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Francesco Pompeo

«We don't do politics». Rhetorics of Identity and Immigrant Representation in Rome City Council

This essay, developing an anthropology of policy perspective (Shore, Wright 1997; Shore, Wright, Però 2011), sets out to observe and analyse a local political process, the creation and establishment of the figure of adjunct councillors elected by non-EU residents to Rome's city council, which represents an emblematic and contradictory case study about migrants' political participation in Italy. Created in 2004, after a long debate, the adjunct councillors was elected the same year for the first time, with low levels of participation; re-elected in 2006 and since then still in office today, formally prolonged (the Council mandate is 5 years), was presented by the municipal administration as a major political innovation. At that time, in the modernizing scenario of the «Modello Roma», this process was intended to be a progressive experiment of empowering migrants' participation in local politics and was implemented in open opposition to the choices of Silvio Berlusconi's national government which were characterized by the tightening-up of immigration control policies through juridical and administrative restrictions introduced with the Bossi-Fini Law¹. The purpose of this mini-reform, effected through a modification of the municipal statute, was to obtain an initial acknowledgement of basic rights for the significant proportion of immigrants – more than 40 per cent of about 300,000 peoples – who had already been living permanently in Rome for more than ten years.

The analysis adopts an anthropological approach to governance (Però 2007), understood as a close scrutiny of the social management models inspired by new political schemes introduced by the European Union that completely redefine the role of the state in order to promote the participation of civil society in drawing up new forms of government so as to lighten the load on public institutions, moving to a different model of «shared administration». In Italy this process has been theorized in terms of a positive change of outlook that redefines the relationship with local neighborhoods and the stakeholders of «civic society» (Bagnasco 1993; Bonomi, De Rita 1998; Magnaghi 2000): a new model of participation inspired by municipal-

ism. This has resulted in a tendency that we can define in terms of a «polyarchy», or a structuring of powers and delegations in local contexts and at national level; through these the state exercises the unprecedented role of third stakeholder, controller and arbiter of relatively autonomous social processes which are the expression of a range of local scenarios. This polyarchic structure is the combination of the subsidiarity principle that derives from the Catholic church's social doctrine – stemming from the concept of making use of the contribution of intermediate bodies, starting with the family, to give direct support to social life in the public sphere – mixed with a politically-slanted drive towards the adoption of «elements of federalism» (Pompeo 2007, 2009)².

1. *Ethnographical queries, epistemological choices*

The research interrogates from an ethnographic view the space between public decision-making and socio-cultural transformation; from ideologies to rhetoric, and finally to the implementation and retroaction of processes. Assuming with Lisa Malkki that ethnographic research is «a critical theoretical practice, a quotidian ethical practice», and a practice of improvisation, which requires «an heightened sense of time and process» (Cerwonka, Malkki 2007: 163-4), the choice of this approach poses some epistemological and methodological queries. The first question indeed is about time, temporality and how framing this process: the analysis began with the classical synchronous method, focusing on the interaction between the public discourse, the institutional rhetoric and the practice of an emerging and contradictory experience.

Despite a large and old debate, coming from the Sixties (for example Vogt 1960), about the prevailing interest in dynamics as characterizing the anthropological examination of political phenomena, according to a recent contribution of Debra Spitulnink Vidali adopting an ethnography of process reveals some peculiar gaps, starting from the observation that: «While there is an extensive set of

terms for political positionalities or states, the language of/for process seems rather anemic» (2013: 5). Such general difficulties to define a specific conceptual scheme, was increased in this research for the multiplicity of versions and interpretations of this political experiment, proceeding with a series of actions and changes, making hard to identify the real achievement of the project.

In this sense this ethnography followed a multi-dimensional and multi-temporal approach, gathering a various typology of sources (declarations, official documents, newspapers), concentrating on intensive participant observation conducted mostly in the two electoral campaigns for the adjunct foreign councillor (2004, 2006) and continued over a time-span of five years on a series of meetings with the various protagonists (winners and losers), collecting discussions and repeating interviews after a lapse of time. This practice of continuous observation, propose others fundamental questions: it originates both from the peculiar characteristics of the process as my positioning in the field, in a large bourdieusian sense; the research arose from a wider study over several years of immigration policies in the metropolitan area of Rome, carried out by me as co-ordinator of the «M.G. Favara Osservatorio», a study group on «ethnic and racial studies» at the Roma Tre University. In conducting this investigation I worked using the network of relationships – at personal and institutional level – built up over time, thanks to some projects of research-intervention, research-action and migrant's formation, funded by local administrations and carried out by the 'Osservatorio'. So I was concerned as someone engaged against discrimination and perceived as an actor working for the migrant's integration in the local society; at the same time my academic affiliation could provide some guarantees and a certain independence in relation to local politicians and their rhetoric. This double identification had made possible a degree of participation respecting a scientific autonomy, giving to me a particular status between witness and consultant to mediate with different actors. In this direction, if «ethnographic knowledge has always been marked by a tension between epistemologies of estrangement and of intimacy» (Keane 2003: 223), managing the articulation of these two different dimensions remains essential to anthropological comprehension, as an indispensable condition to «understand by experience». Only maintaining this problematic density becomes possible to approach ethnographically a third level of questioning concerning this political process, about controversial notions as agency and political subjectivity. Quite complex topic (Frank 2006), agency is now the point of reference of a

plurality of intellectual traditions; defined by Laura Ahearn as «the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act» (2001: 112), it implies a complete overturning of the traditional perspective of social and cultural analysis, focalizing the active contribution of individuals and collectivities in oppositional and transformative doing. In the same direction, subjectivity in a reference book was presented by Sherry Ortner (2006) referring directly to Clifford Geertz as complex structures of thought, feeling and reflection that makes the individual something more than a positional social unit. In order to overcome this definition, Debra Spitulnik Vidali describes a «cultural-specific concepts of subjectivity, understood as the subject positions, stances, attitudes, values, and ideal behaviours that created or promoted by cultures, institutions, and other ideological systems» (2013: 5).

Here, the question becomes how to conduct one ethnography of a local political process, which is namely proposed rhetorically as an affirmative action «in the name of migrants», or a specific recognition of the supposed migrant's agency, in terms of classical political participation. Our investigation starts from a differential and pluralistic interpretations of agency and subjectivity, as negotiated between different actors: first of all the migrants, than the local institutions and the Italian political parties. The experience of the contradictory character of this process obliges us to de-naturalize the language, analysing the use of certain keywords in a dynamic relation to their semantic networks and communicative practices.

In examining the process whereby the figure of adjunct councillor for foreigners was created, we find that this new political device was devised through a major mobilization of symbolic and material resources by organizations and individuals, foreigners and Italians, connected with the immigrant population in many different ways. The basic idea was the emergence of a new leadership which was to directly reflect and express the reality of migrants in the city. As transpired in the course of the research, this happened by means of a hybrid autonomous political language inspired by three elements: a vision of globalization and human rights; political experiences developed in migrants' countries of origin; the migrant leaders' adoption of some local styles and negotiation practices which derived from their close contacts with important figures in Rome politics. From this perspective, the analysis falls within the ambit of studies of immigrant leaders, which have received little ethnographic attention in Italy with the exception of a few important works (Mantovan 2007; Riccio 2008; Schmidt 2000). By contrast, important steps have

been taken elsewhere in Europe with the work of Pnina Werbner (Werbner, Anwar 1991; Werbner, Modood 1997a; Werbner and Modood 1997b; Werbner 2002) and in the general reflections of Gerd Baumann (1999) and Rinus Penninx (2009). The analysis of these political initiatives has served to problematize multiculturalism as an ideological and universal scenario of practices and to deconstruct its basic ambiguity. In the politics unfolding within local electoral struggles based on immigrant status, we gain an insight into a complicated game of more or less strategic essentialisms and logics of social mobility, and therefore, in the final instance, an insight into the dynamics redefining the fields of power of identity politics (Clifford 2000; Goldberg 1994; Pompo 2007; Wiewiorka 1998; Watson 2000).

2. *Foreigners in the «Rome Model»*

In order to trace the starting point in the process of the creation of adjunct councillors for foreigners, we need to focus on the period in Rome's recent history which in local rhetoric became defined as the «Rome Model» (*Modello Roma*) and that embodied a specific vision of the city that lasted more than a decade, ending in 2008. This concept was inaugurated by mayor Francesco Rutelli at the start of the millennium, but was epitomized and taken forward by his successor, Walter Veltroni. Its essential features can be summarized as a plan to resolve historical structural contradictions and more recent problems pertaining to Rome as a whole by means of a vigorous «modernizing» drive³. This was to be achieved through a synthesis of at least three elements: continuous growth in the property market; a drive towards change that was to generate the polycentric expansion of the city, freeing up energies and at the same time contributing to the relaunch of intangible capital with large-scale public works projects dedicated to cultural events. All this was aimed at achieving liberation from the «Roman provincialism» of the past and from the usual centre-periphery model. But the tangible consequence was a further social weakening of the extended metropolitan area, an increase in instances of expulsion out of the city's boundaries and the creation of new phantom conglomerations: over-crowded settlements modelled on the «atolls» of large shopping centres that have arisen like a series of leopard's spots dotted about the outer suburbs of Rome. Along with the creation of these urban fragments hooked up to inadequate infrastructures, there was massive investment in «staging the city,» designing spaces and signs that

were supposed to bring about a change in Rome's generally conservative image (Pompo 2012a). In actual fact this is how the preconditions for the neo-liberal reconversion of Rome's urban policies were created (Herzfeld 2009), with the consequent crisis and reversal of the traditional support for the left in the outer suburbs (Ilardi, Scandurra 2009).

Within this plan for a comprehensive redefinition of the Rome scenario a decision was taken to create a specific urban policy concerning immigrants: a policy that would supersede the former approach based on an anachronistic view of immigrants as an emergency, managed through the omnipresent «Special Office for Immigration» whose remit mainly concerned the initial reception of ever-growing numbers of new arrivals, and extend its responsibilities to a wider spectrum of issues interpreted in terms of growth and recognition of socio-cultural pluralism. This led to Franca Eckert Coen – a leading representative of Rome's Jewish community and already an active member of Veltroni's party list – being nominated as adviser to the mayor with the responsibility of applying «Multiethnic Policies,» a title to which, after some debate, was added the more continental term «Intercultural». From May 2001 she took on the ambitious task of drawing up a «Project of Multiethnic Governance», the features of which can be summarized as a policy of dialogue based on the creation of consultative bodies through agreements signed between the city council and various groups and associations. Over the years, a number of such bodies came into being: the «Council for Religions in the City of Rome,» the «Council for Freedom of Thought and Secularity of Institutions», the «Council for Women in Politics» and finally the «Women Citizens of the World in Politics».

Within the more general plan of bringing immigration into the heart of Rome's modernization, this was interpreted as an issue of pluralism of choice, orientation, origin, and a sense of belonging: that is to say, immigration was addressed in essentially «culturalist» terms, with little attention to migrants' often difficult social conditions. This interpretation aimed to link the phenomenon of migration to the polysemic field of the multicultural politics, merging together the different claims made by historical minorities, «founders» of immigrant communities, Italian-born second generation migrants, new arrivals, and those who form a «community of choice», for example by virtue of their sexual orientation.

3. *What Pact for What Type of Integration?*

Public rhetoric aside, it is clear that «foreigners»

were included in a separate category from the beginning: their different origin and social condition constituted an element of public de-legitimization to be redeemed. In June 2002, city council Resolution n. 66 («Rome in the Future: A Pact for Integration. Indications and Opportunities for Sustainable Multi-Ethnicity»), in fixing horizons and limits to a policy «for immigrants», proposed in the first place a contractual relationship: the foreigner would subscribe to a one-way commitment in which he or she would be required, as always, to atone for the negative stigma of being a migrant by showing a high degree of correctness⁴; a hyper-correctness which appeared particularly implausible given the more general problems of legality that are endemic in the city. In the second place the resolution made some proposals that were highly dubious (such as referring repeatedly to the slogan of «integration») if not openly misleading, with its reference to the concept of “sustainability”: this paradoxically confirmed the implicit assumption that multi-ethnicity is of itself potentially unsustainable. In this way the many contradictions of discourse and practice would allow the responsibilities to be shifted on to the immigrants themselves if “problems” were ever to arise: the institutions would never be to blame.

There is a connection between this way of thinking and two other catchwords favoured by Rome’s administration, the demand that migrants “participate” often in a mainly symbolic sense, and be “represented”. The policy of multi-ethnicity claimed that its precondition was a comprehensive change in relationships with immigrants, going beyond the model of subordinate inclusion in order to generate a new and more mature form of dialogue with the “new citizens”, that is “listening to the direct voice of the interested parties”⁵. This aim to promote immigrants’ agency and bring it to the fore evolved into the adoption of a representative model that was based on the empowerment of immigrant “communities” as counterpart in the dialogue with the institutions. All the successive passages in the policy document referred to nationality-based forms of identification that were often mechanically translated into ethnic categories, modelled on the American experience. These categories were then reformulated into candidacies for representatives based on the continent (!) of origin. These representatives were portrayed as indispensable in the experiment of moving towards a more active role for immigrants. The group that worked with the mayor’s advisor on this policy intended this «new relational model» to put Rome in true competition with the other big European capitals in terms of minorities’ participation in the city’s public life. On the ground, though, the direct consequences were

that the mechanisms for producing leadership were based on an approach that can be considered both imitative and ethnicist.

4. *The Long Road Towards Semi-Representation*

Despite these contradictions, the creation of representatives for Rome’s migrants was a progressive battle within the political context of the time, in which the Berlusconi government was promoting a dominant discourse based on the criminalization of immigrants and the consequent denial of their basic rights. The city administration decided to play a card that had strong symbolic value and restore elementary political rights, assuming ownership of the struggle – if only in a toned-down version – for granting foreign residents the right to vote: a right already envisaged by European treaties but which had not been applied in Italy. The Italian Parliament never ratified Chapter C of the Strasbourg Convention of 5 February 1992 on the participation of foreigners in public life at the local level. However, as a consequence of the same Convention, since 1996 resident foreigners hailing from EU countries had the right to vote in Italian local elections, an opportunity that applies today for example to Romanians. These apparently contradictory limitations clearly define the boundary of political rights in establishing a truly anachronistic exclusion, given that 40 percent of foreigners in Rome have lived there for more than ten years.

In the local institutions the debate had already started in 1995 under the Rutelli administration and rumbled on for a good seven years, largely because Rome’s centre-left were, it was rumoured, frightened «of making a gift to their political enemies by conceding special rights to foreigners that might be interpreted as privileges»⁶. In 2001 and still more in 2002, the process quickened pace with the creation of an *ad hoc* working group of 14 foreigners, who collaborated with the office of the mayor’s representative. On 14 October 2003 Resolutions n. 190 and 191 were approved by the council, with a certain solemnity. They established the figure of adjunct councillor for foreigners and of the «City advisory board for the representation of the foreign community in Rome», which functioned as a support body. This decision was then strongly opposed by the centre-right, especially *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN), which in giving the grounds for their rejection of the measure joined forces with councillor Sabbatani Schiuma to claim that «Italians, by virtue of their history of emigration to all parts of the world, have anti-racism and respect for the supporters of immigration in their DNA [...]. While

the left believes in the globalization of cultures, we want a different sort of multi-racial society in which a confrontation of identities is fine if I am I and you are you»⁷. The Resolution accordingly envisaged the creation of four adjunct councilors on the city council, following a discussion on the criteria for representativeness. They were eventually chosen on the basis of the continent of origin: one for Europe, one for Africa, one for the Americas, one for Asia and Oceania, with one more criterion – a «pink quota», as they called it – that one of the four should be a woman. Added to these would be an adjunct councillor for each of Rome's 20 boroughs.

The analysis of this role, and of how it was established by the Resolutions, immediately revealed its strong constituent limitations: the foreign adjunct councillor participates in the sessions of the city council and the advisory commissioners in association with the councillors with full rights; s/he can propose agenda items and speak on the merits of all the matters discussed in council and in committees; but s/he cannot be nominated for a committee and does not have the right to vote, benefiting nevertheless from the flat-rate financial allowance for each session of the city council. After a lengthy procedure, therefore, what was achieved was a paradoxical semi-representation.

5. *The Additional Electoral Procedures*

The creation of the electoral procedures proved not to be of the simplest; the mechanism envisaged voter registration to be carried out at the city council and borough offices with very restricted opening hours and numerous formalities. The task of mobilizing immigrants and making them aware of the new arrangements was channelled through groups of representatives who had taken part in the preparatory work, the circle of people who had worked with the mayor's advisor and networks more closely linked to their compatriots. As for the group of 14 foreign founder members, most of them women, a very interesting debate on the presentation of their candidature ensued; in the face of the prospect of linking it to the presentation of a genuine program during a public event of major political significance, a strongly «apolitical line» prevailed «as a guarantee of collaboration with all parties», supported by R.S. – almost the doyenne of the group – with a peremptory statement: «We don't do politics, we represent the immigrants»⁸.

Apart from the self-promotion of individuals with leaflets, posters, and placards scattered all over the city, the main resources used in the electoral campaign were the networks of fellow nation-

als; this produced marked differences in the support candidates received based on ethnic origins, with very strong tensions between candidates and national groups who were competing for the same post based on continent of origin. As R. confirmed, «if at first there wasn't this thing about fellow nationals, the groups and the clashes came into being when it was time to register to vote and then when the election took place»⁹.

Despite the mobilization, the first «additional» elections for the new adjunct foreign councillors on 28 March 2004 saw only 30,000 registrations in the list to vote, with final participation by 16,000 voters. Mariella Gramaglia, deputy mayor, had no qualms about making this ethnocentric comment: «It's a high turnout, if you consider that many of them come from countries where they have never voted before»¹⁰. In light of this relative success, it is interesting to analyse the composition of the groups of candidates: out of a total of 51 candidates for the municipal council, 22 were Asians, 14 Africans, 8 Europeans and 8 Americans. In the end the following were elected: Ionut Gabriel Rusu from Romania, Santos Taboada Zapata from Peru, Aziz Darif from Morocco, and Irma Tobias Perez from the Philippines. This outcome revealed the model's first contradictions immediately, especially the contrived management of representation and under-representation. The problem manifested itself in connection with the results of the Asian candidates thus: the highest number of votes by a long chalk went to Romulo S. Salvador, who with 2,539 votes or 14 per cent of total votes was the candidate who gained the most overall support, yet was excluded because his compatriot, Irma Tobias Perez, was the woman who gained the most votes. This result, with two Filipino candidates in pole position, might look surprising, but is certainly due to the fact that the Filipino community is the «oldest» and the most culturally-rooted immigrant group in Rome (about 25,000 people) and also the best organized in the trade unions. In this way, the mechanism of the quotas made a nonsense of the most elementary criterion of representation in the contest between compatriots: the person who received the most votes was not elected simply because he was an Asian male.

If we go beyond the apolitical rhetoric that guided the founding group, the analysis of some of the councilors' route to success reveals much of interest. Among those elected, the Romanian Ionut Gabriel Rusu «originated» from the Catholic NGO Comunità di Sant'Egidio and had undergone political training in the centre-left party then called «La Margherita» (The Daisy); the same can be said for Santos Taboada Zapata, who came from the

Peru Advisory Council and was associated with the Democratic Left party (*Democratici di sinistra*, DS); Aziz Darif worked for the promotion of culture in the Moroccan association, ACMI, and with the Islamic Cultural Centre in Rome, then closely connected to *Rifondazione comunista*. The Filipina Irma Tobias Perez enjoyed the support of the parishes and the left-wing labour union CGIL. In short, all four candidates clearly had left-wing leanings and substantial experience in local associations and politics. The concrete achievements of this first group of councillors included their official presence at several public meetings and conferences and the approval by the city council on 18 July 2005 of the only measure they proposed which, not by chance, concerned the creation of a municipal register of intercultural mediators¹¹.

The second round of elections for the foreign councillors took place in December 2006 at the end of a brief term of office. This time the procedure had been more carefully prepared by means of an amendment that simplified the registration of voters. 18,108 people went to the ballot box, a number that corresponded roughly to ten per cent of those entitled to vote but still much more substantial than in the previous round. The winners were Victor Emeka Okeadu, Romulo Sabio Salvador, Madisson Bladimir, Godoy Sanchez and Tetyana Kuzyk. The new adjunct councillors were all already engaged in politics, at least from the earlier election. The one who garnered the most votes was once again the Filipino Romulo Sabio Salvador, 44 years old and already a member of the Citizens' Council, beating his compatriot Felix Enriquez Mendoza by about 700 votes. Sabio Salvador had been in Italy since 1984 and was proud to have obtained 13 per cent of the votes. Just like Victor Emeka Okeadu, a 46-year-old Nigerian and president of the former group of immigrant representatives, his political program was to «encourage immigrant entrepreneurs» and «instigate participation and representability.» The only woman to be elected was Tetyana Kuzyk, a 35-year-old Ukrainian translator and teacher of English. She said that «the low attendance by European foreigners is due mainly to scarce information. The candidates often spend a lot of money on their campaign: the leaflets cost about 15 cents each and thousands are needed». The fourth to be elected was Madisson Bladimir Godoy Sanchez from Ecuador, 42 years old, who was also standing for the second time: «In our future plans there is the will to again propose the right to vote for local government and to facilitate access to Italian citizenship, so that non-EU citizens can also vote in national elections. I believe that this objective will also guide the other foreign councillors».

At the local borough level, where voting is not linked to continent of origin, the Asian groups prevailed. Of the 20 *municipi* (boroughs), seven went to Filipinos, seven to Bangladeshis and one to an Indian. Africa (one Moroccan and one Nigerian) and the Americas (two Peruvians) had a smaller presence. Finally the *Consulta dell'immigrazione* (Immigration Council) was established, a chamber for redress the conflicts that surfaced with the election; it included the first 30 candidates of various nationalities not elected to adjunct councilor with the following proportions: eight from Africa, eight from Asia, seven from South America, and seven from Europe.

7. Outcomes and Unexpected Consequences

In attempting to highlight the main features of immigrant representation in Rome, we can start with a paradoxical statement made by the former delegate for multi-ethnic policies, Franca Eckert Coen : «The most important thing is to allow representatives to speak freely. Rome city council is doing this with the adjunct councilors and the projects for acquiring dual citizenship. This means speaking to them directly, without going via the associations»¹². In order to critically analyze this rhetoric, it is useful to examine the forms of representation that emerged by applying Mantovan's (2007) framework of the three different modalities which characterize the development of foreigners' political participation: an institutional modality that is favoured and constructed by local public figures; an independent, autonomous association; and a third intermediate, mixed version. Having underlined the lack of development of an autonomous leadership in the immigrant population, we can summarize the Rome case by welding together the first and the third modality, where the role of interlocutor with the institutions is carried out essentially by a mostly Italian network of associations and politicians, inspired by the rhetoric and practices of interculturalism (Pompeo 2002). Despite the precautionary apolitical position of the immigrant representatives, this process clearly reflected the conditions and limits of the space of political agency in the migrant population, primarily defined in relation to political stakeholders and local associations and therefore often in a relationship mediated firstly with Italians, secondly with their own compatriots, and lastly with the other immigrants.

The interviews and the analysis of documents reveal the multifarious contradictions in this position of being hemmed in between a form of agency based on identity – inspired by international

models of ethnic leadership – and subservience to the indigenous logic of Italy's complex politics, towards which the immigrant representatives target communicative strategies that mimic Italian political styles. But the relationship does not stop at this level; it appears more complex still if we weigh up the longer-term outcome of the creation of the adjunct councillors, which is also laden with paradoxes. We have underlined the ambiguities and basic contradictions of this experiment, which came into being within the rhetoric of the «pact for integration and multi-ethnicity» and was linked to the «Rome Model» of modernization that claimed to redraw the image of Rome particularly under mayor Walter Veltroni, at the same time that a centre-right government was in power at the national level. It is important to underline, though, that this semi-representation for immigrants in Rome survived the 2008 political crisis of the left that had generated it.

Romano Prodi's second centre-left national government ended in spring 2008, and shortly thereafter (not unrelated to this event) Veltroni resigned as mayor of Rome in order to launch his campaign as national candidate for the centre-left coalition. The subsequent upheaval in city politics in the capital caused the issue of foreign councillors to be put on the back burner. The result of the municipal election, with the victory of Gianni Alemanno as the first post-fascist mayor of Rome¹³, in many ways came as a surprise and overturned the political majority in city government and, with it, marked a complete rejection of both the «Rome Model» itself and its extension to national level. This brought to the fore the contradiction between a municipal ruling that institutionalized foreign councillors and the new mayor's wish, made clear during his electoral campaign, that the role be abolished. This contrast was part of a broader, officially-trumpeted objective of Rome's new administration to completely dismantle the system of networks and advisors that had been built up during the decade of centre-left rule¹⁴. However, the problem was resolved by a timely and inspired intervention: the extension of the status quo, which «avoided spending public funds to re-run a pointless election»¹⁵, as the representatives of the new administration were quick to point out.

According to the new resolution, signed by the adjunct councillors in office and by a group of city councillors from across the political spectrum, foreigners could not be regarded as «normal» councillors; therefore they served for five years independently of changes in the administration to which they had been elected. In this way the current councillors, the four already seated in the Cap-

itol and the 20 elected to the municipalities, had their mandate extended until 2013 «unless before such a date a new form of representation of the foreign community is reached». It was envisaged that a new system, if it were created, would probably take the form of a committee representing foreign communities that would have a consultative role but with fewer powers than the adjunct councillors and which would not necessarily be directly elected by all foreign residents. As Councilor Godoy recently stated: «It wasn't an idea of ours, for us the important thing is that immigrants should be represented in the administration of the capital».

But the paradoxes did not stop here. In mid-July 2008 Gianni Alemanno nominated the showgirl Ramona Badescu as an advisor to the mayor on questions concerning immigrants from Romania, even though she obtained only 56 votes when she stood for election in the centre-right's civic list. Her official mission was to «study forms of integration between the two peoples and the two cultures, carrying out a work of mediation between the Capitol and the government in Bucharest and working towards a revival of the image of the Romanian people in a broad sense»¹⁶. Alemanno's policy for creating advisors did not limit itself to showbiz. On Thursday 14 January 2010 at a ceremony in the City Hall during the final official buffet presided over by the mayor of Reggio Calabria (Giuseppe Scopelliti, subsequently governor of Calabria), Rome became the first city in Italy to have a municipal representative for relations with the Calabrian community. The chosen representative was the criminal lawyer Domenico Naccari, born in Vibo Valentia in 1968, a city councillor for the People of Freedom party (*Popolo della Libertà*, PdL) in the Alemanno administration who was widely defined, without hesitation, as the first «ethnic delegate» in Rome's politics¹⁷.

These somehow unexpected outcomes represented a complete involution in the process of giving voice to minority groups. This, however, does not belie the deep-rooted contradictions referred to in my introduction. The reinterpretation by the centre-right administration of the figure of adjunct councillor in fact forms a part of the more general process of transforming public space from a context where interests and differences can be expressed, in terms both of universality of rights as well as particulars claims, to a «scene» in which the communicative performativity removes and hides the politician in a grey zone of negotiations. This phenomenon constitutes an extraordinary subject for the anthropological study of new ways of doing politics.

In the long process of Rome's attempt to foster representation for immigrants, whose outcomes

ultimately went counter to what was originally intended, we can identify the paradoxical direction taken in the rhetoric of «migrant leadership» which the actors involved interpreted through the contradictory banner of acting “apolitically”. This rhetoric was advanced by a political culture that aimed to be progressive and modernizing but which was also concerned with not appearing too courageous, thus distorting the principle of minorities’ agency. It applied a global vocabulary re-read through local lens, thus accentuating communitarian and culturalist interpretations, with the result that the rhetoric contributed to further obscuring the difficult social experiences of migrants to Rome which, both in terms of their material conditions and symbolic hierarchies, continue to correspond to the model of subaltern inclusion of migrants which characterizes Italy generally as a space of exclusion from citizenship. From this perspective, the “good intentions” aimed at an intercultural openness towards migrants were translated into projects and principles that were relatively detached from the realities of the over thirty-year old presence of migrants who now represent about 10 per cent of the resident population. Thus, the rhetoric perpetuated mantras that were often indifferent to the local context which should instead have been their focal point and which the “neo-municipalism” originally intended as benchmark and objective of human development.

8. Conclusions

In examining the processes and actors directly involved, the research has identified a practice of subsidiarity which has integrated the interests and objectives of administrations, associations, and local actors, not without some overlapping of roles and conflicts of interest: a model of governance that has aimed to reconstruct a political space, putting the institutions and «civil society» in touch with each other on the ground. This is a concept that through conciliation has neutralized political pressures and conflicts, sometimes also pre-selecting the interlocutors and predetermining the analysis of their needs. The contradictory nature of these processes, that is the policies handed down from on high that in the name of presumed needs have brought about operations that are as symbolically significant as they are ineffective, soon showed their own limitations, receiving a resounding public rejection with the defeat of Rutelli’s candidacy for the mayorship of Rome in 2008 which ended the long period of centre-left government of the capital. The crisis of the «Rome Model» and of the ambition of taking

it to the national level was accompanied, through the election of Rome’s first post-fascist mayor, by the aggressive affirmation of identity-based rhetoric which linked the slogan that society was in the grip of a “security emergency” – and thus required a different model for controlling urban territory and the social diversities present within it – to a campaign in which «the peripheries can take back the centre as the symbolic heart of the true Roman spirit». This process was a local, Rome-based variant of a broader phenomenon of withdrawal and closure linked with other nationalistic regressions in Europe, where populist criminalization has generated «neo-indigenisms» (Pompeo 2012a). Only since 2011 has there been a move away from these ideological portrayals due, unfortunately, to the serious economic and social crisis that has hit Europe. This new scenario is challenging the structures and forms of security built up through decades of social conquests and will no doubt foster a new way of thinking in which political decision-making can regain depth and complexity¹⁸.

We need to at last come to terms with the far-reaching transformations in our local societies and their members, which really cannot be managed in the absence of a corresponding overarching vision of the situation. Otherwise these transformations will continue to be misrepresented as a stage on which a clash of symbols or ideas concerning globalization is played out, as if this clash were an intrinsically unavoidable process and thus distant and estranged from politics. In this sense Rome’s experiment with adjunct councilors, whose role was made residual and stripped of transformative potential, constitutes a warning: only through the constant exercise of a critical gaze, in which anthropological and social research should play an essential part, will we be able to confront this neutralization of politics and hollowing out of democratic systems whose signs are already visible in our daily life. We shall then at last acquire that deep sense of the word “citizenship” (Ong 2003) that is both an obligation and a form of access, a limit and a potential, a condition and a value which must be built up for everyone regardless of ethnic origin, social condition, or cultural orientation.

Notes

¹ Law n. 189 of 30 July 2002, generally known as the Bossi-Fini law, modified the previous immigration legislation (“Testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell’immigrazione e norme sulla condizione

dello straniero”, Decree Law n. 286 of 25 July 1998) introducing a number of restrictions. In particular, annual residence permits are granted only if the applicant has an employment contract. Various additional conditions made it more difficult to apply for family reunification, residence cards valid for five years, and citizenship, while all expulsion procedures were strengthened.

² The general wording of the social doctrine goes back to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, but a clearer version is the openly inter-class and anti-Marxist formulation in the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* of Pius XI (1931). Subsidiarity has spread beyond the context of the Church to become one of the founding principles of the Treaty of Maastricht and thus of the European Union.

³ Francesco Rutelli and Walter Veltroni, as mayors of Rome, were the leading lights in a long phase of Rome politics dominated by center-left coalitions. The 1994-2008 period, with the Jubilee in 2000, saw far-reaching changes in the city and important innovative projects.

⁴ See Abdelmalek Sayad's (1999) discussion of the “legitimacy deficit” that the dominant society always calls upon migrants to atone for.

⁵ Interview by Stefano Camilloni for *Stranieri in Italia* (31 October 2006).

⁶ Personal testimony of a councilor of the DS (Democrats of the Left), now PD (Democratic Party).

⁷ Session of 29 September 2003. Sabbatani Schiuma, a prominent exponent of Rome's populist right wing.

⁸ Testimony from E. K., a woman in the group of 14, in May 2004.

⁹ Interview with R., a male candidate for the Americas, 25 March 2004.

¹⁰ Statement reported by Chiara Sima: “Roma 53 candidati per i consiglieri aggiunti” (“Rome 53 candidates for adjunct councilors” on *Vita*, no profit of 14/11/2006. See also <http://www.vita.it/non-profit/index.html>

¹¹ A wide-ranging debate highlights various contradictions linked to the role of intercultural mediators as “immigration professionals” (Pomero 2012b, Schmidt 2000).

¹² Interview by Nicoletta Di Placido, 29 November 2006.

¹³ Alemanno was elected mayor of Rome on 28 April 2008 with 53.66% of those who voted. He was proclaimed mayor on 30 April 2008.

¹⁴ The first consequence was the freezing for three months of contracts with immigrant associations and the elimination of the large network of intercultural initiatives that the left had developed in schools and neighborhoods.

¹⁵ Statement by PdL Councillor Federico Guidi obtained by Elvio Pasca “Consiglieri aggiunti blindati, aspettando la fine” (Ironclad deputy councilors, awaiting the end), 14 November 2008, from <http://www.stranieriitalia.it>.

¹⁶ See <http://www.votaramonabadesco.it/>

¹⁷ For Antonello Caporale in *La Repubblica* on 12 January 2010 Naccari was «the first political figure assigned the political command of dialect, customs, and the use of suchlike in a foreign land», implicitly proposing: «A federalism cubed, a further development of the capacity to divide the city horizontally into segments of homogeneous dialectical living». See also <http://www.domeniconaccari.it/>

¹⁸ After another change of majority (centre-left) in the spring of 2013, today we are still debating on the adjunct councilors, waiting for their re-election scheduled for the next year.

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