

THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN THE ITALIAN PRESS

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Abstract: This contribution focuses on the migrant women's portraits that emerge in the Italian press. This discursive arena is dealt with by paying attention to what is taken for granted in the discourses about migrant women and their reproductive rights and behaviours. The analysis is based on a dataset of 634 newspapers articles, published between June 2005 and July 2012, and include both partisan, non-partisan, and religious press. It highlights the culturalization of migrant women, mainly portrayed as victims, and points to the high risk of xenophobic manipulation and political instrumentalization of migrant women's rights

Keywords: migration, women, press analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Italy is a relevant case study for the analysis of the possible instrumentalization and culturalization of migrant women's rights in political discourses, for three main reasons.

Firstly, migration is a politicized issue, at least since the '90s (Sciortino and Colombo, 2004). Migration flows regulation is a crucial topic in recent political campaigns and some political parties lever on anti-immigration agendas in constructing their political identity (Cousin and Vitale, 2006). The radical populist Northern League particularly focuses on undocumented migration at the main issue in its political discourses (Biorcio, 1997 and 2010; Diamanti, 1996). Thus, the defence of migrant women's rights is intertwined with the political discourse on migrants.

Secondly, the public discourse on migration has been widely studied in Italy (Binotto and Martino, 2005; Dal Lago, 1999; Calvanese, 2011; Corte, 2002). However, much of this research deals especially with media racism, paying little attention to its impact (see Sciortino and Colombo, 2004). This wide attention lead to the "Charter of Rome", a code of conduct for journalists in the media coverage of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees,

and victims of trafficking, signed in 2008 by the National Council of the Journalists' Association and the Italian National Press Federation.¹

Third, the issue of women's rights (a well-established topic in the Italian political sphere, where the feminist movement has a long history – Lussana, 2012) has been recently revived in the public sphere by a number of events. In 2011 (February, 13th), a large demonstration was launched after the sex scandals involving Prime Minister Berlusconi. The demonstration, protesting against the discrimination of women in politics and the labour market, gathered an impressive amount of people and was widely covered by the media.² About the same time, a documentary and a book on the use of female body in the media gained a wide echo.³ As a consequence, the political and public debates over the role of women in society gained animus.

In this political climate, the present contribution addresses the media representation of migrant women, by focusing specifically on their reproductive and sexual rights. – The sources are newspaper articles from the Italian daily and weekly press (2005-2012). The analysis of media shows a systematic lack of attention to issues of concern to migrant women: feminine migration appears to be almost completely invisible. In the rare cases where they do become visible, migrant women are predominantly represented through cultural lenses, portrayed as 'the others'. As it will be shown, this 'otherization' is often related to a political instrumentalization of migrant women's rights, whose defence is turned into an argument against migration.

The next section gives a brief overview of female migration in Italy, while the third section addresses aims and methodology. The fourth section is devoted to the analysis of the results, while the last section discusses the outcomes of the research project.

2. MIGRANT WOMEN IN ITALY

The category of 'migrant' includes a large variety of situations: unskilled job-seekers as well as professional elites, UE as well non-UE citizens, single-migrants as well as families, seasonal workers as well as long-term residents, undocumented persons, and asylum seekers (see Bonizzoni, 2011). Official data bases vary, depending on the classification criteria they adopt (Busso, 2007). According to the public common-sense 'migrant' is often a synonym with 'foreigner', thus extending the displacement process much longer than the

¹ See the English version at [http://www.eui.eu/Projects/MEDIVA/Documents/TraduzioneCartadiRoma-definitiva\(EN\).pdf](http://www.eui.eu/Projects/MEDIVA/Documents/TraduzioneCartadiRoma-definitiva(EN).pdf)

² After the event a women movement has been established, "If not now, when?" (Se non ora, quando?).

³ *Lorella Zanardo, Il corpo delle donne* – Documentary available at http://www.ilcorpordelle donne.net/?page_id=91 (English version); http://www.ilcorpordelle donne.net/?page_id=209 (Portuguese version).

actual migration experience, which, instead of being an event, is turned into a status and a public identity (Bordignon and Diamanti, 2002).

Until the late 80s, the regulation of immigration was based on temporary measures and occasional regularization programs (sort of ‘amnesties’ – see Triandafyllidou, 1999 for a historical reconstruction). Scholars agree that there often was a lack of a long-term institutional perspective: until the framework law of 1998, the laws on migration could be defined as ‘emergency laws’, without a scheme of policies to support migrants (Caponio, 2005; Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2005; Ambrosini, 2001). The framework law of 1998, reinforced by the 2002 migration law, introduced a mechanism that connected residence permits with job contracts - for economic migrants.⁴

According to the official data (ISTAT, 2012),⁵ foreign citizens living in Italy represent 7,5% of the population (4,570,317) – an increase of 8% over the previous year. The migrant population is sex-balanced: however, huge differences emerge when considering the country of origin. Ukrainians, Moldavians, Poles, Peruvians, and Ecuadorians have higher percentages of women, while Indians, Tunisians, Egyptians, and Bangladeshis are mostly men. Moreover, migrants’ presence has a huge regional variety, showing higher rates in Northern counties, even though the sex distribution is quite balanced (ISMU data, 1995-2011).⁶

The number of foreigners living in Italy started rising in the 70s, and it especially increased in the late 80s (Triandafyllidou, 1999), when women began to assume the first-migrant role. According to Tognetti Bordogna, women’s migration in Italy includes three phases. During the first one, in the 70s, migrant women mostly came from Latin and Central America, the Philippines, Cape Verde, and Eritrea – mainly Catholic countries –, and middle-class families employed them as domestic workers. The second phase took place since the 80s: countries of origin differentiated and there was a decrease in job-segregation. Nevertheless, women’s migration remained an invisible process, for both scholars and the public sphere. In the 90s, migrant women became more visible, for different reasons, such as family reunification - that involved also non-working women - and sex trafficking (Tognetti Bordogna, 2004). Nowadays, as Italian families become increasingly dependent of migrant women’s work, they are mostly employed as caregivers in reproductive work. The increasing presence of migrant women – characterized by a high degree of internal differences in terms of migratory experience and legal status (Bonizzoni, 2011) – triggered an increasing interest from the media and, slowly, feminine

⁴ For an analysis of migration laws and residence permits see Einaudi, 2007; Bonizzoni 2013,

⁵ Official data available at <http://noi-italia.istat.it/>

⁶ Data available at <http://www.ismu.org/index.php?page=490#>.

migration began to be visible even in the press, modifying the predominant representation of migration as an essentially male process.

3. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY: MIGRANT WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE

This contribution focuses on the representation of migrant women in the media. In the last decades, the public sphere underwent a process of “mediatization” (Mazzoleni and Schultz, 1999): scholars consider contemporary societies to be “Democracies of the Public” (Manin, 1992; see also Rosanvallon, 2008).

Therefore, the analysis of discourse in the mass media is crucial in order to understand how migrant women are constructed as a political subject in Italy, and how their rights are open to political and/or xenophobic manipulation. A long and well-established tradition of studies explored the close interconnections between discourse and power (Foucault, 1975) from a number of perspectives, such as political and/or critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Van Dijk, 1997), policy frame analysis, (Yanow, 1996), and media frame analysis (Gamson, 1992). In this perspective, the analysis of the representation of migrant women in the media includes the analysis of the narratives and frames they are located within in the public sphere.

The relationships between migration and media have been widely studied. Many scholars have focused on racism, stereotypization and/or criminalisation of migrants, and Islamophobia (see, for instance, Said, 1997; Van Dijk, 1991). Nevertheless, significantly less attention has been paid to the specific representations of migrant women (Campani, 2001; Nash, 2006; Navarro, 2010). This has to do with the almost complete lack of media coverage (Van Dijk, 1991).

In order to explore the Italian media narratives about migrant women I analysed 634 articles from Italian newspapers, published between June 2005 and July 2012. I chose 2005 as a starting point because the referendum over the regulation of medically assisted procreation, which took place on 12/13 June, has triggered the resurgence of public interest in reproductive rights, which constitute the focus of this project. I selected the articles dealing with migrant women and reproduction, and I codified them per topic (abortion, fertility, maternity, sexuality, other). Then, I used a text-driven coding scheme in order to identify the ways in which migrant women are connected to the topics taken into consideration (see table I to IV), and to explore the extent of women ‘victimization’ within the Italian press, as well as the role attributed to religion (table V). Finally, I reconstructed migrant women ‘figures’ as they emerge in the Italian press.

I divided the press into four main categories: Non-partisan Mainstream Newspapers (*La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa*, *Il Sole 24 ore*, *Il Messaggero*, *l'Espresso*); Right-wing Newspapers (*Il Giornale*, *Libero*, *Il Secolo d'Italia*, *Il Foglio*, *La*

Padania); Left-wing Newspapers (*L'Unità*, *Liberazione*, *Il Manifesto*); and Catholic Newspapers (*Famiglia Cristiana*, *l'Avvenire*, *Osservatore Romano*). The Italian media sphere is inherently intertwined with politics: the national mainstream newspapers are connected to powerful economic groups, while political newspapers are financed by political parties or groups, addressing different political audiences. Specifically, *La Repubblica* and *L'Espresso* are connected to the De Benedetti group, a slightly centre-left group, also active in energy and healthcare; *La Stampa* is associated to the Agnelli group (which owns the powerful FIAT empire); RCSmediagroup owns *Il Corriere della Sera* (and *El Mundo*); *Il Messaggero* is owned by the Caltagirone group (centre-right oriented), while *Il Sole 24 Ore* is the voice of Confindustria (Italian employers' federation). *Famiglia Cristiana* is the most read Catholic weekly magazine, as well as one of the three most diffused weekly magazines in Italy; *l'Avvenire* is considered the daily newspaper of the Italian Bishops' Conference, while *l'Osservatore Romano* is close to the Vatican hierarchies. As for the openly political newspapers, *Il Giornale* is owned by the Berlusconi's group, *La Padania* is the Northern League newspaper, while *Liberio*, *Il Secolo d'Italia* and *Il Foglio* address the larger right-wing audience. *L'Unità* was the Communist Party newspaper, now it voices the Democratic Party; *Liberazione* is the voice of the Communist Refoundation party, while *Il Manifesto* mainly addresses left-wing audience and grass-root movements. I decided to sample newspapers focused on different audiences in order to highlight the possible differences in framing and narrating migrant women's issues.

Migration is a key-theme in the Italian public sphere. The attention towards migrants in the Italian press is hardly new. A careful reconstruction shows different phases in the migration discourse of the mainstream press (Sciortino and Colombo, 2004). The first phase (70s) describes two immigrant figures: the elite, rich foreigner and the foreign worker, destined to low skilled jobs and the focus of a slightly negative narrative about unfair labour market competition. The second phase took place in the 80s, and was related to the dramatic increase in the immigration flux. The discursive field changes: it is far less centred on the labour market and much more preoccupied with the impact of immigration. The "migration issue" undergoes a process of politicization (Balbo and Manconi, 1992; Maneri, 1998; Mansoubi, 1990). Finally, in the 1990s the interest in this issues diminishes, and the term *immigrant* is acknowledged as part of the common language - indicating a political problem. In media coverage a strict relation is built between immigrants and crime, while references to the labour market virtually disappear (Cotesta and De Angelis, 1999; Dal Lago, 1999, Maneri, 1998; Triandafyllidou, 1999). In the 2000s, the press begins to include references to Islam-related migration. Recent studies focus on racism in the media, including Islamophobia, and underline the wide

media coverage of crimes related to migrants. In general, scholars' analyses on media and migration in Italy focus on media racism, by analysing the press as well as television channels with both local and national audiences. In broad terms, one could say that Italian media sphere is characterized by a negative image of migrants.⁷ Moreover, migrants in Italy can be described as very absent from their own narratives, since they rarely have a voice (Sibhatu, 2004).

Very few studies specifically focus on migrant women in the Italian press (Campani, 2001; Censis, 2002). Campani, for instance, underlines their virtual absence compared to men. When they become visible, migrant women are mainly depicted as maids, as reassuring figures (especially in the 70s and 80s). In the late 80s and in the 90s, other figures emerge. First, the image of the migrant prostitute – presented with a high degree of emotiveness, submissive, completely dependent on men, and often labelled as a “slave”. This victimized figure has been widely important in criminalizing migrants – and the press completely ignores the cases of women who managed to regain control over their lives. Second, the Islamic woman, arriving through family reunification, gets presented as “the other”, submissive toward the Islamic men and completely embedded in the culture of her country of origin. In the next section, I present the results of a first exploration of the Italian media sphere concerning its representation of migrant women.

4. MIGRANT WOMEN IN THE ITALIAN PRESS

The research focuses on the media coverage of migrant women between 2005 and 2012. Table I shows the topics related to the images of migrant women, and focuses especially on reproductive rights.

As it can be seen, the articles in the sample mostly focus on fertility/abortion: migrant women are mentioned either for their fertility or for abortion rates. A large percentage is also related to sexuality: this category includes topics as prostitution, gender relationships, and related issues (forced marriages and ‘Female genital mutilation’). Finally 15% of articles focus on migrant women and maternity and, more broadly, on the relationship between migrant mothers and their children (in Italy and abroad). The last category (various and mix) collects articles that mention migrant women in relation to other topics,

⁷ A brief bibliography on media and migration in Italy includes studies on the racism in the national media sphere Balbo and Manconi, 1992; Belluati, Grossi and Viglongo, 1995; Binotto and Martino, 2005; Calvanese, 2011; Campani, 2001; Censis, 2002; Corte, 2002; Cospe, 2003 and 2008; Cotesta and De Angelis, 1999; Dal Lago, 1999; Etnequal, 2003; Guadagnucci, 2010; Lunaria, 2011; Mai, 2002; Maneri, 1998; Mansoubi, 1990; Marletti, 1991; Medici senza frontiere, 2012; Naletto, 2009; Osservatorio di Pavia, 2001; Riccio, 2001; Sciortino and Colombo, 2004; Sibhatu, 2004; Triandafyllidou, 1999; Villa, 2008. For analyses of the local media sphere see Bonerba and Mazzoni, 2013; Iris, 1991; Lippi and Tirota, 2013; Lodigiani, 1996; Macciò, 2012; Riccio, 1997. On photojournalism, see Gariglio, Pogliano, and Zanini, 2010. In the last years, the on line media monitoring also increased. See, for instance, <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/>; and <http://www.mmc2000.net/>.

such as their presence in the labour market. Three types of articles are mapped: interviews with experts (doctors, sociologists, volunteers working with migrants) or with politicians; crime news; life stories.

TABLE I - Migrant Women and the Italian Press - Topics Distribution (Percentages)

Topic	Non-partisan	Catholic	Left	Right	Total
Maternity	20	16	4	3	15
Sexuality	17	18	32	38	22
Fertility/Abortion	39	49	51	43	42
Various + mix	24	17	13	16	21
Total	100	100	100	100	100

In what follows, I will present how migrant women are described in relation to the listed topics and the predominant narratives that emerge. Naturally, I pay attention to the differences in the media representation according to their political orientation.

4.1. FERTILITY AND ABORTION

Most articles mentioning migrant women focus on fertility and abortion (42%). Specifically, the media underline the strict correlation between migration and abortion (45% of entries on fertility/abortion), and, to a lower extent, between migration and fertility (18%).

In all newspapers, migrants' abortion rate is connected to the difficulties that come with migration, especially the economic conditions of migrants (18%): job insecurity and hard work conditions, low incomes, and the absence of a family support affect the possibility of having a child.

Therefore, she interrupts her pregnancy. It's her second time. 'If I were at home, maybe I could have a child, there is my mother, my family, we help each other, there, but, here, how can I? I am alone, my brothers are two males, they do not know anything of children, I am not married. I can not just lose my job, how do I live without money?'. (Redazione, "Le immigrate e l'aborto. L'Italia finto paradiso", *La Repubblica*, 30.03.2007)

The predominant narrative reads migrant women as characterized by a low socio-economic status and, because of this reason, forced to interrupt pregnancies, to abandon or even murder their children.

A number of articles also highlight migrant women's emotional distress, in relation to abortion (8%): the experience of dislocation and loneliness in host countries are, in the words of some articles, overwhelming.

Thirdly, some voices in the media portray migrant women as 'victims of ignorance' (11%). Specifically, they allegedly ignore contraceptive practices. Thus, their high abortion rate is related to their failure to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

In the sample, 56 per cent do not use any kind of contraception for these reasons: 'The pill causes cancer' (Peru, in a relationship, without children). 'I thought that I used the pill so much that I have become sterile, so I stopped using it' (Peru, married, two children) 'My sister in law had the spiral, she got a bleeding. It is dangerous' (Ecuador, 25 years, married, one child). 'The condom hurts after childbirth' (Romania, 33 years, two children). 'I'm always with my husband and I don't betray him, so it is not necessary' (China, 23 years). 'In my country the pill is free, here it is expensive, even 12 euro, I do not have money' (Morocco, no children). 40 per cent do not know their fertile period, a high percentage is pregnant again within three months after delivery. 'For a week or two we meet every few months... why contraception?' (Romania, 28 year-old, in a casual relationship). 'If you do it once in a while nothing happens' (Peru, no children). (Redazione, "Le immigrate e l'aborto. L'Italia finto paradiso", *La Repubblica*, 30.03.2007)

The article above reports the outcomes of a project analyzing the reasons migrant women abort, and it clearly shows how the press characterizes migrant women: abortion is the ultimate contraception practice, connected to migrant women's alleged ignorance or cultural refusal of birth-control practices.

Moreover, it is said that migrant women often resort to illegal abortion, either because illegal immigrants are afraid of being denounced or because they don't know the legal terms of abortion. Thus, migrant women' agency and individuality disappear (as it is well underlined in the international literature on this subject: see Phillips, 2007). On the contrary, their behaviour is put in connection to their countries of origin.

'In fact, the choices of foreign women are strongly affected by cultural elements - says Graziella Sacchetti, gynaecologist of the Italian Society of Medicine of Migration - Among the Arabs, for example, male involvement in contraception is unthinkable, and therefore the condom is excluded. The Moroccans have less problems, while the Egyptians reject the pill.' [...] Women from Eastern Europe, especially from former Soviet Union, traditionally use the pill, or the spiral. For

Chinese women, also, contraception is not a taboo. However, they typically refer to the doctors of the big local communities, for example using a spiral made in China. (Ruggiero Corcella, “Aborto clandestino un dramma dell'immigrazione”, 24.02.2008)

The midwife is in charge of up to 20 patients. Many foreigners. "I am in charge of many Roma women - says Fusco - for them, the birth-control pill is unthinkable, they do not like rules.' The Roma girls call her 'my sister'. (Cristina Zagaria, “La trincea dei consultori ‘Ma non siamo abortifici’”, *La Repubblica*, 23 .11.2005)

These citations from non-partisan newspapers clearly show how the connection between migrant women and their countries of origin is used to build a cultural understanding of their behaviours. In other words, migrant women's reproductive behaviours are explained as determined by their cultural belonging, rather than as an individual choice. This is consistent with what occurs in other national contexts (cfr. Lonergan, 2012, for UK; see also Phillips, 2007). When speaking of migrant women and abortion practices, partisan and religious newspapers also refer to a cultural frame, – with some significant differences.

In our case, the vast majority of foreign women master the methods of contraception: they do not use them either because of a lack of responsibility, or because of an 'elementary' *forma mentis*, so to speak – for example, the belief that if you have just had a baby you will not get pregnant right away. (V.G., *Sempre più donne (straniere) nei CAV: “Da soli non possiamo aiutarle tutte”*, *Avvenire*, 17.04.2012)

This extract, from the Catholic newspaper *l'Avvenire*, reports the words of a doctor who volunteers in the Centri per la Vita (Centres for Life – Catholic organizations that try to prevent abortion). In a patronizing tone, he describes migrant women irresponsible and, in fact, ignorant about reproduction and pregnancy matters.

On the contrary, left-wing newspapers sometimes bring up the 'culturalization' issue, for the purpose of criticizing it.

The whole discourse on the 'Health of Migrants' and the protection of the human body is strictly connected to this issue. The possibility of an integration is directly proportional to the capacity of self-determination, in particular for the female gender. (Italia-Razzismo, “Aborto, i dati sono in crescita solo per le donne straniere”, *l'Unità*, 01.08.2009)

In this perspective, the recognition and the empowerment of migrant women’s agency regarding their reproductive choices are connected with the migration issue.

Also, the strict relation between fertility and migration is pointed out in a variety of articles (18%). According to the Italian press, migrant women show a higher birth rate either because of cultural reasons or because their migratory experience was successful: thus their fertility is specifically connected to a faith towards the future.

In commenting on migrant women’s fertility rates, right-wing newspapers flag the threat of invasion. The right-wing daily newspaper *Libero*, for example, frames the difference in birth rates by fomenting fears over the threat of a possible de-Italianization of Italy:

[...] we would have no chance of winning the devastating sperm war. [...] Our people must be free to choose their demographic rates. [...] Immigration is not a corrective to the declining Italian birth rate, but a real replacing process. (Gilberto Oneto, “Le balle sugli immigrati. Alzano la natalità? No, ci invadono”, *Libero*, 09.10.2011)

To sum up, in relation to fertility and abortion issues, migrant women’s representations underline their economic difficulties and their cultural embeddedness. Therefore, migrant women seem, first of all, to be categorized as belonging to a disadvantaged class: thus, they suffer from demanding job conditions and they cannot afford contraception. Second, they are portrayed as ignorant, either for cultural reasons or because of a lack of education. Finally, migrant women are depicted as interrupting pregnancy only because of their difficult situation; under different circumstances, they would have several children. Nevertheless, there are some differences in reporting that we need to take into account: the argument from ‘ignorance’, for example, is more present in right-wing and non-partisan newspapers, while Catholic and leftist newspaper pay more attention to the material life conditions of migrant women.

TABLE II - Representation of Migrant Women (Percentages and Press Sub-Spheres Distribution): Fertility and Abortion

	Non partisan	Catholic	Left	Right	Total
Fertility and abortion					
Abortion/Immigration	43	39	62	47	45
Economic reasons	19	20	27	15	19
Emotional distress	8	10	3	7	8
Ignorance	12	5	5	16	11
Fertility/Immigration	18	26	3	15	18

4.2. MATERNITY

Maternity and migrant women becomes a theme related to fertility: migrant women have the 'merit' of increasing the low Italian fertility rate (13% of entries on maternity).

Especially in religious newspapers (and, also, in non-partisan ones), this merit is connected to the supposedly different vision of maternity of migrant women (39%).

In the culture of her country, being a mother is the highest expression of being a woman. And her desire pushes her to risk anything to keep her child. With that child, the pride of being a woman, and an African woman, is reborn in her. [...] The life of the African woman is based on three pillars, as three are the firestones on which she cooks: God, the community, and the family. For African women, therefore, motherhood is something essential to femininity, in the end it is what characterizes their womanhood. (Suor Eugenia Bonetti, "Becky, da prostituta a mamma", *Famiglia Cristiana*, 09.05.2011)

This extract, that tells the story of a prostitute who changed her life through motherhood, shows the type of language related to maternity and migration: the migrant woman is framed as someone who has deep roots and connections with maternity, in an implicit contrast with the medicalized and rationalized Western way of life. Thus, motherhood seems to be culturally framed, in strict connection with the higher migrant fertility rates. This description of 'otherness' is consistent with the otherization that Yegenoglu narrates (1998): a reconstruction of Western women's identity mirrored by the construction of an 'other' identity.

Some articles tackle the issue of transnational maternity (16%). Migrant women are forced to leave their children in their country of origin, so they suffer from a 'mutilated' motherhood. Again, especially religious (and, to some extent, non-partisan) newspapers pay attention to this topic, underlining the difficulties of being a mother abroad, taking care of the children of their employers while their own live far away.

There are immigrants who do not see their children and their parents for years. Not only because the journey is too expensive, but because, being illegally present, they cannot afford to leave Italy for the fear of not being able to come back. To those who help us to take care of our families we often deny the right to their own family. The result is a permanent situation of uncertainty, which results in easy exploitation, but also in blackmail. (Chiara Saraceno, "Quei bisogni ignorati", *La Repubblica*, 07.07.2009)

Migration processes, when involving families, heavily affect the intimate relations (Bonizzoni, 2009). This extract highlights what in the literature is referred to as ‘international care chains’: rich countries families are increasingly dependent on migrant women as care-givers; migrant women, in turn, leave their dependent relatives in someone else’s charge (Bonizzoni, 2011: 316).

The Ukrainians have left their children at home, and so have the Romanians, the Moldovans and all the other women, especially those from Eastern Europe, who came to seek their fortune in Italy (there are 416,311 immigrant women who work in Italians’ homes): they know about their children by phone or by pictures. According to the last data from the Romanian Ministry of Family, there are 200.000 children with at least one parent abroad. And it is often the mother who leaves, because in the Ukrainian matriarchal family the woman is the one who bears the greatest responsibilities. [...] The other side of emigration is the destabilization of the family, which especially affects the youth and the elderly - the most vulnerable. (Giovanni Ruggiero, “Mamme e badanti: ‘Noi, così lontane dai nostri bambini””, *Avvenire*, 13.11.2010)

This extract from the Catholic *Avvenire* frames migrant women as victims – and heroines, who sacrifice themselves for the sake of their families. Nevertheless, their choices also carry the heavy weight of destabilizing the family and its traditional roles.

Finally, migrant women are portrayed as mothers of children born in Italy. On the one hand, newspapers articles address the issue of the nationality of those children born to foreign parents. In Italy, second-generation children lose their residence right on turning 18 – at that moment, they can apply for citizenship, but they can be expelled in the meanwhile. This paradoxical situation, of children born and raised in Italy becoming foreigners on reaching adult age makes the object of a fierce debate in the Italian political sphere.

On the other hand, more attention is paid to mother-children relationships when crime-events defined as ‘cultural clashes’ occur. Both partisan and non-partisan newspapers widely cover the stories of crimes related to clashes between first and second-generation migrants (cfr. *infra*).

Maternity is not a central issue in the Italian press concerning migrant women. Nevertheless, it helps to show different elements of culturalization. Again, some differences emerge in the press sub-spheres. Of course, right-wing newspapers do not affirm the merit of migrant women referring to their high fertility rate. The issue of a different (better) perception of motherhood is largely diffused in Catholic newspapers, but

almost absent in the leftist ones. The question of the nationality of second-generation migrants is a highly politicized issue, and is therefore dealt with mainly by partisan newspapers, as the percentages below show.

TABLE III - Representation of Migrant Women (Percentages and Press Sub-Spheres Distribution): Maternity

	Non-partisan	Catholic	Left	Right	Total
Maternity					
Maternity merit	14	11	20	0	13
Different maternity	25	39	0	12	26
Transnational maternity	14	29	0	11	16
Children citizenship	47	21	80	77	45
Total	100	100	100	100	100

4.3. SEXUALITY

Sexuality and sex relations are quite accounted for in my sample. A first sub-topic of migrant women's sexuality is related to the prostitution/sex-trafficking theme (11%). Migrant women were often mentioned when dealing with sex trafficking or positive experiences of emancipation from prostitution, especially in the 90s (Campani, 2001; Dal Lago, 1999; Sciortino and Colombo, 2004). Nevertheless, this topic seems to be less important in the media, and only Catholic newspapers pay some attention to it.

Secondly, there is a quite important focus on the 'cultural clash', concerning second-generation migrant women, which include their difficulties in simultaneously adhering to their family's traditions and culture and with the pressures of the Italian (Western) culture (40%).

The laceration of the migrant adolescents, divided between the tradition of the family of origin and the modernity, the daily relationships with the Italian peers, so different, so free. (Nunzia Vallini, "A noi giudici diceva: voglio essere bresciana' Mandato di cattura europeo per il cognato", *Corriere della Sera*, 18.08.2006)

Several newspapers report cases of crimes and murders, women killed or hurt by relatives, allegedly because of cultural or religious reasons. Articles frame these cases as 'cultural crimes', depicting migrant women as the victims of their tradition, which is often connected to Islam. The culture of the 'others' is behind these crimes and is implicitly described as traditionalist and primitive in comparison with Italian culture.

The danger of the next decade is likely to be the 'latent conflict', embodied by the girls who study and integrate but who live in traditionalist families. 'Many parents do not have a high level of education – says Fihan Elbataa, from the Brescia section of the Young Muslims of Italy – and then, faced with situations where they see a danger, they do not know how to react. They become severe and impose rules through aggressiveness. We try to encourage them to enter a dialogue, to leave a space of freedom'. (Gianni Santucci, "In Italia 2000 spose bambine ogni anno. E molte sono costrette a rimpatriare", *Corriere della Sera*, 20.01.2010)

Right-wing and mainstream newspapers pay particular attention to the 2nd generation's double identity, and describe the youth as being divided between opposite loyalties. Catholic newspapers are less attentive to this issue, preferring to focus on cultural differences *tout court*. In this perspective, as it has been mentioned earlier, mother-children relationships emerge as another issue.

Sister Claudia Biondi Caritas Ambrosiana has seen dozens of girls who go out dressed like daddy wants them to and then change clothes in the elevator, to match their peers'. 'There is always a greater attention and protection towards the daughters, especially by fathers and brothers, a protection bordering on possessiveness'. This often leads to a rupture. Do mothers mediate? 'Not always. In the case of a teenager runaway, for example, we had an encounter with a group of women who were divided'. Some linked to the origins, other allied to their daughters. (Alessandra Coppola, "Lo scontro di civiltà in casa e le donne in prima linea", *Corriere della Sera*, 05.10.2010)

The differences between the Italian culture and the tradition of 'the others' are assumed as a datum by most articles, especially by Catholic newspapers. Most articles list a series of supposedly homogeneous cultural or religious practices that state a difference between the "Italians" (more often the Westerns) and the "others": forced marriages, female circumcision, and restrictions to girls' liberties, for instance.

Female circumcision, for all African religions, becomes such an essential component of girls' life to make them forget the torture of having their genitals cut. (Carla Massi, "Infibulazione, carcere fino a 12 anni", *Il Messaggero*, 07.07.2005)

Specifically, what emerges is that migrant women's culture is always framed as traditionalist and detrimental for women. The role of religion is always underlined as

negative for migrant women, the specific target being Islam. Right-wing newspapers, especially, seem to consider only the migrants who arrive from Muslim countries, and to focus on Muslim patriarchy.

There is a parallel city in our cities, an underground city that lives in harassment and abuse. But also in solitude and silence. Surrounded by family members, relatives, neighbours who observe, judge and monitor, for Muslim women who do not want to lower their heads and try to rebel, there are not many ways out. (Daniela Santanché, "Storie di donne violate in nome della sharia", *Libero*, 14.03.2008)

Even religious newspapers underline the differences between the Italian culture, associated to Christianity, and Islam, though in a more subtle way.

The centrality of cultural heritage in foreigners' and their children's lives (especially for those coming from Arabic countries) is confirmed, and there are changes and contradictions generated by the encounter with the new context. In particular, Egyptians and Pakistanis focus on maintaining the role of wives or daughters, who are in charge of preserving and passing on traditional values. There are values which are considered non-negotiable, near to a grey area where there is a greater openness to change. (Giorgio Paolucci, Interview with Giovanna Rossi, Sociologist of Migration, "La doppia attrattiva delle seconde generazioni", *Avvenire*, 17.01.2010)

In this perspective, consistent with many scholars' observations, migrant women are culturally embedded. Moreover, they embody their culture because they are mothers: they are responsible for transmitting a sense of identity to their children (Lonergan, 2012).

There are some differences, though, especially considering left-wing newspapers, where the distinction between Islam and patriarchy is usually underlined.

But patriarchy is not an inevitable timeless, a-historical event: it is a socio-symbolic structure that engages other social and cultural structures (including Islam) and whose fates depend on the relationships and conflicts between women, between women and men, and between men. In her investigation of the Pakistani women in Val Trompia, last Thursday, Manuela Cartosio put a new light on how the conditions of the young Pakistani immigrants, even in the extreme cases, such as Hina's, is plagued by poor relationships between mothers and daughters, and by a lack of socialization and communication between women. And certainly this is the first node to address in order to change the situation. But the second step must be the

opening of a struggle by men against other men’s violent behaviours, within the immigrant communities as well as within the Italian society, and transversely between the ones and the others. (Ida Dominijanni, *Transversal Patriarchies* (it is the title of the newspaper article, *Il Manifesto*, 22.08.2006).

The sexuality of migrant women also emerges as a radical otherness: migrant women appear to be sexualized (see Yegenoglu, 1998). Sexually active migrant women are described as either victims of sex trafficking or being torn between their loyalty to family and tradition, on the one side, and the freedom of modernity, on the other side.

TABLE IV - Representation of Migrant Women (Percentages and Press Sub-Spheres Distribution): Sexuality

	Non-partisan	Catholic	Left	Right	Total
Sexuality					
Prostitution/sex trade	12	30	12	4	11
2nd generation	46	13	38	45	40
Cultural differences	42	57	50	51	49
Total	100	100	100	100	100

4.4. VICTIMS AND ISLAM

Newspapers analysis shows, on the whole, a wide victimizing frame. Concerning reproductive rights, migrant women seem to be either driven by culture or at men’s mercy.

Specifically, a connection between culture, tradition, and religion, especially Islam, emerges. Left-wing newspapers, for instance, wonder about the invisibility of migrant women for left-wing activists, especially considering women coming from Muslim countries. Again, the implicit assumption is the victimization of (Muslim) migrant women. Thus, left wing newspapers articles underline the supposed tension between women rights (feminism) and minority (multiculturalism) – cfr. *infra*. Nevertheless there is no criticism towards Islam as the whole (0%). On the contrary, an effort to differentiate religion from patriarchy is obvious (19%) – as is the wide denunciation of migrant women’s precarious situation (59%). While scholars underline that migrants’ life conditions are less of a concern for the Italian press (Sciortino and Colombo, 2004), they prove to be key-themes when reporting about migrant women. Religious newspapers also pay a great deal of attention to migrant women as victims. Even though there is virtually no complain against Islam (3%), a subtle suggestion of the necessity of teaching and guiding the ‘others’ unfolds:

A girl who lives and studies here acquires the self-esteem necessary to oppose, for example, arranged marriages in, for example, India... In some societies, male domination is still undisputed [...] But I remember that even in Italy, in order to stop the honour killing, we had to convince, and compel, otherwise the moral conscience does not develop. (Lucia Bellaspiga, “Cardia: niente alibi “culturali”, sentenze severe”, *Avvenire*, 29.05. 2012)

Migrant women emerge, again, as the vulnerable subjects, who have to be trained according to modern values by the supposedly emancipated Italians. In this perspective, there is a differentiation between ‘Western women’, driven by self-esteem, autonomy, and moral values, and ‘non-Western women’, whose behaviours are culturally driven (Phillips, 2007; see also Yegenoglu, 1998).

IT’S CALLED Chrysalis Project, a title that says it all: to get out from the ‘cocoon’ the many immigrant women who come to Italy for family reunification, dependent on husbands and without their economic autonomy, and therefore more likely than the others (those, that is, who come here to work), to take refuge in the house and to suffer alone from the problems affecting all the immigrants. (Maria Cristina Carratù, “Crisalide, contro la solitudine delle immigrate”, *La Repubblica*, 26.05.2010)

This extract, again, clearly shows the image of migrant women as dependent on men and culture. Some articles from both leftist (22%) and non-partisan newspapers (27%) focus on positive examples of migrant women’s stories of emancipation and empowerment, especially in relation to women’s roles in the job market and in representative bodies (such as workers’ unions). In other words, successful stories are related to a westernization of migrant women.⁸ Nevertheless, in a number of stories, women’s strength is attributed to a supposedly fixed character of femininity, as in this extract below:

Both Italians and ‘new Italians’ must break into the public sphere, and become the authoritative manufacturers of our civil society. We have one more resource to do this, that is the alphabet of feelings. [...] And it is in everyday life that women build the mixing of cultures and civilizations. Women are the leaders of a chain of coexistence – just think about the caregivers, the teachers, the child carer – and have the ability to create moments of celebration in their neighbourhoods and in

⁸ A strategy also apparent in other countries’ media, see, for instance, Navarro’s study on the media representation of Islamic women in Spain (Navarro, 2010).

their communities, through the many women's associations. (Livia Turco, "8 marzo: Italiane e straniere un fiore per i diritti", *l'Unità*, 09.03.2012).

Migrant women, thus, have a heavy weight to carry: they are women, sharing an ontological feminine character with other women; they are mothers, and they embody the culture of their country of origin, mysterious and radically 'other'; they live in Western countries, where they can learn about autonomy and emancipation. Thus, they are often portrayed as the possible mediators between supposedly radically different cultures.

It has often been said that immigrant women are a key element of growth, development and integration [...] And the immigrant women who carry with them the richness of their cultures of origin, lovers of life and motherhood, offer us this gift. (Suor Eugenia Bonetti, "La ricchezza delle donne immigrate", *Famiglia Cristiana*, 31.10.2011)

In particular, it is the daughters who can apply for this bridging role, as the following extract suggests:

From the interviews a dual identity comes out: Italians in all respects, but also proudly connected to their roots, the culture of the country of origin, their parents and their religiosity. A pride reinforced by the Arab Spring. (Jolanda Bufalini, "Generazione due: orgoglio musulmano e voglia di votare", *l'Unità*, 30.09.2011)

Right-wing newspapers focus on migrant women especially in order to stand against migration. First, migrant women in right-wing newspapers seem to originate only from Arab and Muslim majority countries: there is no room for other women. Second, there is a strict correlation between religion (Islam) and the image of migrant women as victims. In this perspective, the protection of migrant women's rights becomes an argument against migration and Islam.

[...] we are striving for a real integration in our country, that will never exist as long as you do not give up on these incivilities; until you put it into your head that women are citizens, and as such they have the same rights and the same dignity as men. (Antonio Mazzocchi – PDL elected and president of Cristiano Riformisti, "Non c'è solo l'infamia del burqa, in Italia si pratica l'infibulazione", *Liberò*, 10.10.2009).

For this reason, the extracts show a high degree of culturalization and a homogenizing attitude towards the culture (and religion) of the others.

In the Muslim culture a woman must obey her husband or father, if he decides that she must wear the veil, according to the Shariah, the wife or daughter cannot resist. The Muslim woman is not allowed to have male friends. The woman cannot contradict her husband and father and cannot leave the home, nor can she work or study without his permission. She is forbidden to have sexual relations outside marriage and to frequent non-Muslim men. These precepts are so deeply ingrained in the Islamic culture that even the converted adapt to these rules. (Patrizia Marin, “Dobbiamo difendere le donne musulmane dalla loro cultura”, *Liberò*, 08.09.2006)

This extract is titled, meaningfully, “We have to defend migrant women from their own culture”. It suggests that Islam is characterized by a cultural homogeneity, and that Italy must help Muslim women even when they do not want to – because they are portrayed as being victims of their own culture.

The other aspect that must be strongly emphasized is that, following this ideology of multiculturalism, women and the most vulnerable subjects are likely to remain victims of male domination, and of the strongest. (Souad Sbai, “Voglio tolleranza zero”, *Liberò*, 17.04.2008)

Souad Sbai is the president of the Italian Association of women from Morocco. For this reason, her declarations are reported as ‘authority arguments’ on Islam by right-wing newspapers. Multiculturalism is highly criticized as “not good for women”: in other words, the only reference is to the possible perverse effects of multicultural policies on women (the argument of vulnerable minorities within minorities – see Phillips, 2007; Ponzanesi, 2007).

Multiculturalism has brought to the fore forms of family organization different from those of our tradition, and the canons of cultural relativism prevent us from clearly stating that they, from the point of view of individual freedom, are worse. (Gaetano Quagliariello, “Quando i diritti sono incivili”, *Il Giornale*, 30.01.2007)

As the following extract shows, critics of multiculturalism resist the very idea of the equal treatment of minorities and different cultures.

Lesbian or infibulated. Congratulations, women! The winning models in the autumn-winter trends of the leftist Italy – that has the ass-face of Romano Prodi and the Islamic-Zapaterist head of the post-communism – oscillate between the two opposite extremes. At the expense of the common woman, the normal female, the girlfriend, the wife, the mother, home-and-work. And this is the last glorious stage of women's emancipation. (Marcello Veneziani, “Lesbica o col burqa, così oggi si dice donna”, *Liberò*, 19.11.2006).

Right MP Santanchè addresses the connection between feminism and multiculturalism in order to compete on the traditionally leftist field of women rights and to present the political right as the new feminism.

I think the feminist issue is crucial to the process of integration. It is impossible to think of living together with the Muslim in our Country without reaffirming women's dignity. We cannot let them feel abandoned in Italy too. That's why I wrote my law proposal to remove the veil. And I must say that there has been only a deafening silence around me. Where are the feminists? And where were they, when Hina was buried, the Muslim girl killed by her father because she had rebelled against the Islamic culture? (Daniela Schiazzano, “Santanchè: l'integrazione deve partire dalla questione femminile”, *Il Messaggero*, 22.03.2007)

In this extract, MP Santanchè refers to the ‘foulard issue’ – which had a wide echo in Italian press, even though almost no debate about the veil took place in Italy.

To sum up, migrant women are portrayed as “the others”. They are victims, either of their culture and religion or of the pre-modern traditions of patriarchy that characterize their countries of origin. The degree of the patronizing attitude towards migrant women is slightly different: their empowerment is referred to in different ways, within the press sub-spheres. Leftist newspapers focus on migrant women's individual agency and education, as well as on their role within the job market; right-wing newspapers, on the other hand, affirm that they have to be aided to emancipate themselves, even against their will. Thus, positive stories are the tales of migrant (and especially second generation) women who fight their families and challenge their traditions. Religious newspapers tell stories of migrant women's empowerment that focus on women's role within families instead, underlining their efforts to care for family ties even under difficult circumstances.

TABLE V - Representation of Migrant Women (Percentages and Press Sub-Spheres Distribution): Victimization

	Non partisan	Catholic	Left	Right	Total
Victims					
Islam vs Catholicism	6	3	0	5	5
Islam and patriarchy	16	23	19	44	27
Victimization	51	67	59	48	52
Women strenghts	27	7	22	3	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100

5. PORTRAITS OF LADIES: THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE MIGRANT WOMEN IN THE ITALIAN PRESS

This contribution analysed the representation of migrant women in the Italian press, with a special focus on reproductive rights.

First, it is worth noticing that, consistently with the literature on media and migrants, migrant women are rarely a topic of debate *per se* (see Campani, 2001; Navarro, 2010). They become an object (and rarely a subject) of discourse. Second, five figures of migrant women emerge. The first three figures have been present in the Italian media sphere since the 80s and the 90s (see Campani, 2001): the maid, a reassuring image of migrant women working in Italian homes; the prostitute, dependent and subordinate; and the Muslim woman, dependent and subordinate as well, and embedded in her culture. Also, the figure of the emancipated (and westernized) migrant woman comes to the fore. Finally, the migrant mother, mainly ignorant and poor, subordinate either to her life circumstances, her family, or her culture, plays a prominent role. On the whole, migrant women are widely represented as being victims of their own cultures and traditions. Within a patronizing frame, migrant women are mainly described as ignorant, poorly educated, culturally driven and subjected to patriarchy – this is particularly the case of women coming from Arab or Muslim-majority countries. Even when reporting “positive” examples of migrant women’s empowerment, there is an implicit contrast with their initial disadvantages.

Second, the representation of migrant women has two main characters: it expresses a radical ‘otherness’ and a process of ‘culturalization’.

Migrant women represent a radical otherness, internally homogeneous. This otherness constructs the Western sameness in a dialectical perspective, since the practice of identity construction ‘constitutes not only the objects but also the subjects’ (Yegenoglu, 1998: 22). At the same time, an essentialized femininity is described as being a common character beyond women’s differences.

Moreover, migrant women's otherness is charged with a cultural significance. An exaggeration of cultures' internal homogeneity, and a diffuse use of culture as an all-encompassing explanation of migrant women's behaviours is apparent. Migrant women seem to be described, to a large extent, as incapacitated by their cultures and, as a consequence, as lacking in autonomy. Forced marriages, female circumcision, and veiling are all included in the category of cultural – coercive – choices. Thus, cultural differences appear to be loaded with moral significance.

By focusing on press sub-spheres some differences emerge, though. While the equation migrant women – victim is widespread, its understandings and specifications are more nuanced. The right-wing press promotes the defence of migrant women while targeting their cultures and religions. Thus, migrant women's emancipation and fair treatment imply the rejection of their culture. Migrant women issues, thus, constitute a political lever against migration, and an argument against multiculturalism. The leftist press see the defence and the support of migrant women rights as requirements of multiculturalism and feminism. Therefore, even though migrant women are generally treated as victims, their emancipation deals with their conditions as 'migrants' and 'women'. More than Islam, it is the patriarchal culture that has to be fought, together with social and political discrimination against migrants. Finally, the Catholic press shows a charitable attitude towards migrant women and their difficulties. If characterizing a culture is itself a political act, the analysis of the Italian press also shows the political effects of the culturalization of migrant women.

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