

## CONTENTIOUS PRECARIOUS GENERATION IN ANTI-AUSTERITY MOVEMENTS IN SPAIN AND ITALY<sup>1</sup>

### LA PROTESTA DE LA GENERACIÓN PRECARIA EN LOS MOVIMIENTOS ANTIAUSTERIDAD EN ESPAÑA E ITALIA

**Massimiliano Andretta**

Department of Political Science  
University of Pisa, Italia  
massimiliano.andretta@unipi.it

**Donatella della Porta**

European University Institute and  
Scuola Normale Superiore, Italia  
donatella.dellaporta@sns.it

#### Abstract

This article focuses on the precarious generation protesting in Spain and Italy in times of crisis and austerity (2010-2012). Their many similarities notwithstanding, the two countries have experienced different types of mobilization against austerity measures. In Spain, a relatively autonomous mobilization –characterized by new collective actors and new forms of action– has made possible the building of a political actor, Podemos, able to seriously challenge the established political parties. In Italy, instead, the mobilization was dominated by established political actors, especially trade unions, did not produce innovative forms of action and has not been able to overcome (so far) the fragmentation of the social movement sector. In both countries, however, the anti-austerity protests have been characterized by a strong presence of what we call here the “precarious generation”, particularly exposed to the

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<sup>1</sup> While the two authors shared the thinking and writing of the all article, as some assessment process requires formal attribution, we declare that Donatella della Porta is responsible for sections 1, 2, and 3 and Massimiliano Andretta from section 4 to 7. We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, who helped us to better clarify important aspects of this article.

economic crisis and the austerity measures. By relying on data from several surveys conducted in demonstrations on social, economic and labor issues in the two countries from 2010 to 2011, in this article we single out differences and the similarities in terms of presence, social composition, grievances and emotion, collective identity and network embeddedness of the precarious generation. Our findings show that the precarious generation was almost equally present in the selected demonstrations in the two countries, share similar socio-graphic features and similar types of grievance and emotions. Nonetheless, in Spain it seems to have built a more cohesive and radical collective identity based upon a more informal and internet based network integration while in Italy it seems embedded in a more traditional and formal network, which prevented the formation of a strong collective identity. Moreover, while in Spain the differences between the older and the precarious generation reveal that, both have a strong identity based on different networks; more formal the older and more related to informal and online instruments the latter; in Italy, the older generation has a much stronger collective identity based on a organizational network, while the precarious one is less but still integrated in organizational network. We conclude that the more autonomous civil society tradition in Spain, together with the particular political opportunities, under the pressure of a harsher economic crisis, may account for the differences we found.

**Keywords:** Precarious generation; contentious; anti-austerity; movements; Italy; Spain.

### Resumen

Este artículo se centra en la protesta de la generación precaria en España e Italia en tiempos de crisis y austeridad (2010-2012). A pesar de sus muchas similitudes, los dos países han experimentado diferentes tipos de movilización contra las medidas de austeridad. En España, una movilización relativamente autónoma –caracterizada por nuevos actores colectivos y nuevas formas de acción– ha hecho posible la construcción de un actor político, Podemos, capaz de desafiar seriamente a los partidos políticos establecidos. En Italia, en cambio, la movilización fue dominada por los actores políticos establecidos, especialmente los sindicatos, no produjo formas innovadoras de acción y no ha sido capaz de superar (hasta ahora) la fragmentación de los movimientos sociales. En ambos países, sin embargo, las protestas contra la austeridad se han caracterizado por una fuerte presencia de lo que se ha denominado "generación precaria", particularmente expuesta a la crisis económica y las medidas de austeridad. Basándonos en datos de varias encuestas realizadas en protestas sobre cuestiones sociales, económicas y laborales en los dos países de 2010 a 2011, en este artículo destacamos las diferencias y las similitudes de la generación precaria en términos de presencia, composición social, sentimientos de agravio y emoción, identidad colectiva e integración en las redes. Nuestros resultados muestran que la generación precaria tenía casi la misma presencia en las protestas seleccionadas en los dos países, compartían características socio-demográficas similares y el mismo tipo de agravios y emociones. Sin embargo, en España, parece haberse construido una identidad colectiva más coherente

y radical, integrada a partir de unas redes informales y basadas en Internet; mientras que en Italia aparece arraigada a partir de redes más tradicionales y formales, lo que impide la formación de una identidad colectiva fuerte. Por otra parte, mientras que en España las diferencias entre la generación más mayor y la generación precaria revelan que ambas tienen una fuerte identidad en base a las diferentes redes que las sustentan (más formal en la mayor y más relacionada con instrumentos informales y online en la última); en Italia, la generación más mayor tiene una identidad colectiva mucho más fuerte sobre la base de una red organizativa, mientras que en la generación precaria ésta es menor, pero todavía integrada en una red organizativa. Llegamos a la conclusión de que una tradición más autónoma de la sociedad civil en España, junto con las oportunidades políticas particulares, bajo la presión de una crisis económica más severa, pueden dar cuenta de las diferencias encontradas.

**Palabras clave:** generación precaria, protesta, antiausteridad, movimientos, Italia, España.

*On May 15th 2011, indignant citizens started permanent occupation of Puerta del Sol in Madrid, building tent city for hundreds of people, but also other infrastructures for tens of thousands of visitors. In the following days, the mobilization quickly spread to hundreds of Spanish cities, all around the country. In fact, “the encampments rapidly evolved into ‘cities within cities’ governed through popular assemblies and committees. The committees were created around practical needs such as cooking, cleaning, communicating and carrying out actions. Decisions were made through both majority rules vote and consensus. The structure was horizontal, with rotating spokespersons in lieu of leaders. Tens of thousands of citizens were thus experimenting with participatory, direct and inclusive forms of democracy at odds with the dominant logic of political representation. Displaying a thorough mixture of utopianism and pragmatism, the new movement drew up a list of concrete demands, including the removal of corrupt politicians from electoral lists, while pursuing revolutionary goals such as giving ‘All power to the People’” (Postill, 2011).*

*On October 15<sup>th</sup> 2011, following a call for a transnational day of action by the Spanish Indignados, a march was organized in Rome. Participation was huge: 300 000 people according to many sources. However, only a few of these managed to arrive in Piazza San Giovanni because violent clashes between some groups of demonstrators dressed in black and the police disrupted the demonstration and made its conclusion impossible. The first violent incidents happened in Via Cavour between 2.30pm and 3pm: some groups of people dressed in black (between 100 and 200) attacked cars, cash machines and supermarkets, while other demonstrators tried to stop them. Between 3 and 4pm, between the Coliseum and Via Labicana, a few hundred militarised demonstrators in black outfits started attacking different targets, including a semi-abandoned office of the Ministry of Defence. The police*

*confronted them, and the clashes continued to Piazza San Giovanni, where some of the demonstrators, who had already arrived, fled, while others joined the struggle against the police. The violence extended resulted in 135 injured and much frustration among the activists, who had seen a large mobilization which had failed in its political development (della Porta and Zamponi, 2013).*

## 1. ANTI-AUSTERITY PROTESTS IN SPAIN AND ITALY: AN INTRODUCTION

While anti-austerity protests in the years 2000s were important in both countries, they took different characteristics. The two mentioned episodes are emblematic of such differences. In Spain, in fact, new forms of protests mobilized masses of those who had been directly affected by austerity policies. While previously existing networks –built around the anti-Bologna process protests organized by the students, the struggle against evictions, the platform of young people against precariousness– clearly played a role in the development of the protests, the camps that spread from Madrid to all over Spain were able to mobilize a large number of first time protesters, with massive experimentations with participatory and deliberative forms of democracy in the squares (Romanos, 2011). Even when the police evicted the activists from the squares, protest continued indeed in neighbourhoods as well as around public services and common goods. The stunning growth of Podemos, as a party related with the *indignados* movement, testifies of the long-term effects of a cycle of contention that involved a large part of the Spanish population.

In Italy, instead, while strikes and regular rallies dominated contentious politics, with unions and social movement organizations as main collective actors (della Porta, Mosca and Parks, 2015; della Porta and Reiter, 2012; della Porta and Andretta 2013), the innovative forms of action did not spread. Indeed, when the global day of action for October 15<sup>th</sup> was organized globe-wide, in Italy, no broad movement had emerged in direct imitation of the 15M in Spain. The self-proclaimed «Italian indignados» camping in Piazza San Giovanni in Rome were only a few in number and not recognised by other social and political actors. An important role in anti-austerity protests had been assumed in the last three years by the student movement, which however in the Spring of 2011 had been weakened by a clear defeat on the education reform. Therefore, the organisation of the Italian mobilisation of October 15<sup>th</sup> became a contentious issue among Italian social movements, with different political groups trying to gain symbolic strength and visibility as the organisers of the protest. In particular, the tensions in the social movements' organizational field were built around some main cleavages between the global justice generation

and an emerging anti-austerity generation; as well as between different movement coalitions that had grown around the mobilisation of the preceding three years, especially involving students, steelworkers and grassroots environmental committees. Around these cleavages, a complex web of misunderstandings, tensions and internal struggles developed during the whole summer, jeopardizing attempts at building formal or informal structures of organisation towards October 15<sup>th</sup> (della Porta and Zamponi, 2013). Afterwards, while protests continued in different forms, attempt to give them an electoral outcome got very limited results.

The different developments in the recent years are embedded in, if not determined by, different protest cultures that dominated in the two countries. While of course the more rapid and dramatic impact of the financial crisis in Spain versus Italy can in part account for the more dramatic expression of discontent in the former than in the latter, protest repertoires appeared as influenced by different historical experiences. As research about the evolution of the Global Justice Movement (GJM) in the two countries had already indicated, strong in both countries, the transnational protests of the beginning of the years 2000s took different characteristics in the two countries. In Spain, decentralized and grassroots tendencies dominated, resonating with libertarian traditions as well as with the mobilization of ethnic and national territorial minorities. In Italy, the three main nodes present in the global justice movement –the ecopacifists, the anti-neoliberals and the (inheritor of the) Disobedients– had interacted in the local social forums that flowered before and after the anti-G8 protest in Genoa. Even after the demise of most of them, occasions for collaboration have been frequent (Andretta, 2005; della Porta, Andretta, Mosca and Reiter, 2006; della Porta, 2007). In Italy, however the traditional political tensions among different social movements sectors emerged again in the declining phase of the GJM (Andretta and Piazza, 2010) and remained visible in the years to follow. Especially, as the center-right Berlusconi government was substituted by a grand-coalition in support of the self-defined “technical” government led by Mario Monti, the implementation of anti-austerity measures found weak opposition by unions and associations that had traditionally developed near to the center-left parties.

As the GJM dynamics in the two countries before, the recent waves of anti-austerity protests seem also to have been fuelled and constrained by the social movement traditions present in the two countries, which also reflect the historical production of two different types of civil society.

Those historical experiences produced a very different kind of civil society in the two countries, also as a result of the different timing and types of tran-

sition toward democracy. In an interesting comparison between the types of civil societies emerged and consolidated during and after the democratization process in the two countries, Riley and Fernandez found a stronger but less autonomous civil society in Italy: “In the current democratic period, civil society is organizationally stronger in Italy than in Spain. Italians are more likely than Spaniards to join voluntary associations, there are more cooperatives per capita in Italy than in Spain, higher percentages of Italians than Spaniards are members of unions, and Italians join parties and vote in greater numbers than their Spanish counterparts. Further, Italians are more likely to petition their government than Spaniards, and Italy has experienced more general strikes and riots in its postdictatorial democracy than Spain” (2014: 453). At the same time, the authors found that the two civil societies differ also in terms of linkage with political parties, more heteronomous in Italy and more autonomous in Spain. This seems particularly true for the relations between trade unions and political parties (ibid.: 454-459). Indeed, the traditional reliance on left-wing parties, that had turned to the center, might have contributed to weakened contentious capacity in Italy than in Spain, especially after the Partito Democratico (PD) started to support or participate in governments that were perceived to implement the neoliberal agenda.

While the differences in the types of organizations involved in the two waves of anti-austerity protests easily fits such an interpretation, we should also consider the earlier and higher exposition to the economic crisis and the related harsher austerity measures, which in turn could have produced more grievance in Spain than in Italy among the most exposed sectors of the population, especially among what we call “precarious generation”. In fact, as for past critical junctures, “social change may affect the characteristics of social conflict and collective action in different ways. It may facilitate the emergence of social groups with a specific structural location and potential specific interests” (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 35).

These differences accounted for, we also expect cross-national similarities in the ways in which the precarious generation (defined as made of those between 14 and 40 years old) mobilizes. This generation faces indeed a very different type of life expectations and/or conditions than the previous ones, and it is more seriously threatened by the current economic crisis. This makes particularly interesting to investigate how these citizens overcome barriers of marginalization, network and develop collective identities. Our precarious generation is, like Guy Standing’s precariat, composed of people ‘who have minimal trust relations with capitalism or the state, making it quite different from the salariat. And it has none of the social contract relationship of the proletariat,

whereby labour securities were provided in exchange for subordination and contingent loyalty, the unwritten deal underpinning welfare state' (Standing, 2011: 9). It is in fact characterized by a sum of insecurity on the labour market, on the job (as regulations on hiring and dismissals give little protection to workers), on the work (with weak provisions for accident and illness), on income (with very low pay), all these conditions having effects in terms of accumulation of anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation (ibid: 10 ff.). As he noted, precariat "is not just a matter of having insecure employment, of being in jobs of limited duration and with minimal labour protection (...) it is being in a status that offers no sense of career, no sense of secure occupational identity and few, if any, entitlements to the state and enterprise benefits that several generations of those who found themselves as belonging to the industrial proletariat or the salariat had come to expect as their due" (ibid.: 24).

By precarious generation, we refer to a life cohort for which precarity, as Standing defines it, become a most widespread condition. The extent to which the precarious generation is a class very much depends, in Marxian terms, on the extent to which it is aware of the common class interests and engages in collective action (Andrew, 1983). This is rather an empirical question that we try to investigate here.

By relying on data of several surveys conducted in demonstrations on social, economic and labor issues in the two countries from 2010 to 2011, in this article we investigate the differences and the similarities in terms of presence, social composition, grievances and emotion, collective identity and network embeddedness of the precarious generation. The article is structured as following: in the following section (2), we present the research method and the logic guiding the selection of the demonstrations surveyed; section 3, 4, 5, and 6, introduced by a literature review on the dimensions we decided to focus on, deal respectively with the presence and the social composition of the precarious generation; its type of grievances and emotions; its collective identity; and, finally, its network embeddedness. In each dimension we also compare older and precarious generations within countries. In the conclusions, we will summarize the most important findings and suggest some tentative explanations.

## 2. THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In addressing the above-mentioned questions, we will use data on surveys of protest demonstrations in Italy carried out by Cosmos (Centre on Social Movement Studies) at the European University Institute within an international consortium coordinated by Bert Klandermans and Stefaan Walgrave on a project named Contextualizing Contestation. The surveys were carried out mainly

between 2010 and 2013, in the years of hardest recession. They covered dozens of demonstrations in countries most hit by the crisis, such as Spain and Italy, and those which seemed instead less hard hit, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and Sweden, with Czech Republic and the U.K. in between (see [www.protestsurvey.eu](http://www.protestsurvey.eu)). We here focus only on Spain and Italy.

In each country, different types of demonstrations were selected, involving both old and new social movements. For this article, we restricted the analysis to four type of demonstrations in both Spain and Italy: the traditional first may (one held in Barcelona in 2010 and one in Florence, 2011), a typical anti-austerity protest (one in Rome in 2012 and one in Vigo 2011); an anti-neoliberal type of protest (one in Barcelona in 2010 and one in Florence in 2012) and, finally, a new type of protest involving directly the precarious generation (the EuroMayday in Milan in 2011 and the Real Democracy Demonstration in Barcelona in the same year). We tried to maximize in this way the similarities across the compared demonstrations. Demonstrators were sampled randomly and given a questionnaire to mail back. About 1,000 questionnaires were distributed at each demonstration, with an average return rate of 20 per cent for the Italian case. In order to reduce selection bias arising from the tendency of interviewers to select some categories of interviewee rather than others, 'pointers' were asked to assign randomly selected demonstrators to the interviewers (van Stekelenburg, Walgrave, Klandermans, and Verhulst, 2012; Andretta and della Porta, 2014). The core questionnaire included questions about socio-demographic variables; mobilization channels and techniques; social embeddedness; instrumental, identity and ideological motives; emotions; conventional and unconventional political behaviour; political attitudes (including political interest, left-right self-placement, political cynicism); and awareness of and identification with protestors elsewhere in the world. A short face-to-face questionnaire was also filled in during the demonstration and used to control for return bias. Interviewers were instructed to administer such short questionnaires to every five people selected. This allowed us to control for possible bias introduced in the return of the questionnaires. The variables included in the short face-to-face questionnaires that can be compared with those in the longer postal questionnaires are: gender, education, age, membership in organizations staging the demonstration, participation in past demonstrations, and the extent to which interviewers were determined to participate in the selected demonstrations. Our bias analysis demonstrated that on only two variables (gender and participation in previous demonstrations in the last twelve months) and only in some of the demonstrations there were weak statistically significant differences between the two samples.



For each demonstration, we also filled in fact sheets in order to assess context variations, which included short interviews with both organizers and police (before and after the demonstrations) as well as an analysis of media coverage of the events. Moreover, the interviewees were asked to complete another short survey reporting on such characteristics of the demonstration as number of participants, slogans, weather conditions, and so on, as well as specific questions about responses to the survey.

Using the surveys conducted in the selected Italian and Spanish demonstrations, this article focuses on the analysis of what we call “precarious generation” involved in them. The term “generation” implies an operationalization based on age. We decided to consider as members of the precarious generation those demonstrators born after 1970. This means that they were 42 years old or less at the moment of the selected demonstrations.

### 3. PRESENCE AND SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE PRECARIOUS GENERATION IN ITALY AND SPAIN

Research on political participation has long suggested that political participation increases with social centrality. The first research on political participation, based upon surveys, revealed very low levels of participation (Lagroye, 1993: 312). Moreover, the number of citizens involved diminished dramatically for the more demanding forms of participation. The normative problems involved in this selectivity were increased by the non-representativity of those who participated: in fact, higher levels of participation were observed, *ceteris paribus*, for the better educated, middle class, men, middle-age cohort, married people, city residents, ethnic majority, and citizens involved in voluntary associations (Milbrath and Goel, 1977). In a similar way, in their research on participation in the US, Verba and Nie (1972) observed that the higher the social status of an individual, the higher the probability that s/he will participate; and this observation has been confirmed in a seven-nation comparison (Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978) that concluded that social inequalities are reflected in unequal political influence. Usually, higher social status implies in fact more material resources (but also free-time) to invest in political participation, as well as a higher probability of being successful in their careers (via personal relationships with powerful individuals) and especially a higher sense of personal achievement. Psychological disadvantages overlap with social disadvantages, reducing the perception of one’s own “droit de parole” (Bourdieu, 1979: 180). If participation responds to demands for equality, it tends however to reproduce inequalities since “any individual participates, at least potentially, with the differential (or unequal) coefficient (if we do not want to use the word ‘privilege’,

that would have an *ancien régime* flavour) that characterizes his/her position in the system of private interests” (Pizzorno, 1966: 90).

Social movement studies have challenged this elitist vision by presenting protest as a resource of the powerless (Lipsky, 1970). They noted indeed that those who protest present some different characteristics than those who use conventional forms of political participation: if the middle classes do vote more, workers strike more often; and if those in middle age are more present in party-related activities, students occupy their schools and universities (della Porta, 2015). Nevertheless, social movement studies also recognized that protesting requires some biographical availability (McAdam, 1986, 1989). First of all, time availability and responsibilities are considered as relevant. Initially, there was indeed an expectation that growing older (getting a job, marrying, having children) implied less flexibility in the use of one’s own time as well as increasing responsibility which makes protest less likely: it would be more costly and potentially risky for those middle-age persons than, for instance, for young students. Also, there was an expectation that some material resources could help in buying some time flexibility. While research indicated however an effect of protesting on those socio-biographical conditions –delaying the formation of family or pushing towards some types of work rather than others– it could not definitively confirm that the taking up of work and family responsibility reduces the commitment to protest. While indeed married life tends to reduce the level of commitment (Corrigall-Brown, 2011), having a full-time job increases participation in voluntary organizations, and even in high-risk forms of participation (Nepstad and Smith, 1999; Wiltfang and McAdam, 1991; Passy and Giugni, 2001). In particular, growing older, getting a job and building a family do not necessarily reduce participation in protest. Recent research noted however that some conditions which affect biographical availability can impact on the step which precedes actual choices to participate: the development of positive motivations towards protest seems to decline for married people and full-time or part-time employees (Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006). According to Verhulst and Walgrave (2009), first-timers are indeed more often young, but profession does not play a role.

Our research indicates that both in Spain and in Italy the presence of a precarious generation, made of people born after 1970, in many types of demonstrations occurred in the period of crisis, is very strong. The precarious generation in all the demonstrations selected is slightly more present in Spain (50.5%) than in Italy (44.8%). If we look at its presence across the types of demonstrations (table 1), we see that while in Italy the precarious generation concentrated in what we called “Youth against the crisis” type (80.5% vs. 60.5% in Spain),

in Spain it participated more also in the other types: if in the “anti-neoliberal” type it was almost equally present in the two countries (about 53% in Italy and about 57% in Spain), the Spanish precarious generation constituted about 46% of the “anti-austerity” demonstrators (against 35% in Italy), and as much as 32% in the traditional “May First Day”, against only 10% in Italy.

What is more, only 7% in Italy and 12% in Spain are “first timer”; while more than half participated more than 1 and less than 5 demonstrations before. Besides demonstrating, the two precarious generations show a high degree of commitment in various types of protest actions (Fig. 1).

**Tab. 1. Presence of Precarious Generation in Italy and Spain across types of demonstrations<sup>2</sup>**

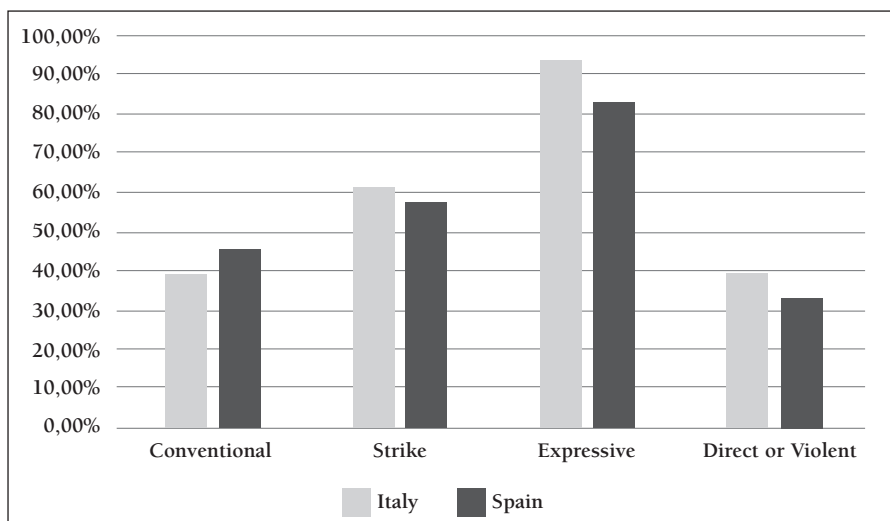
COUNTRY		Types of protests				
		Traditional May day	anti-austerity	anti-neoliberal	Youth against the crisis and for democracy	
Italy	Older Generation	95 90,5%	122 64,2%	62 47,3%	24 19,5%	303 55,2%
	Precarious Generation	10 9,5%	68 35,8%	69 52,7%	99 80,5%	246 44,8%
	Total	105 100,0%	190 100,0%	131 100,0%	123 100,0%	549 100,0%
Spain	Older Generation	120 68,2%	90 53,9%	33 43,4%	135 39,2%	378 49,5%
	Precarious Generation	56 31,8%	77 46,1%	43 56,6%	209 60,8%	385 50,5%
	Total	176 100,0%	167 100,0%	76 100,0%	344 100,0%	763 100,0%

It is worth noticing that no much difference can be seen on the basic socio-graphic features of the two protesting precarious generations: in countries about 50% is woman, In Spain 20% was born after 1986, and 25% In Italy; about 50% in both countries was born between 1977 and 1986; 70% in Spain and 80% in Italy has at least a tertiary first stage level of formal education; 51% in Spain and 63% in Italy has actually an unstable job position, either student (about 25% in both countries), or unemployed, or part-time employed, or individually self-

<sup>2</sup> N=1.312; Cr.s V: presence across types in Italy, .48; significant at .001 level; presence across types in Spain, .23, significant at .001 level; presence across countries and types, .32, significant at .001 level

employed. It is to be mentioned that the precarious generation involved in the two May First demonstrations selected differ a bit, though for the Italian case the number of participants belonging to this category is too small (just 10) to generalize: in the first may in fact demonstrators of the precarious generation is much more male than the average in the other demonstrations selected (60% in Italy and 64% in Spain), only one participant in Italy and about 20% in Spain was born after 1986, and 50% in Italy but only 40% in Spain between 1977 and 1986; and only 35% in Spain, but 70% in Italy, has actually an unstable job position. While no relevant differences have been found in terms of formal education.

**Figure 1. Precarious generation participation in type of protest actions in Spain and Italy<sup>3</sup>**



It is also interesting that both precarious generations differs from older generations. In Spain, the older generation is prevalently male (63%), less formally educated (16% completed only the basic level of education, against 5% of the precarious generation; and 35% against 60% completed the second stage of tertiary or more); has a stable job position (81% against 41%, either with a full time job, 62%, or with a pension, 18%). In Italy, the older generation gender is more equilibrated than in Spain (53% of males); but 42% against only 15% of the young completed only the secondary level of formal education; and 83% against 37% has a stable job position (54% has a full time job and 28% is retired).

<sup>3</sup> N=630; no difference is statistically significant

In sum, in both countries, more or less the same type of precarious generation mobilized in the demonstrations selected, and in both countries their substantially differ from older generations in terms of socio-graphic features. Their mainly unstable job position did not prevent their active participation in demonstrations. It seems that, under the pressure of a serious threat, such as the crisis and the austerity policies, which is seriously challenging their present life and future expectations, their biographical availability helped them to take the “street” in protest.

#### 4. GRIEVANCES AND EMOTIONS IN THE PRECARIOUS GENERATION

Grievances theories have long been challenged by more recent approaches to social movement studies (Klandermans, 1997), suggesting that what is to be analysed is more how grievances are translated into actions than grievances per se. If this is certainly a good point, it does not allow however for a complete dismissing of the grievances analysis. As van Stekelemburg and Klandermans (2010: 2) have recently argued, “At the heart of every protest are grievances, be it the experience of illegitimate inequality, feelings of relative deprivation, feelings of injustice, moral indignation about some state of affairs, or a suddenly imposed grievance”. If it is true that grievances do not produce automatically protest, the current economic crisis and the spread of protest in many countries, has brought about a renewed attention of the structural socio-economic transformations producing different grievances and collective action (della Porta, 2015). Social psychologists, are among the few who continued to pay attention to grievances theories, by underlining how together with other dimensions, the relations between grievances and emotions is worth analyzing to explain collective action: the sense of injustice often produces indignation which in turn is transformed in anger (Klandermans, Van der Toorn and Van Stekelenburg, 2008).

While research on social movements initially shied away from emotions and stressed the ordinariness of the people who participate in movements, more recently there has been a recognition that social movement politics is passionate politics (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001), as “participants in rituals communicate whole complexes of ideas and embodied feelings” (Barker, 2001: 188). Social movements are certainly rich in emotions: “Anger, fear, envy, guilt, pity, shame, awe, passion, and other feelings play a part either in the formation of social movements, in their relations with their targets... and in the life of potential recruits and members” (Kemper, 2001, p. 58). Emotions often mentioned in relation with social movements include grief, anger, joy, pride, love, and indignation (Gould, 2003).

Different typologies have been built that distinguish emotions that address a specific object from more generic one, or short-term versus long term emotions, or reciprocal versus shared emotions (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001). Emotions of trauma (grief, shame, helpless anger) are distinguished from emotions of resistance (pride, happiness, love, safety, confidence, righteous anger) in research on the movement against child sexual abuse (Whittier, 2001: 239). Feelings such as anger, outrage or fear can be particularly relevant in recruitment; indignation, pleasure, and pride can reinforce commitment (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001).

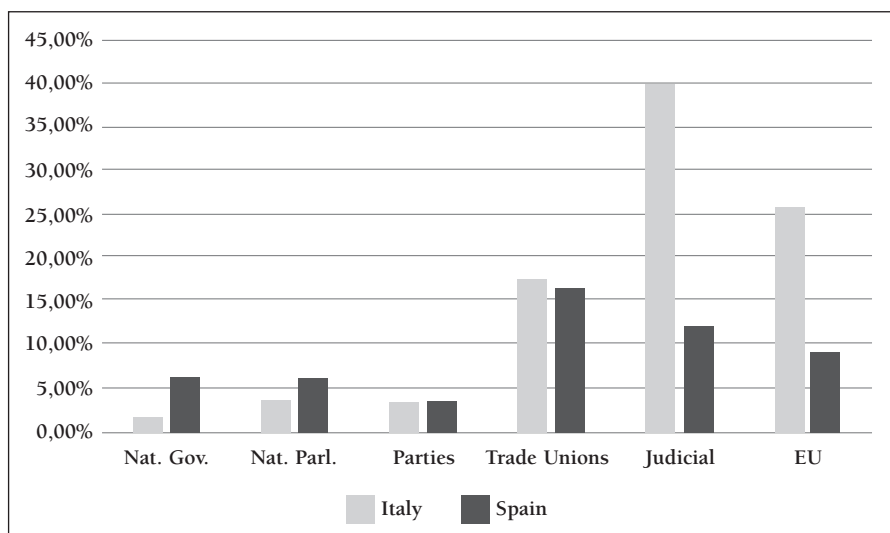
Emotions are embedded in context, where social rules define the proper emotions to feel and the proper way to express them (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001). In fact, emotions are produced in social interactions: rituals produce emotions, and emotions interact with cognition in determining an individual's behaviour. In authoritarian regimes as well as in democracies, public rituals are staged in order to produce communities of feeling (Berezin, 2001).

Social movements as well as movement events tend to transform emotions (e.g. transforming shame into solidarity), or to intensify them (Collins, 2001: 29). Successful rituals produce collective effervescence and group solidarity, strengthening the emotional energy. For example, some protest rituals and language helped transform shame into pride in the gay and lesbian communities (Gould 2001). In particular, social movements transform emotions by modifying the everyday relations the "old" emotions were attached to (Calhoun, 2001: 55). Specific groups or specific environments nurture master emotional paradigms (or habitus) that define appropriate emotions (della Porta and Giugni, 2009).

In order to investigate the grievances, we focus on the protestors attitudes toward the political system and main political actors, as well as on their satisfaction with the democracy in their country. Trust is generally very low, showing similarities in the political grievance of the two precarious generations: national governments, the parliaments and political parties receive a very low level of trust, while trade unions, the judicial system and the European Union are trusted slightly more (Figure 2). It is worth noticing that in Italy the judicial system and the European Union are trusted much more than in Spain by the precarious generation: about 40% in Italy but only 12% in Spain trust the former, and about 26% against only 9% the latter. A possible explanation may be the different political contexts, in Italy the "hated" Berlusconi government has been several time challenged by judicial investigation and the EU has been perceived as a potential ally against the national government; while in Spain the hardship of the austerity measures have made more evident the role of the EU

in supporting and even dictating those measures. Satisfaction with democracy is very low in both countries. The precarious generations seem to believe that the anti-austerity measures could not have been passed if democracy had worked in their country: on a scale from 0 (not satisfied at all) to 10 (very much satisfied), participants answers in the two countries score only about 2.4

**Fig. 2. Precarious generation's (quite and very much) trust on institutions and political actors in Spain and Italy<sup>4</sup>**



If we look at the differences within the countries between precarious and older generations, in Italy, the latter trust a bit more, but still very little, political institutions: 3.4% vs. 1.6% the national government; 6.2% vs. 3.7% the parliament; 7.8% vs. 3.3% political parties; 29% vs. 17% trade unions (here the difference is statistically significant at .001 level; Cr.s V: .13); 46% against 40% the judicial system; and 28% against 26% the EU. Dissatisfaction with democracy is at the same level. In Spain, instead, with the exception of the judicial system and the EU, distrusted at the same level by both the generations; all other institutions and actors are trusted significantly more by the older generation: the national government, 13% against 6% (Cr.s V: .11, at .01 level); the parliament, 14% against 6% (.13, at .001 level); political parties, 10% vs. 4% (.12, at .001 level); and trade unions, 28% against 16% (.14, at .001 level). In the 0-10 scale of

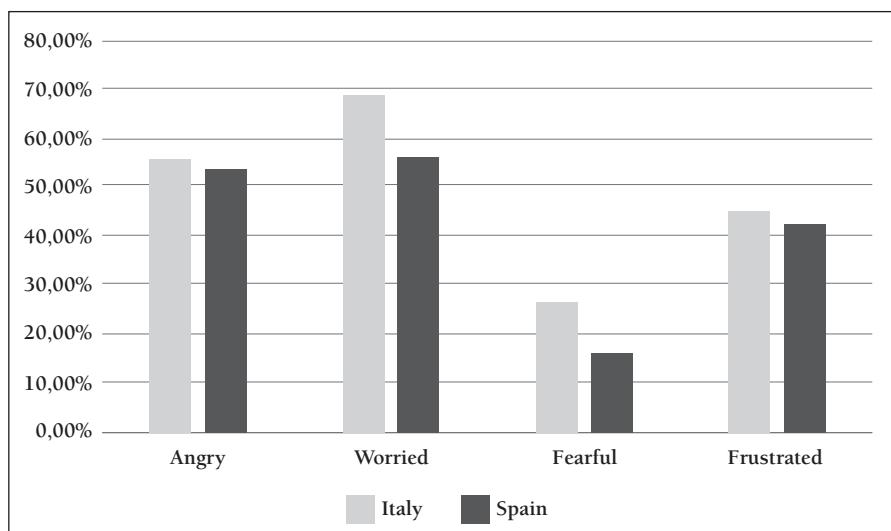
<sup>4</sup> Cr.s V: none of the differences are statistically significant, except trust in Judicial System - .32, at .001 level, and in EU - .23, at .001 level

democracy satisfaction, while the precarious generation stops at 2.4, the older one reaches 3.4 (ETA: .22, significant at .001 level).

Dissatisfaction with democracy calls into question also the role of political parties, which receive a very low trust, and only 20% of the precarious generation in both countries feel very close to a particular political party. The attitude towards elections differs very much in the two countries. If the majority of both generations (more than 50%) disagree with the sentence “Vote is useless in this country”; only 1% in Italy but as much as 82% in Spain did not vote in the last elections before the demonstration. In Italy, in fact, the precarious generation grievances seem to be much more channelized by existing extreme leftist parties (about 58% voted for a communist party there) than in Spain (only 3%). No much differences we found on this electoral aspect between precarious and older generations within countries (though in Spain 76% instead of 82% voted no party).

As far as emotions are considered, our questionnaire included a battery of four items, which sought to measure the emotional side of demonstrators' mobilization. Respondents were asked to express how angry, worried, frustrated or fearful they felt when they thought of the problems they were protesting about using a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very strongly). In Figure 3 we illustrated

**Figure 3. Strong emotions of the precarious generation in Italy and Spain<sup>5</sup>**



<sup>5</sup> N: 610; Cr.s V are significant only for “Worried” - .13 at .001 level – and “Fearful” - .12 at .001 level



the percentage of those feeling “very strongly”: most demonstrators of the precarious generation strongly feel angry, worried and, a bit less than 50%, frustrated (while only 25% fearful), while the Italians seem a bit more worried and fearful than Spaniards.

In Spain, not much differences concerning emotions emerge between the precarious and the older generation; while, in Italy, interestingly, the older one is angrier (70% vs. 56%;  $\chi^2(1) = 15$ , at .001 level), but less fearful (18% vs. 26%) and frustrated (40% vs. 46%).

Other indicators, often associated with emotions are the individual's and the group's sense of efficacy. Here too, no relevant differences are associated with the two protesting precarious generations, who present, in both countries, a high feeling of effectiveness: 62% in Spain and 70% in Italy agree or strongly agree with the item “My participation can have an impact on public policy in this country”; and as much as 81% in Italy and 85% in Spain with the item “Organized groups of citizens can have a lot of impact on public policies”. Also the older generations in the two countries share the same feeling of effectiveness.

To sum up, the precarious generation in Spain and Italy does not significantly differ in terms of “indignation” toward the political system, probably considered unable to deal with their life problems, and “deaf” to their voice. The very low trust in political parties and representative institutions is linked to their strong dissatisfaction with democracy, but, if this makes them particularly angry and worried, it does not undermine their confidence on the impact of their voice.

Two relevant differences can be singled out though: while in Italy the precarious and the older generation share the same level of distrust, in Spain the older generation shows if not more trust, at least less distrust than the precarious generation; and, while in Spain the combination of political grievance and dissatisfaction translated in a (temporary?) exit strategy from electoral politics, in Italy it is (was?) still channelled by traditional but radical political parties into the electoral arena. Without much enthusiasm, however, as the identification with those parties remains low.

## 5. PRECARIOUS GENERATION: A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY?

Alessandro Pizzorno (1966) had already noted that the characteristics of political participation are rooted in the systems of solidarity that are at the basis of the very definition of interest: interests can in fact be singled out only with reference to a specific value system, and values push individuals to identify with wider groups in society, providing a sense of belonging to them and the

willingness to mobilize for them. In this perspective, participation is an action in solidarity with others that aims at protecting or transforming the dominant values and interest systems. The process of participation requires therefore the construction of solidarity communities within which individuals perceive themselves and are recognized as equals. Political participation itself aims at this identity construction: before mobilizing as a worker, an individual has to identify herself as a worker and feel that she belongs to a working class. Identification as awareness of being part of a collective *us* facilitates political participation. As Pizzorno (1966: 109) stated long ago, in fact, the latter ‘increases (it is more intense, clearer, more precise) when class consciousness is high’. In this sense, it is not the ‘social centrality’ mentioned by Milbrath and Goel (1977), but rather the centrality with respect to a class (or a group)– as linked with the identification with that class (or group) –that defines an individual’s propensity to political participation. And this explains why some groups, composed of individuals that are endowed with low status, under some conditions are able to mobilize more than other groups. Participation is therefore explained not only by individual resources, but also by collective resources.

In fact, recent research has looked at the shift from individual to group identities, and then the politicization of such identities. Research on cleavages had indeed singled out a cultural dimension, as informed by ‘the set of values and beliefs that provide a sense of identity and role to the empirical elements and reflects a self-awareness of the social group(s) involved’ (Bartolini, 2000: 17, see also Bartolini and Mair, 1990). Regarding the class cleavage, Rokkan (1999: 286) noted that ‘conflicts between owners and employers have always contained elements of economic bargaining but they have also strong elements of cultural opposition and ideological insulation’. Also in social movement studies, collective identification is expected only if there is awareness of the fact that one’s own destiny is in large part linked to material conditions, while the lack of such awareness is defined as false consciousness (Snow and Lessor, 2013).

Identity formation is a complex process, and it is difficult to operationalize. As far as our data are concerned, relevant indicators included in the questionnaire are identification with other demonstrators and the organizations staging the demonstrations, as well as various motivations, values and norms that pushed participants into the street. This set of variables reveals strong differences in the collective identity of the precarious generation in the two countries.

The data of our research indicate that the precarious generation in Spain identifies much more both with other participants (84% identify “quite” or “very much” against only 56% in Italy;  $\text{Cr.s } V = .31$ , significant at .001 level)

and the organizations staging the demonstration (70% vs. 49%,  $Cr. V = .22$ , significant at .001 level). It is worth noticing that while in Spain the precarious generation has the same high level of identification than the older one, in Italy the latter shows a much higher identification: 76% vs. 56% quite or very much identify with other participants ( $Cr.s V: .21$ , significant at .001 level), and 67% vs. 49% with organizations ( $Cr. V: .18$ , at .001 level).

With respect to the motivations, the precarious generation in Spain seems more motivated to participate in the selected demonstrations “to express their view” (55% vs. 45% very much agree with this item;  $Cr.s V: .10$ , significant at .01 level); “to press politicians” (56% against 29%;  $Cr.s V: .26$ ; significant at .001 level); and because they “feel morally obliged” (48% vs. 22%;  $Cr.s V: .26$ ; significant at .001 level); and above all “to defend their interests” (as much as 54% against only 20% in Italy;  $Cr.s V: .33$ , significant at .001 level). In Italy a bit more declare they participate in order “to raise awareness” (61% vs. 51%; not significant), and “to express solidarity” (49% against 45%, not significant).

If we build an indicator of “motivation strength”, ranging from 0 (no motivation at all) to 1 (strongly motivated)<sup>6</sup>, we notice that the mean is .51 in Spain and only .37 in Italy (ETA: .23, significant at .001 level). Moreover, while in Spain the precarious and the older generation is characterised by the same level of motivational strength; in Italy the older generations is instead significantly more motivated (.47 vs. .37, ETA: .16, at .001 level). Interesting differences refer to especially two items, which shows the different types of collective identity of the two generations in Italy: the older generation is much more motivated by the pressure that their protest make on politicians (56% vs. only 29%;  $Cr. s V: .27$ , significant at .001 level); and by the need to express solidarity (62% vs. 49%;  $Cr. s V: .13$ , significant at .001 level).

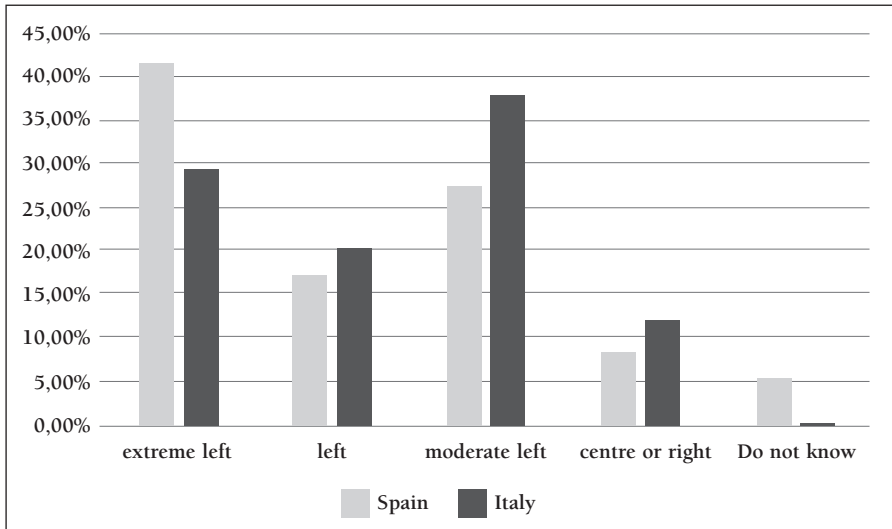
Figure 4 represents, instead, the self-location of the two precarious generations on a classical left-right scale, showing that in Spain the young demonstrators declare to be much more leftist than in Italy. Again, while in Spain no difference we found between the precarious and the older generation, in Italy the latter places itself much more than the former on the leftist side of the scale (about 77% vs. 59% placed either on the extreme left or in the left category;  $Cr. s V: .22$ , at .001 level).

Summarizing, it seems that although basically the same kind of precarious generation mobilized in Italy and Spain, in the latter country it appears to have produced a more intense collective identification based on strong motivation,

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<sup>6</sup> The indicator is built by dichotomizing each type of motivation getting value “1” if the participant strongly agree with the relative item; then normalizing the sum of all motivations dummies.

Figure 4. Precarious generation self-collocation in the left-right scale in Spain and Italy<sup>7</sup>



especially linked with its “interests” and firmly located on a leftist position. While in Spain a strong collective identity characterises both the precarious and the older generation, in Italy the precarious generation appears much weaker, less cohesive and less rooted in a leftist position than the older one.

## 6. NETWORKS AND EMBEDDEDNESS OF THE PRECARIOUS GENERATION

A different set of explanations for participation looks at embeddedness in social networks (Diani, 1992; della Porta, 2013). The main assumption is that participation in protests requires supporting networks that provide positive incentives, not only in affective terms but also in cognitive ones. Networks which are relevant for the explanation of differential political participation are those that provide for information about protest events as well as emotional support. In line with literature on social capital, these networks are expected to provide norms of reciprocity and reciprocal trust that are relevant for collective action. Embeddedness helps overcome the free-rider phenomenon by providing a sense of commitment as well as social control: so much so, that the single most relevant factor in explaining participation in protests is whether or not one has been asked to participate (Schussman and Soule, 2005).

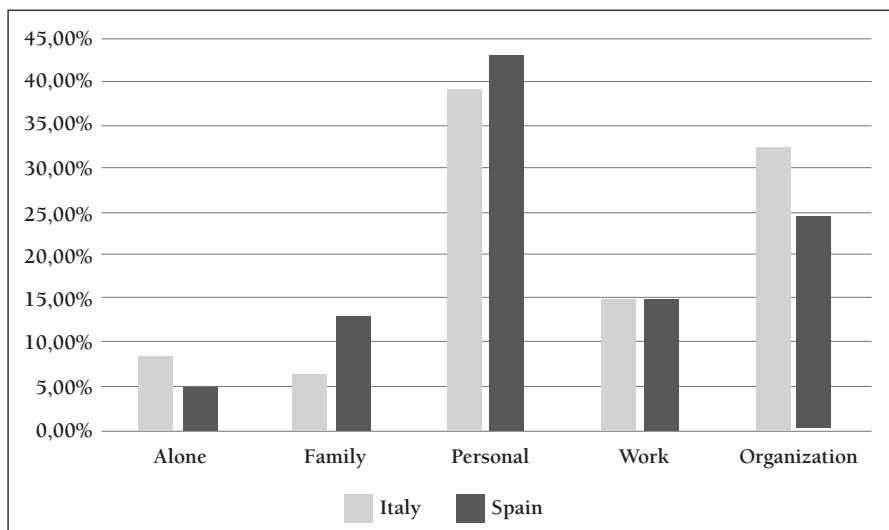
<sup>7</sup> N=610; Cr.s V: 22, significant at .001 level

The presence of dense but informal networks distinguishes social movements from other collective actors, which instead have clear organizational boundaries. In social movements, individuals and organizations, while keeping their autonomous identities, engage in sustained exchanges of resources oriented to the pursuit of a common goal. The coordination of specific initiatives, the regulation of individual actors' conduct, and the definition of strategies all depend on permanent negotiations between the individuals and the organizations involved in collective action. No single organized actor, no matter how powerful, can claim to represent a movement as a whole. (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 21). In new social movements, a networked, loosely coordinated structure emerged as a better fit to address the various and variable needs of mobilization as well as those of survival in the doldrums (Diani, 1995; Taylor and van Dyke, 2004). The network structure allows movements to maintain a plural repertoire, testing various potential options and combining their effects. The capacity to form and sustain these networks is therefore a very central task in resource mobilization: categorical traits (such as class) are not sufficient for collective action; they need to be supported by dense network ties.

In a cross-national study on protest participation based on the World Values Survey, Russell Dalton and his colleagues (Dalton, van Sickle and Weldon, 2010) noted that 'involvement in social groups creates networks for recruitment in political life' (ibid.: 59). In fact, while grievances appear to be unrelated to protest, "education and social group membership are strong and significant predictors of protest" (ibid.: 67). Similarly, in research on immigrants' mobilization, Klandermans, Van der Toorn and Van Stekelenburg (2008) observed that participation in associations was very highly correlated with protest, as well as with other dimensions connected with protest, such as identification with an ethnic group, sense of efficacy and feelings of injustice. Indeed, 'integration into civil society –whether through ethnic or cross-ethnic networks– as reflected in embeddedness and dual identity, reinforces action participation. These aspects of integration create the preconditions for immigrants to turn discontent into action' (ibid.). Also according to Verhulst and Walgrave (2009), a characteristic of first-timers that clearly distinguishes them from frequent demonstrators is their weak organizational embeddedness (see also Saunders, Grasso, Olcese, Rainsford, and Rootes, 2012).

To operationalize network embeddedness we use three sets of variables: the first set includes with whom respondents were protesting (if alone, with their family, with friends or colleagues, or with other members of the organization they belong to); the second, the most important channels of information through which protesters knew about the demonstration (mainstream or alternative media, family, informal, work or organizational channels); the third, their member-

Figure 5. Network embeddedness of the precarious generation in Spain and Italy<sup>8</sup>



ship in different types of organizations. The first set of variables has been aggregated by considering a scale of network embeddedness. This means that if a protesting individual is accompanied by personal friends and acquaintances, she is included in more external network; if she was with colleagues, she would be put in work networks; and if she was with other members of an organization, she would be considered part of an organization network.

Figure 5 shows that the protesting precarious generation in Spain is more embedded in informal networks, such as family or friends; while in Italy more in organizational networks. At the same time, in both countries, the level of formal embeddedness is higher in the older generation: in Italy 44% vs. 32% demonstrated with co-members of the organization, 20% vs. 39% with friends or acquaintances; and in Spain 37% vs. 24% with the former, and 29% vs. 42% with the latter.

As far as the channels of information are concerned, the most important, and indeed interesting, difference refers to the much higher use of online alternative media and social networks by the precarious generation in Spain than in Italy (Figure 6). Here too, the difference with the older generation in the two countries are relevant: in Spain, 50% of the older generation, against 33% of the precarious one use much more the organizational channels of informa-

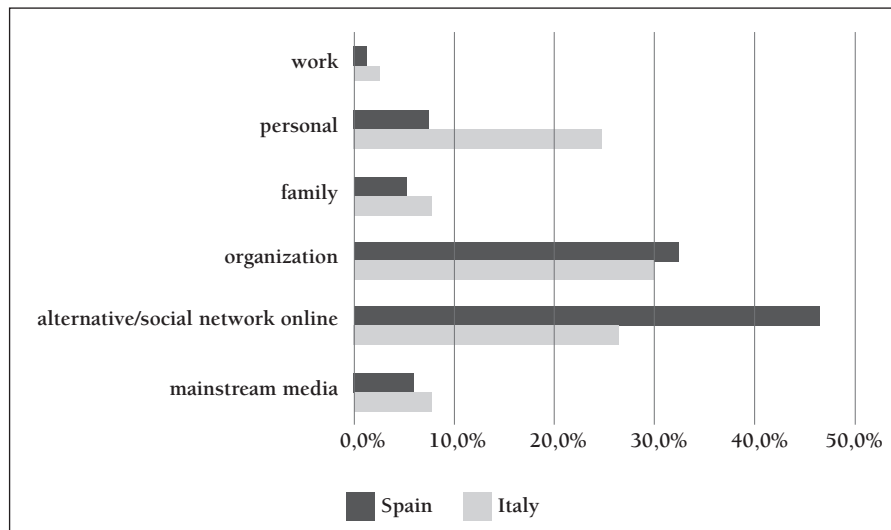
<sup>8</sup> N: 610, Cr. s V: .15; significant al .01 level

tion, and only 22% vs. 47% online instruments; in Italy, 50% vs. 30% the former and 15% vs. 27% the latter.

Finally, as far as the organizational membership is concerned, 25% of precarious generation participants in Italy and 26% in Spain are members of one organization staging the demonstration; as much as 38% in Spain and 30% in Italy has no membership at all (referring to the last 12 months at the moment of the demonstration). In both countries about 20% of the precarious generation belongs to a political party, while as much as 44% in Spain and 46% in Italy belong to a social movement organization; the only relevant difference refers to membership in trade unions, more widespread in Spain (37%) than in Italy (only 20%).

What counts more, is the difference between the precarious and the older generation within the two countries: in Spain, 51% of the older vs. 26% of the precarious generation belongs to one organization staging the demonstration (Cr. s V: .23, significant at .001 level), only 24% vs. 38% has no membership in the last 12 months (.16, at .001 level), 30% vs. 20% is a political party member (.12, at .001 level), 63% vs. 37% is member of a trade union (.29, at .001 level); and 60% vs. 44% belongs to one social movement organization (.16, at .001 level). In Italy, 55% vs. 27% is member of a staging organization (.28, at .001

Fig. 6. Most important channels of information of the precarious generation in Spain and Italy<sup>9</sup>



<sup>9</sup> N=596; Cr. s V: 28; significant at .001 level

level), 23% vs. 33% has no membership, 25% vs. 20% is member of a party, but as much 50% vs. 20% of a trade union, and, finally 41% vs. 46% of a social movement organization.

To sum up, the two protesting precarious generations are embedded in different types of networks in the two countries, mostly informal and based on new, online, type of communication, in Spain, and more formal and based on traditional organizational type of communication in Italy. The difference in terms of network and membership between the older and the precarious generation is more evident in Spain than in Italy. The older generation here is much more formally embedded and organizationally driven. While in Italy, though the older generation is much more organizationally embedded, the precarious generation has difficulty in building its distinct network integration.

## 7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, we singled many similarities in the ways in which the precarious generations mobilized in the two countries. First of all, both countries saw a high participation among young people. Notwithstanding the material and symbolic constrains usually associated with a lack of a stable job (and a stable life), young people in precarious position took the street in protest against neoliberalism. Antiausterity policies made the threats unbearable with the result that also a generation that had called itself “with no future” made their voice heard.

The precarious generation in Spain and Italy share similar socio-graphic features, they are equilibrated in term of gender, more than the older generation, they are more formally educated and they are prevalently student, unemployed, and effectively “precarious” in term of job position.

In both countries, moreover, this generation shows the type of indignation against the political system, and the traditional political parties, which generated anger and worries, without however lowering, preventing, or questioning a strong sense of collective efficacy.

But the similarities stop here.

If in both countries this generation was embedded in several networks, those were found more personal in the horizontal social movement culture that prevails in Spain, and more within formal movement organizations in the more associational contentious culture we had described in Italy. Moreover, the traditional forms of the left organizations, mainly political parties and trade unions, have been found more relevant in the older generation network integration in both countries. But, while those are still relevant, though to a less extent, for the younger cohort of protesters in Italy; in Spain the precarious generation seems



more able to experiment new forms of network integration, and to exploit more effectively internet and the social networks.

The more autonomous, though weaker civil society in Spain, might have left the space open for a new more radical, more cohesive and motivated collective identity, while a stronger, but more heteronomous civil society in Italy might have reduced the opportunities for a more cross-sector movement. As already noticed in the introduction, this may account for the old trade unions dominating antiausterity protest in Italy, which might have limited the space for new actors and identities to emerge.

It seems that the more structured, and party-dominated, civil society in Italy is being preventing the precarious generation to find the space to build a new collective identity and new forms of organizations. There, young people need to adapt to the pre-existing “bins” of the old collective identity in which they identify less and less.

These differences can explain why the precarious generation in the two countries differently linked their protest action to the electoral action. Even if high level of mistrust and negative feelings towards institutional politics prevailed, Spanish young activists were able to take electoral politics seriously, when chances opened up at that level. Countering the expectations that the extremely high level of mistrust and the lack of practice with elections would reduce the chance of finding party allies, the stounding victories of movement-related parties like Podemos and Guanyem indicates an availability towards the use of multiple repertoires and organizational formats. The same level of distrust, was instead electorally channelized in Italy by established often radical leftist parties, still rooted in both social movement tradition and civil society organizations.

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MASSIMILIANO ANDRETTA is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Sciences of the University of Pisa, where he teaches Political Science and Political Communication. His research interests are mainly on social movement and political participation studies. He has been involved in several national and international research projects and he is currently collaborating in a project on Anti-austerity protest in Europe at the Schuman Centre, European University Institute. Among his recent publications, we mention "Power and arguments in global justice movement settings", in D. della Porta e D. Rucht (eds), *Meeting Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013; (with Donatella della Porta) "Dynamics of Individual Participation", in *Journal of Civil Society*, 10:4, 2014, and "Il Movimento 5 Stelle in Toscana: un movimento post-subculturale?", in Roberto Biorcio (ed.), *Gli attivisti del Movimento a 5 Stelle: dal web al territorio*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2015.

DONATELLA DELLA PORTA is professor of sociology at the European University Institute, where she directs the Center on Social Movement Studies (Cosmos). She is also directing a major ERC project *Mobilizing for Democracy*, on civil society participation in democratization processes in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America. Among her very recent publications are: *Methodological practices in social movement research* (Oxford University Press, 2014); *Spreading Protest* (ECPR Press 2014, with Alice Mattoni), *Participatory Democracy in Southern Europe* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2014, with Joan Font and Yves Sintomer); *Mobilizing for Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2014); *Can Democracy be Saved?*, Polity Press, 2013; *Clandestine Political Violence*,

Cambridge University Press, 2013 (with D. Snow, B. Klandermans and D. McAdam (eds.)). Blackwell Encyclopedia on Social and Political Movements, Blackwell. 2013; Mobilizing on the Extreme Right (with M. Caiani and C. Wagemann), Oxford University Press, 2012; Meeting Democracy (ed. With D. Rucht), Cambridge University Press, 2012; The Hidden Order of Corruption (with A. Vannucci), Ashgate 2012. In 2011, she was the recipient of the Mattei Dogan Prize for distinguished achievements in the field of political sociology.

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