



2009-2019: ten years of antiracism in Italy, a country squeezed between fear and reception

by Grazia Naletto

"Don't be afraid", "I welcome". Two campaigns, two intentionally evocative titles. In between: ten years of the Italian anti-racist movement. The imagery recalled by these very different is closer than it seems and tells a lot about the path followed in these intense decade.

The "Don't be afraid" campaign was launched on March 18, 2009 by a group of organizations¹ that did not intend to resign to a climate of hostility and violence against foreigners that had been on the rise in the country since 2008. The implicit target of the campaign was the unscrupulous wickedness of the Minister of the Interior of the time, the leghista Roberto Maroni, whose rhetoric and deeds in the two-year period 2008-2009 were inspirational for the security package approved by the Berlusconi government². The declared target of the campaign was the worrying spread of racism. The word racism, however, was not mentioned, the promoters chose the word "fear" instead, internalizing the very imagery it was meant to deconstruct.

On June 18, 2019, ten years later, a similar coalition³ launched *Io accolgo*, a campaign that aims to give voice to that part of society that does not recognize itself in the

¹ Acli, UNHCR, Amnesty International, Antigone, Arci, Asgi, Cantieri Sociali, Caritas Italiana, Centro Astalli, Cgil, Cir, Cisl, Cnca, Comunità di Sant'Egidio, Csvnet, Emmaus Italia, Federazione Chiese Evangeliche in Italia, Federazione Rom e Sinti, FioPsd, Gruppo Abele, Libera, Rete G2 Seconde Generazioni, Save the Children, Sei – Ugl, Terra del Fuoco, Tavola per la Pace, Uil.

² "The increase in episodes of intolerance and racist violence that we are witnessing are worrying symptoms of a short circuit that risks degenerating and that distances us from the pivotal references of our civilization". This is a sentence taken from the *Manifesto for a national campaign against racism, indifference and fear of strangers*.

³ A Buon Diritto, ACLI, ActionAid, AOI, ARCI, ASGI, Caritas italiana, Casa della Carità, CEFA, Centro Astalli, CGIL, CIAC, CIAI, CIR, CNCA, Comunità di S. Egidio, CONNGI, Ero Straniero, EuropAsilo, Federazione Chiese Evangeliche in Italia - FCEI, FOCSIV, FOCUS Casa dei diritti sociali, Fondazione Finanza Etica, Fondazione Migrantes, Forum Terzo Settore, Gruppo Abele, ICS Trieste, INTERSOS,



representation of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees offered by another leghista Interior Minister, Matteo Salvini. He, better than his party comrade who preceded him, managed to set the tone to the Italian public debate on migrations before entering government and, just like Maroni, once a minister, matches his xenophobic rhetoric with administrative acts and regulatory reforms designed to leave a deep mark on the lives of thousands of foreigners in our country.

I welcome is a slogan that distances itself more explicitly from the dominant public imagination, it takes side in favour of the idea of welcoming, calling the public to assume a responsibility in solidarity.

In 2009, as in 2019, the attempt was to redirect the gaze of a part of the public opinion in the direction of the principles of equality, solidarity, non-discrimination. We chose to operate on the collective imagination (the representation of foreign citizens) hoping to move the centre of gravity of public policies on migration and asylum towards the horizon of rights.

In the first case, the chosen strategy was to use and overturn the picture proposed by the adversary: "do not be afraid" is addressed to those who have been told for months that the foreigner poses a threat to "our" security. In the second case, you opted for frontal opposition: you (the govt.) reject, I accept.

The thread that links these two different communicative strategies helps us reconstruct, in brief, the richness and creativity expressed by the Italian anti-racist movement during the last ten years, but also its limits and the challenges ahead. It is the rough and hardened thread that has warped "the trap of permanent emergency"⁴.

Permanent emergency

Legambiente, LINK-coordinamento universitario, Lunaria, Medici Senza Frontiere, NAIM (National Association Intercultural Mediators), Oxfam, Rainbow4Africa, ReCoSol, Refugees Welcome Italia, Rete della Conoscenza, Rete Studenti Medi, SaltaMuri, Save the Children Italia, Senza Confine, UIL, Unione degli studenti, Unione degli universitari, UNIRE.

⁴ F. Miraglia, G. Naletto, "1989-2019: 30 anni di antirazzismo in Italia" in Giovannetti M., Zorzella N. (a cura di), *IUS MIGRANDI. 30 anni di politiche e legislazione sull'immigrazione in Italia*, Franco Angeli editore, Milano 2020 (in corso di pubblicazione).



The category of "emergency", which is essential to fuel "fear perceptions", has crossed the public debate on migration throughout the decade. Few thousands of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti citizens still living in different kinds of settlements (informal, camps and equipped areas) have led to the proclamation, in 2008, of a "nomadic emergency" in three Italian cities. The arrival of about 62 thousand migrants from Egypt, Tunisia and Libya justified the proclamation, in 2011, of a "North African emergency".

The *economic and social emergency* brought back by the effects of the global crisis that began in 2008 has been evoked. Then came the *security crisis*, supported by bizarre interpretations of crime statistics, by an over-representation in the media of crime stories and by the misleading representations of the terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic radicalism that shocked Europe. After that was the *humanitarian crisis*, which in particular between 2014 and 2016, has found the country's public system unprepared for the new demand for reception without; the health one, which is more frequently referred to in the periods of intensified arrivals of migrants by sea (end of 2013-2015; 2017).

Almost without interruption, the gaze of governments, the media, and therefore also of a large part of public opinion, has only looked at the border and has forgotten the approximately five million foreign citizens who reside permanently in our country: migration policies have remained at the centre of public attention, progressively cornering social inclusion policies.

The Italian anti-racist movement was thus pushed to concentrate its efforts on guaranteeing the right to arrive and be welcomed and to sacrifice a large part of the collective elaborations that in previous decades had tried to keep together the right to migrate with social, civil and political citizenship rights, in order to imagine a new social model plural, polycultural and based on equal rights⁵.

Squeezed between the real emergencies (those generated by the numerous regulatory reforms that have progressively weakened the protection of foreign citizens in

⁵ We refer not only to the experience of the Antiracist Network of the late 90s of the last century, but also to the important elaborations from the Migrants' Table of the Social Forum that in the two-year period 2001-2002 analysed in depth the role played by the work of migrants in the process of neo-liberal globalization.



our country) and those represented by a public debate manipulated in a cynical (and smart) way by nationalist, xenophobic and racist movements, we have been trapped in an agenda mostly defined by others.

The denunciation of the countless forms of institutional discrimination and the attempt to obtain justice in the courtrooms; the organization of public protest, the attempt to reduce the inhuman effects of the policies of rejection; the promotion of grassroots solidarity actions in the social, educational, housing and work fields and the performance of a *de facto* substitute role for institutions in the provision of essential services (from reception to social and legal orientation, health care for undocumented persons, victims of trafficking, and so on), have all been priorities that have left little room for the creation of collective places of relationship and longer-term cultural, social and political interventions.

This was the background that characterized the commitment of the antiracist work in the last decade. Without this work, the living conditions of many foreign citizens would be much worse than they already are.

Below we try to retrace in brief, while the details we refer to can be found in the archive of our Website cronachediordinariorazzismo.org and in previous editions of this White Paper.

At the beginning of the decade, the movement is forced to confront the strategy of fear put in place by the Berlusconi IV Government, which took office on May 8, 2008, which brought to the extreme consequences the security slippage of migration policies initiated by previous governments. One of the first acts of the Berlusconi IV was the approval of a scheme of measures that will become the 2008-2009 "security package" and will deeply frame the relations between Italian society and foreign citizens⁶. A few days

⁶ With various legislative measures, the Berlusconi government tightens the rules on immigration: the introduction of the aggravating circumstance of the penalty for foreign citizens without a residence permit and the crime of illegal entry and stay; the introduction of the tax on stay and the integration agreement; the extension to 180 days of the time spent in Temporary Residence Centres (CPT) and their renaming in Identification and Expulsion Centres (CIE); the limitation of the right to family reunification; the amendment of the Consolidated Law on Local Authorities, with the extension of the powers of mayors in matters of security and public order are some of the most relevant provisions. See: A. Caputo, "Immigration and legal policies: from the 1998 Consolidated Text to the recent interventions on security", and G. Naletto, "The



later, on May 21st, 2008, the proclamation of a state of "nomadic emergency" in the cities of Naples, Rome and Milan, completed this "program" of institutional racism against foreigners and Roma, Sinti and Caminanti.

The anti-racist movement expresses very strong opposition to the adoption of these rules and manages to prevent the abolition of the ban on reporting undocumented foreigners to the PS authorities by teachers and doctors which would have undermined the guarantee of the right to education and health. This is also thanks to the great commitment and involvement of schools and doctors' associations. The inadmissible proposal to census Roma citizens living in the camps and to take their fingerprints, including children, is also stopped, thanks to a strong mobilisation of civil society⁷.

Immediately after the entry into force of Law 94/2009, the pillar of the Leghista "security package", the fifth of the seven amnesties/regulations that have marked the history of immigration in our country is launched. Law 108/2009 contains a provision that allows the "declaration of assistance and support activities for families" (art.1-ter) by employers. It will be called the "amnesty scam" because it is very selective and because many of the approximately 294 thousand citizens who apply are swindled by unscrupulous accountants and lawyers who, in exchange for fees that reach several thousand euros, promise to take care of the practice of the stay and the finding of a job, but in many cases are limited to producing fake documents.⁸

Against these unjust requirements and against the entry into force of the security package, on October 17, 2009, a national demonstration brings 150 thousand people from the anti-racist movement in Rome, its demands will return in future mobilizations⁹. A year

normative legitimation of discrimination and racism", in G. Naletto, (edited by), Report on Racism in Italy, Manifestolibri, Rome 2009.

⁷ As Filippo Miraglia recalls, "On July 8, 2008, the ARCI organizes in Rome, where mayor Alemanno supports this infamous project, a demonstration in which more than 3 thousand people, among them many celebrities and politicians, have their fingerprints taken in protest: now file us!", in F. Miraglia, G. Naletto, cit.

⁸ See *Parlare civile. Comunicare senza discriminazione*, here: <http://www.parlarecivile.it/argomenti/immigrazione/sanatoria-truffa.aspx>.

⁹ These are the points of the call to convene issued by the Committee on 17 October: No to racism, Regularisation for all, Repeal of the security package, Reception and rights for all, No to rejections and bilateral agreements providing for them, Net break in the link between the residence permit and the employment contract, Right of asylum for refugees and displaced persons, Final closure of the Identification



later, on October 30, 2010, eight immigrants climbed on a crane at the Brescia metropolitan shipyard to protest against the amnesty scam. They ask for a residence permit for all those who have applied for it, the withdrawal of the security package and the release of the residence permit from the employment contract.

On 5 November, in Milan, five immigrants climbed the former Carlo Erba Tower, for the same reasons, supported by the *Immigrants in Italy* Committee. Three of them remained on the tower for almost a month.

The protests in Brescia and Milan were preceded, in January, by another self-organized mobilization in the deep South. Between January 7 and 10, what will be remembered as the "Rosarno rebellion" follows the racist attacks suffered by the foreign workers of the Plain, reaping the anger and frustration accumulated in years of exploitation and abuse. On the afternoon of the 7th, between 1.30 pm and 2 pm, shots from an air gun hit two African farm workers. A few hours later, four hundred migrants organized two roadblocks on Highway 18 and in another area of the town, then they walked to the city centre and damaged some cars and shop windows. Another march followed the next day. The rebellion triggered a "hunt" against immigrant workers which ended with the "voluntary" departure of 250 of them and the shameful deportation on police buses to Bari and Crotone of 748 more¹⁰.

It is always the farm workers who promote another important struggle a year and a half later: from the Boncuri farm in Nardò, in the province of Foggia, on July 30, 2011 the first self-organized strike of foreign farm workers employed in tomato harvesting. Workers asked for regular contracts, to increase the price per case or to be paid per hour, to abolish the "caporalato" irregular recruitment system, the opening of an office for

and Expulsion Centres (CIE), No differences among Italians and foreigners in access to rights, Right to work, health, housing and education for all and everyone, Maintenance of residence permit for those who have lost their jobs, Against all forms of discrimination against gay, lesbian, transgender people, Alongside all workers and women workers fighting for the defense of the workplace.

¹⁰ See the chapter by Veronica Iesué in this report.



employment in the countryside, safe public transport systems, sanitary facilities in the fields, houses and services¹¹.

Years later, the slums of the plain are still there, the conditions of exploitation have even worsened. Many workers have lost their lives in the countryside. And even today a surreal debate is taking place on whether or not to launch yet another selective regularization to deal with the shortage of agricultural labour due to the Covid-19 emergency. Those first protests of farm workers were nonetheless some of the most relevant experiences of self-organisation of migrants.

Also in 2011, a circular issued by the Minister of the Interior on April 1st closed access to the Identification and Expulsion Centres (CIE) and Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers (CARA) to journalists and anti-racist activists. The Circular offers the opportunity to restart the campaign for the closure of the detention centres even if, initially, the objective of LETCHEIN is to obtain the withdrawal of the circular. Especially in the initial phase, the campaign manages to involve a wide network of journalists and activists who obtain the support of several parliamentarians in organizing numerous visits to the detention centres that will help bring to light many violations and also to obtain the release of some illegally detained migrants. At the end of the year, the Maroni circular was revoked by the Minister Cancellieri. In the following years, *LasciateCIEntrare* continues to carry out valuable work in monitoring the CIEs, denouncing many cases of mismanagement of the centres, supporting the protests for their closure from Turin to Rome, from Trieste to Bologna. A goal that still remains totally unacknowledged by politics.

In May 2011, during a very aggressive election campaign in some large municipalities, the Lega Nord and Forza Italia publish a petition and put on posters stigmatizing Roma and Muslim people. Naga, a historical antiracist association in Milan, promotes an anti-discrimination appeal that for the first time in May 2012 leads to the

¹¹ AA.VV., *Sulla pelle viva. Nardò: la lotta autorganizzata dei braccianti agricoli*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2012; Y. Sagnet, *Ama il tuo sogno. Vita e rivolta nella terra dell'oro rosso*, Fandango, Roma 2012.



important condemnation of a political party for discrimination on the basis of Article 2, paragraph 3 of Legislative Decree 215/2003¹².

In the meantime, the promoting committee of the campaign "L'Italia sono anch'io" (I am Italy too) takes shape, with the aim of reforming the Citizenship Law n. 91/92 and introducing the active and passive electorate at local level for foreign citizens with a residence permit¹³. The campaign brings together 19 organizations and activates about 100 local committees on two citizens' initiative laws that will be filed to the House of Parliament, accompanied by 200,000 signatures, on March 7, 2012. An extraordinary popular mobilization that continues in different forms in the following years, in collaboration with the movement of young Italians without citizenship, with hearings and parliamentary meetings, sit-in meetings and press campaigns until the end of 2017, when the reform of the citizenship law is sacrificed by Parliament on the altar of the political majority¹⁴.

2011 is also the year in which the association Carta di Roma was born. The group launches a work of awareness and training in schools of journalism and in the world of professional journalists to promote proper information on migrants, refugees and Roma and minorities.¹⁵

The entry into office of the "technical" Government, in November 2011, changes the context in which the movement finds itself working: the effects of the global economic crisis reach their peak and the axis of public debate temporarily shifts to structural

¹² See http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/SentenzaNAGA_PdL+LN.pdf. For a reconstruction of the facts, see later on the sheet dedicated to the event.

¹³ The campaign was promoted by Acli, Arci, Asgi-Associazione studi giuridici sull'immigrazione, Caritas Italiana, Centro Astalli, Cgil, Cnca-Coordinamento nazionale delle comunità d'accoglienza, Comitato 1° Marzo, Coordinamento nazionale degli enti locali per la pace e i diritti umani, Emmaus Italia, Fcei – Federazione Chiese Evangeliche In Italia, Fondazione Migrantes, Libera, Lunaria, Il Razzismo Brutta Storia, Rete G2 - Seconde Generazioni, Sei Ugl, Tavola della Pace, Terra del Fuoco, Carlo Feltrinelli. The committee was presided by then Reggio Emilia mayor Graziano Delrio.

¹⁴ The reform proposal obtained the approval of the House on October 3, 2015 and then silted up in the Senate in the following years, despite the pressure of the campaign and young Italians without citizenship. In 2017, public initiatives were organized on January 27, February 9, July 12, September 11, November 7, November 20 and December 20 and several meetings were held with representatives of the Senate, including the President.

¹⁵ www.cartadiroma.org.



policies; institutional rhetoric changes register and expels the most aggressive and discriminatory tones; the temporary decrease in landings leads to a reduction in the presence of migration on the political agenda. A few weeks after the Monti government took office, on December 9, 2011, Gianluca Casseri killed Modou Samb and Mor Diop in Florence and injured Moustapha Dieng during a racist raid in the centre of the city. The Government strongly condemned the incident. The reaction of the anti-racist movement was expressed mainly by the Senegalese community and the Tuscan associations that organized a national anti-racist demonstration in which about 20,000 people take part, on December 17.

2012 is above all a transition year. On 7 March, the first phase of the campaign closes. Italy is also in the process of handing over its citizens' initiative bills to the Chamber of Deputies, but Government and Parliament are busy on other fronts.

The organizations involved in the management of the reception system are engaged in an attempt to avoid that the end of ENA, scheduled for December 31, 2012, will result in the expulsion of thousands of people from the reception system, without a path of social inclusion for them. The problem arises especially for the most vulnerable people and, only for these, a circular of the Ministry of the Interior of February 2013 provides for the continuation of the reception extended to the Sprar¹⁶.

In the month of September, the Government launched a new measure for the emergence of foreign labour (Legislative Decree 109/2012). Also in this case, the requirements (such as the need to prove the presence on Italian territory prior to December 31, 2011 with a document issued by the public administration and the provision of high minimum incomes for the employers concerned) causes many problems and brings to the rejection of thousands of applications. Many associations and movements find themselves, therefore, involved in the promotion of a laborious task of pressuring on the prefectures and/or in the promotion of appeals against the rejections. Still in 2015, the procedure of emersion was not closed.

¹⁶ See Lunaria (Ed.), *I diritti non sono un costo. Immigrazione, welfare e finanza pubblica*, 2013, pp. 91-101, http://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/i_diritti_non_sono_un_costo-tot..pdf.



Some good news comes at the end of the year: the closing of the Italian section of the Stormfront website by Italian authorities and the arrest of four people involved in an investigation launched by the Rome Police Headquarters, also thanks to the reports of the associations¹⁷.

Since 2013, the numerous massacres of migrants in the Mediterranean have put migration policies back at the centre of the public debate and remain there almost uninterrupted until 2019. The drowning of 366 migrants near Lampedusa on October 3, 2013 marks the opening of a new phase that will force associations and movements to return to put all of their energies in the struggle to claim the right to arrive and be welcomed in Italy and Europe. The slogan "Let's stop the massacres" resonates in these years in many initiatives and mobilizations organized throughout the country¹⁸.

The Italian military mission Mare Nostrum started in October 2013 and saved the lives of more than 100,000 people was closed just one year later. Between 2014 and 2018, for a large part of the anti-racist world, the priority areas of intervention will therefore be two: dealing with the significant growth in demand for reception and intervene at sea when European States refuse to do so.

On the first front, many associations and social cooperatives are involved in the management of the binary reception system for asylum seekers and refugees: on the one hand the emergency system of the Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS) governed by the Prefectures, on the other hand the ordinary reception system for asylum seekers and refugees (SPRAR) managed by the municipalities. The number of people received has grown over the years: 66,066 in 2014, 103,792 in 2015, 176,554 in 2016, 183,681 in 2017, 135,858 in 2018 and they are still 105,142 at the end of 2019, despite the substantial closure of Italian ports to ships providing aid at sea. The sudden growth in the demand for accommodation causes quite a few distortions and several cases of mismanagement (mainly due to the role played in the reception system by unscrupulous private firms) that find great visibility in the media. The case called *Mafia capitale*, which Brings many people

¹⁷ See the profile of the episode by Paola Andrisani in this report.

¹⁸ Probably the most important being the one in front of the Colosseum in Roma on June 15, 2015.



involved in the reception system to jail (December 2014), is just one of the episodes that will make news and will help to the campaign of delegitimization of the public reception system that is being skilfully exploited by the new leader of the Northern League.

Between 2014 and 2016 there will be a proliferation of conflicts in the territories that often see municipalities and national authorities in conflict, and the involvement of spontaneous and organized citizens' committees against reception projects. And this is precisely the issue that, together with that of the "landings", is ridden by the xenophobic and intolerant propaganda of the leader of the Northern League who, at least until mid-2019, manages to be central in the public debate. Perhaps it is no coincidence that on July 4, 2016, in Fermo, Emmanuel Chidi Namdi, an asylum-seeker hosted with his partner in a community centre in Capodarco, was killed in the street by a right-wing extremist. The demonstration of solidarity with his companion remains largely entrusted to the antiracist militants of the city; very few initiatives are organized in other cities.¹⁹

On the second front, as early as 2014, international NGOs (including Moas, Proactiva Open Arms, Life Boat, Jugend Rettet, Boat Refugee, Sea Watch, Sos Mediterranee, Msf, Sea-eye, Mission Lifeline), intervene in the search and rescue missions at sea for migrants crossing the Mediterranean; in addition to these, in 2018 Mediterranea starts its all-Italian mission. Thanks to these missions, launched to try to fill the void left by Mare Nostrum and the progressive disengagement of European governments in sea rescue missions, thousands of migrants are rescued and saved. But in times of cultural and political hegemony of the right across Europe, saving people and welcoming them had become a sin.

And if on February 28, 2015 the leader of the Lega, who arrives in Rome to sanction the alliance with the most extreme right wing and involve them in his national party project, finds an active city movement that aggregates more than 20,000 people in a peaceful but very clear in its message (#maiconsalvini), on October 19, 2019 the Lega fills Piazza San Giovanni, without the city being able to organize anything significant to

¹⁹See: Chiodo S., "L'omicidio di Fermo", in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo. Quarto libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, Roma 2017.



challenge it. Years of violent and pervasive xenophobic propaganda, the last year of the Gentiloni government and a year and a half of the first Conte government weakened the movement.

The humanitarian shudder²⁰, which shocked Italy and Europe on September 3, 2015, when the photo of the body of little Alan Kurdi found lifeless on the beach in Bodrum went around the world, faded very quickly, to make way for a campaign of criminalisation of solidarity. From 2017, with the complicity of the Gentiloni Government and its Minister of the Interior, this campaign delegitimizes to a large part of public opinion the work of any person associated with the reception and solidarity with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

With the arrival of the new Minister of the Interior Minniti, the movement finds itself in a grip: on the one hand, the daily attack by the Lega and the extreme right movements on social networks and on the ground; on the other hand, the strategy of a Minister of the Interior who, with the promotion of two law decrees, accentuates the security positioning of the centre-left in matters of immigration and asylum, in the hope of stopping the growth of consensus from which the opposition is benefiting. In addition to the launch of a "security package" which in many ways recalls the Maroni one of a few years earlier, the Minister rides the campaign already launched on several fronts against the NGOs involved in SAR missions²¹.

The illusion held by some national organizations of being able to reorient the government goals through advocacy initiatives is unfortunately doomed to failure. Nor, on the other hand, are public mobilizations able to involve much more than "insiders": in the face of the communication machine that the opposition leader has meanwhile set up, especially online, even attempts to network and join forces to raise public awareness have had little success.

²⁰ A March of barefoot men and women, launched in a few days by director Andrea Segre, crosses more than 30 Italian cities on September 11, bringing thousands of people on the streets.

²¹ The main objective, in a Europe more divided than ever before precisely on migration policies, is to stop the arrival of migrants by sea, a priority that has been made explicit since the adoption of the European Immigration Agenda adopted in September 2015.



The only exception was the demonstration promoted in Milan on May 20, 2017, with the support of the municipal administration, a few weeks after the conversion into law of the two Minniti-Orlando decrees: thousands of people took part by adhering to a manifesto that took a generic stand against racism and for the welcoming of migrants that would bring together the most critical voices of the new course and the party to which the Minister of the Interior belongs under the slogan "Together without walls"²².

The only battle that could be won, as it was shared by a large part of public opinion, was the one of the reform of the law on citizenship: many initiatives in support of the reform were held throughout 2017, also thanks to the obstinacy of the young *Italiani senza cittadinanza*, and managed to involve schools, media and culture across the board. Unfortunately, in vain.

It is in this unfavourable context that the *Io ero straniero* (I was a foreigner) campaign handed over to Parliament, on 27 October 2017, a bill that represents one of the few examples of proactivity of the anti-racist movement in recent years on crucial aspects, including those of migration policies. The discussion of the bill would start April 2019 at the Constitutional Affairs Commission, the hope is that it will not be locked in a drawer like the reform on citizenship.

The lower point of this path is 2018, one of the black years of Italian racism. Its beginning can be symbolically identified in the racist raid carried out by Luca Traini on 3 February in Macerata²³, in the middle of the election campaign. The reaction that followed highlights the weakness of the democratic and anti-racist world in the face of the unstoppable advance of the right. The organization of a national demonstration on February 10 by the Sisma social centre is in fact boycotted by the Mayor and the Minister of the Interior and risks being banned. Only thanks to the protests of Fiom and some left-wing personalities, the demonstration takes place and about 10 thousand people take part. Some large national organizations withdraw their support. This is one of the crucial passages of recent years, because it sanctions the substantial subordination of some areas

²² A new edition of the event is held on March 2, 2019 and sees the gathering of about 200 thousand people.

²³ See Grazia Naletto in this report, section 2.3.1.



of civil society, in particular the more organized ones, to the agenda dictated by politics and the total subordination of the political forces that define themselves as left-wing to the agenda of the right.

The entry into office of the Conte I Government with Salvini as Minister of the Interior, in June 2018, kicks off a phase in which the only possible objective becomes that of resisting. The series of measures adopted by the Minister only goes in one direction: to stop even more than his predecessor did, the arrival of migrants by sea, to limit as much as possible the rights of foreign people who are already in Italy and, in this way, to reduce the demand for reception²⁴.

The whole summer of 2018 is marked by a head-on collision between the minister, the NGOs and that part of society that does not subscribe to the policies of rejection. Dozens of initiatives are promoted throughout Italy to demand from time to time that migrants be allowed to land²⁵. This in a context in which the aggressive rhetoric disseminated on the web is flanked by the violence of real life. The killing in San Ferdinando of trade unionist and laborer Soumaila Sacko on 2 June marks the beginning of a summer marked by individual and group violence that targets immigrants, particularly those of African origin²⁶.

²⁴ D.L. October 4, 2018, n. 113 *“Disposizioni urgenti in materia di protezione internazionale e immigrazione, sicurezza pubblica, nonché misure per la funzionalità del Ministero dell’Interno e l’organizzazione e il funzionamento dell’Agenzia nazionale per l’amministrazione e la destinazione dei beni sequestrati e confiscati alla criminalità organizzata”*, turned into law L. December 1, 2018, n. 132 and the so called Security decree bis, il D.L. June 14, 2019, n. 53 *“Disposizioni urgenti in materia di ordine e sicurezza pubblica”*, turned into law L. August 8, n. 77.

²⁵ We remember a few. Already in April, Father Zanotelli launched a hunger strike against the institutional racism of the government. The case of the ship *Acquarius*, which was prevented from docking in an Italian port, opened a spontaneous mobilization on June 11 under the slogan #Apriteiporti. On 7 July Libera, together with ARCI, Legambiente, ANPI invite to wear a red T-shirt to ask for a welcome that combines security and solidarity. On the 11th of July, members of the *“Rete rimaniamo umani”* chain themselves in front of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport. On July 18, the movement of the red hands begins to demonstrate weekly in Montecitorio. On August 3, some local administrators launch the manifesto *“Inclusion for an open society”*. On 9 August, the FCEI spreads a Manifesto for the reception. On August 19, an appeal on the Diciotti case is addressed to President Mattarella.

²⁶ See: Lunaria (Ed.), *Il ritorno della razza*, giugno 2018, and Lunaria (Ed.), *Un'estate all'insegna del razzismo*, ottobre 2018: https://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Focus-N4_ilritornodellarazza.pdf and here: <https://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/FOCUS62018unestateallinsegnadelrazzismo.pdf>.



Attempts to organize a coordinated protest against racism unfortunately fails, but civil society did not give up. Various initiatives of explicit condemnation of institutional and popular racism are taking place across the country in many ways. Starting from the Sabir Festival, organized by Arci, the proposal of a mobilization "With migrants, against barbarism" in different Italian cities for October 27th. On November 10 the national demonstration "Unity and solidarity against the government, racism and the Salvini decree" brings about 40 thousand people to the streets of Rome.

And it's not just the protest. Solidarity from below manages to organize itself by concretely ensuring that reception and inclusion that have been removed from the institutional agenda. Solidarity with Mimmo Lucano, the campaign to support the children of Lodi²⁷, unjustly excluded from access to the school canteen and school bus service, the support of some mayors and the many legal actions promoted by Asgi to ensure the registration of asylum seekers, the resistance actions carried out by the occupations of the fighting movements for the home (many of which have been evicted²⁸) and also a growing online activism in terms of communication try to react to the strategy of exclusion. Precisely in 2018, the network begins to convey many examples of viral antiracism, mostly acted by those who suffer racist discrimination and violence directly on their skin, with public complaints, ironic messages or video complaints. Spontaneous individual activism, mostly triggered by young people, seems to have a greater capacity to create empathy and to penetrate the meshes of hostility and indifference than the organized one²⁹.

In some cases, these initiatives manage to break through the wall of hostility and resentment even online, as in the case of the Sea Watch captain Carola Rackete³⁰ who, in June 2019, conquered a large part of public opinion with her act of resistance and a clear,

²⁷ For further details see Martino Mazzonis in this report.

²⁸ Among the most violent evictions, we remember those that took place in Rome in Piazza Indipendenza on August 24, 2017 and in Primavalle on July 15, 2019. Two different governments and two different Interior Ministers, united by their strategy of striking by force at the many housing occupations in the city which are largely inhabited by migrants and refugees.

²⁹ For further details see Lunaria, (Ed.), *Il ritorno della razza*, mentioned above.

³⁰ For further details see Paola Andrisani in this report.



human and politically solid language. Carola Rackete marks perhaps the first impasse in the xenophobic propaganda of the Interior Minister from the Lega and restores strength to all those groups such as Mediterranea, that, despite everything continued to operate at sea.

On 13 June 2019, the *Io accolgo* campaign, with its flashmob in the Spanish Steps, relaunched a message of welcoming and peace. The intention was to limit as much as possible the effects of the Salvini laws, encouraging widespread solidarity.

Unexpectedly, on August 20, the Lega/Movimento 5 Stelle government fell. A new turning point arouses expectations and hopes in at least part of the anti-racist movement. A political appeal of the campaign addressed to the new Government to demand the immediate withdrawal of the Salvini package is struggling to gather support³¹. The "Salvini laws" are still there. The Memorandum with Libya was extended on February 2, 2020.

The decade opened with the global economic crisis and ended with another extraordinary event, the proclamation of the state of emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic under which Italian ports are declared "unsafe". A very difficult moment for migrants and the anti-racist world called to reinvent, once again, solidarity from below, proximity services and its advocacy strategies. It is difficult to predict the outcome of these months of unprecedented "social distancing" in our country. The social and economic effects of the emergency will surely require a new extraordinary effort to prevent those who are always ready to breathe new life into the fire of racism from drawing from them.

A systemic vision of public policies, which stops relegating migration and immigration policies to the corner of "special policies", the further development of experiences of self-organized migrants' movement, a greater transversality of the actors

³¹ The "friendly" government leads to a more prudent and diplomatic approach that does not seem to have helped so far. The appeal basically calls for the abolition of the "Salvini laws", the cancellation of the Memorandum with Libya, the reintroduction of the permit for humanitarian reasons, the reopening of the Siproimi (ex Sprar) to asylum seekers, the reopening of Italian ports to ships providing aid at sea and a stop to rejections in Libya. It can be consulted here: <http://ioaccolgo.it/firma-lappello>



involved and a political and cultural agenda more independent from the one dictated by politics, could perhaps facilitate this task, which, of course, is not going to be easy.