the violent expressions, incite racism, xenophobia and hate. Here, the threat to one's own identity and the fear for the loss of security more frequently transforms into clashes, threats. A trend within the wider context of a general increase of violent contents which show how, from being places of potential aggregation, social networks risk becoming spaces for the proliferation of violent conclusions and false information able to overcome the truth of the facts.

## **5. Social networks**

In the preceding paragraphs has been explained the primary role of the collective imagination in daily life. The collective imagination spread by the media represents a critical element so that Internet becomes a resource for the comprehension of the migratory phenomenon. The connections have transformed individuals from simple users of the content into generators of content, even though for the most part this doesn't take place through an act of original

creation, but through the act of making a comment and sharing which certainly add to and transform the content, but do not change the sense of the message. This happens in virtue of that dimension of a protected environment, the “safe garden”, previously referred to, in which each person creates ties with the direct connected public (friends, followers etc.) and with the indirect public (friends of friends etc.) who contribute to defining the social identity of each person through the instrument of the virtual like. In this case the relational dimension of dialogue and debate fails, whereas an important role is given to a performative dimension in which each person constructs a representation, a product that must find a public. Parisier (2011) introduces the concept of *the vicious circle of the ego* with reference to Zuckerberg, who argued that with the advent of social networks individuals do not longer need to have a different image for their work friends or co-workers and for the other people they know, affirming that having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity. But as we are observing, the algorithms analyze the information we publish and the result is that: «Our identity conditions the media, and the media conditions our convictions and interests. We click on a link, thus means that we are interested in the topic, and so it’s highly probable that in future we will read articles related to this subject, and this in turn will affects us. We remain trapped in this vicious circle of the ego and, if our identity has been misrepresented, strange phenomena begin to occur, like the reverberation of an amplifier» (Parisier, 2011, p. 102).

In this context, individuals are induced to show all of themselves in a process of mediatic exhibition (Cava & Pira, 2015) of their lives. So the individual identity is increasingly shaped on the one hand by the self representation we want to offer to our audience, on the other from the conditioning that social media algorithms can generate.

In this sense the consumer aspect prevails as Bauman recalls, causing a sort of “technological fetishism” according to which technology relieves us of the responsibility of making a choice and offers a scapegoat from moral impulses «silencing their moral conscience making them insensitive to the complete effect of the moral challenge, and overall, disarming them on a moral level when they find themselves making choices which require a certain dose of negation and self-sacrifice» (Bauman, 2006, p. 112-114).

This kind of moral disarming is what pushes people to unite around their fears rather than make choices that require sacrifices, as a result of the mechanisms of dissemination of contents that takes place as claimed by Jenkins, Ford & Green (2013) by activating a minority, a *peripheral participation*, against a majority of *voyeurs*, giving rise to a process of false participation.

This explains how the perception of uncertainty and fear when faced with immigration are constantly increasing, despite the reduction in crime and the fact that there is no direct correspondence between violent crime and migration.

Individuals have in some way lost the ability to elaborate reality substituting it with the social representation of the same.

We are witnessing a very specific phenomenon generated by the combination of the effect of the sounding board that the news, even partially, has through media and social media even if not supported by the facts, which emerge from the knot of the web that proliferate generating real cascades of information (Pira, 2017, p. 320).

## **6. Spectacularization, fear and emotion**

Fighting fear requires management skills, managing information, having the cultural knowledge that allows us to understand. The Charter of Rome Report shows us how partial information prevails, in this way the representation of migration remains something else that strikes our collective imagination, evokes *pietas*, fear, dread, but doesn't raise questions, doesn't help us to overcome the barrier of the collective imagination on the immigrant and make him a real person. Above all it doesn't show us the interdependence that ties us to them, it doesn't explain that the increase in the economic gap between north and south of the world is the triggering factor of the migratory flows, that the economic exploitation which benefits our western society is the cause, that the same technology which has opened the door to almost infinite possibilities is the same one which reveals the gap and motivates the excluded to try to become the included. And yet, the spectacularization of the hundreds of thousands of people setting off, who face the sea on unlikely vessels causes the dread of “an invasion” which will change the landscape of our cities, which will

undermine our safety with the risk of terrorist attacks and fundamentalist Islam. Uncertainty is characterized by fear, fuelled by ignorance and by prevailing against rather than in favour of. The phenomenology of the migrant as a media representation, it is what, in Castells vision, determines the excessive anxiety in the climate which compromises learning abilities, «the situations which reawaken the fear are those which recall a more widespread public (Graber, 2007, p. 267). It is a case of reactions and events which threaten the survival, and these reactions mobilize cognitive resources which activate attention. [...] The news, (and in particular the images) can be sources of stimulation equivalent to what was experienced» (Castells, 2009, p. 193). Therefore images with high rates of dramaticity and decontextualization, arouse emotions in the public and influence their decisions.

[...]today the sources of insecurity have moved "out" from our daily life, from our ability to control them. They moved elsewhere. "Outside" from our borders, also because the borders are no longer able to delimit our lives. And when tragic events that generate fear and anxiety occur within our borders, it is a matter of facts that they escape to our understanding (*Rapporto sulla sicurezza e insicurezza in Italia e in Europa*, 2017, p.9).

The emotional component tends to prevail in the elaboration of the information. This brings us back to the data of the Report. The exponential increase of news coverage dominated by the frame of fear, which represents a distortion of the presence of alternative frames that could lead to better understand an issue (Van Gorp B., 2009), seems to have permeated Italian society on the whole, debated between the urgency of hospitality and the need for security.

This attitude is amplified on social networks. The studies based on *echo chambers theory* demonstrate «users' tendency to promote their favoured narratives and hence to form polarized groups. Confirmation bias helps to account for users' decisions about whether to spread content, thus creating informational cascades within identifiable communities. At the same time, aggregation of favoured information within those communities reinforces selective exposure and group polarization» (Quattrociocchi, Scala & Sunstein, 2016, p.1).

In particular Facebook users show three tendencies:

1. To acquire information which are coherent with their belief system (*confirmation bias*)
2. to find people with similar attitudes (*echo chambers*)
3. to strengthen each other own opinion radicalizing them (polarization) (Quattrociochi & Vicini, 2016, p. 132)

In spite of the pervasive presence of *misinformation* and *fake news* the connected social networks may represent an opportunity for the autonomous construction of meaning where the ability to exercise one's own objective responsibility which helps us to accept interdependence with the others and re-establish a sense of trust and openness can be restored.

We are in the midst of a period of profound and prolonged media change, which is impacting the ways messages are generated and circulated. The communications and marketing industries are now facing pressure to rewrite the rules around branding and strategic communication (Jenkins, 2015).

Jenkins identifies some key concepts on the basis of which it is possible to realize a new model of shared and participatory culture. Concepts that struggle to establish themselves at present because of the deviations that the media and social system generated by social networks.

The possibility of giving life to a *participatory culture* as the capacity of individuals and basic communities, including the ability to produce media and to promote or modify the messages (produced by the media, by advertising agencies, by corporate communicators), able to contrast the proliferation of *misinformation* and the instrumental use of information. The establishment of the principle of *transmedia branding* and the dissemination of key information and experiences across multiple media platforms with the aim of intensifying the relationship with the client, in response to *pervasive consumerism*.

## **Conclusive remarks**

We have described the media representation of immigration by reconstructing the dynamics of the Italian storytelling. A *mediascape* made up of sufferance, desperation, poverty and fear derive from this. Such an emotional narrative construction favours the distancing from the Other-Foreigner, fuels safety concerns or provokes compassion which is included in what we have referred to as “the aesthetics of pity”.

If the mainstream media nurture the collective imagination of a sentimental audience used to this “hypervisibility of pain”, the social network space intensifies this criticality because we are before a reticular audience.

In these pages, we portrayed a static photography of Italian society on the issues of immigration. Until now we have described the immigrant as objects of storytelling crushed in crime, emergency and security. But we believe that there could be a different communicative framework for the representation of immigrant beyond this “pity paradigm”: how can the immigrants speak?

As a conclusions, we propose a powerful operation of narrative decentralisation: let us turn our attention from the public who witnesses this particular construction of the Other-Immigrant to the immigrants as the media public.

Let's try to reflect on that normality of immigration which seems not to interest the discursive practices on immigration at all.

Let's change the perspective and think instead about the role that the culture industry can play in defining itineraries of integration. The cultural consumption can define the contexts in which a mixed and integrated culture is generated: conferences, exhibitions and museums, readings, web sites, the places in the city set aside for social gatherings (Giusti, 2015). It is a question of representing universal stories. The web from which the criticism of the preceding paragraph emerged, for example, could have a very strong role in the transmission of the identity handed down, the web pages represent a cultural offering which has an eye to the past and an eye to the future. We believe it is essential to rehabilitate the experience and cultural heritage of those who are the protagonists of migratory pathways. Internet could be one of the most immediate

chances of socialization, an instrument capable of generating knowledge to be shared with others.

In the restructuring of one's own social relationships and above all in the redefinition of one's identity in a different cultural framework, the media consumption space – both mainstream and digital media - is one of the central locations in building new biographic pathways for immigrants. In this sense the collective imagination driven by the media –polyvalent container of symbols, images and meanings – is oriented within a social reality made up of shared representations. It is well-know that the collective imagination plays a priority role in daily and collective life, in fact, it works as a fundamental element which takes part in the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1997). For this reason we feel it is relevant to take into consideration the invisibility of the immigrant as cultural consumers when planning real integration pathways.

Such an approach would abandon the rhetoric of terror and the aesthetic of pity which we have discussed in this paper.

From the moment one actually begins to experience the move and have contact with another cultural reality, the test to be passed is seizing the meaning of that urban life, compare, mix, hybridize it with the cultural traits of the land of origin. Therefore cultural consumption is fundamental in the existential project of the migrant, it constitutes a necessary dimension in the construction of Self. It is part of a process of customization of a personal lifestyle. The choice of what to consume is, in fact, functional in order to realize the construction of Self on a daily basis.

Media consumption is correlated to relational practices. The media can keep the contact within the “migrant tribe” alive while its members interact with the society chosen as their destination.

Italy does not seem to have as yet responded to this “communicative urgency”.

As a media consumer, the immigrant must be examined as a consumer of a cultural product that translates into a certain outlook on the world in their daily interactions made of media images. In fact, we are talking about social individuals and consumers who select and synthesize models of original, material and immaterial culture through the daily practices assimilated in the host country (Simeon & Stazio, 2007).



In this perspective, the media manage to help the *audience* gain power by representing and promoting new models of identity. Here we are expanding the limits of the connection between citizenship and immigration as traditionally viewed; in fact, we are not referring to the mere inadequacies of the category of citizenship exhausting the relationship between individuals, institutions and rights (Marchetti, 2009). Rather, we are referring to the type of citizenship expressed through the use of “mediatic grammar” able to make the immigrants become protagonists of the public arena where information almost becomes a fundamental human right in the expression of the concept of citizenship. For example, why not put an end to the ethnicization of the news?

Let's consider the social citizenship and then the legal one: the formal dimension of citizenship cannot overlook the participation and the identification that can be gained through the media.

The media should be an irreplaceable resource in the processes which create forms of cohesion within an evermore multicultural and multi-ethnic society.

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