

Review: Katia Pilati, Migrants' Political Participation in Exclusionary Contexts: From Subcultures to Radicalization

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Katia Pilati, *Migrants' Political Participation in Exclusionary Contexts: From Subcultures to Radicalization*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, ISBN 978–1–349–71645–6, 123 pages

Review by Marius Ioan TĂȚAR

In a high-quality democracy, citizens should not only have equal rights to participate in politics, but these rights should also be used in an equal manner. Low and unequal participation rates might undermine democracy particularly if political engagement is obstructed by structural constraints which can widen and reinforce gaps in terms of unequal political influence between those who participate and those who do not (Tătar 2015b). Persons who vote, contact politicians, sign petitions or participate in demonstrations can make their voice heard in the political arena and their interests have better chances of being represented in the political process, compared to those that do not/cannot participate (Tătar 2015a, Tătar 2013, Tătar 2011b, a). If the factors that hinder the political engagement of different segments of population are based on unequal access to participatory resources and structures, then the terms in which political participation processes take place in a democracy might not be fair (Teorell 2006) inducing a participatory bias that compromises the principles of political equality and inclusion that underlie democracy (Dahl 1989, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Thus the political exclusion of different parts of the population raises serious concerns about the quality of democracy. The issues of political exclusion among persons of migrant origin are particularly salient in the European Union given the increasing inflow of foreigners in EU countries. The number of people residing in an EU Member State with citizenship of a non-member country on 1 January 2016 was 20.7 million, representing 4.1 % of the EU-28 population (Eurostat 2017). Integrating immigrants and allowing them to participate in the host countries at similar levels as natives constitutes thus a major challenge to policies aiming to build a cohesive society in Europe.



Focusing on three migrant communities, Filipinos, Egyptians and Ecuadorians living in Milan, the book authored by Katia Pilati, *Political Participation in Exclusionary Context*, aims to provide a detailed picture on the effect of a closed political context on migrants' civic and political engagement. The book is structured into 6 parts (5 chapters and conclusions). In the introductory chapter, Pilati presents the main hypothesis of her study, arguing that the effect of an exclusionary context on political engagement is moderated by two sets of factors: the level and type of individuals' organizational engagement and the level and type of networks organizations can access. In the second chapter, the author discusses the individual and contextual factors affecting migrants' political participation. Pilati illustrates how the cultural and structural dimensions of the political context might affect migrants' participation using the case of Milan. The third chapter investigates migrants' civic and political participation in Milan, which is also compared with other European cities. The fourth chapter links the involvement of migrants in various types of organizations (i.e. ethnic, pan-immigrant, native organization) to the level and forms of their political participation (i.e. engagement in any political activity, mainstream protest, mainstream conventional activities, immigration-related protests, immigration-related conventional activities). In chapter five, Pilati maps the organizational networks and political engagement of migrant organizations.

Based on both individual (micro) and organizational (meso) survey data collected by a larger team of researchers, the author generally points out the exclusion of most individual migrants and migrant organizations from the political sphere in Milan (p. 75). The study unfolds at different levels of analysis. At the individual level, the book highlights different degrees of political exclusion by comparing patterns of engagement in various forms of conventional and unconventional political activities by migrants in Milan vis-à-vis natives. Evidence on political exclusion is also noted when comparing patterns of migrants' engagement in Milan with levels of migrants' political participation in several other European cities (p. 41 and 75). The author uses this finding to suggest that indeed there are effects of political context on migrant participation. At the organizational level, Pilati notes that political exclusion translates into a weak migrant organizational structure, and a limited presence of migrant organizations in the political sphere (p.75). Most activities by migrant organizations in Milan are concentrated on service-delivery and provision, while political activities play a

limited role only (p. 58). The effect of organizational networks on political engagement of organizations depends on the ethnic group considered. Overall, the author concludes that constraints are posed both on the possibility for migrants to get organized in migrant organizations, and by excluding migrant organizations out of the political sphere (p. 75).

The results presented in the book mainly confirm findings of previous studies on political participation in general, and particularly of research on migrants' participation. Pilati finds significantly lower levels of migrant individuals and organizations involvement in various political activities compared Italian natives, and she pinpoints the exclusionary context as the main factor that hinders migrant political integration in Milan. While the author compares on several occasions migrant participation in Milan and other eight European cities, the focus of this study remains bounded to only one local political context, namely the municipality of Milan. To a certain extent, this approach limits not only the generability of results but also the author's ability to fully grasp the effects of exclusionary contexts and analytically disentangle it from the potentially confounding effects of other macro variables. By joining the findings at individual and organizational levels, Pilati illustrates three different ways migrants can face an exclusionary context: sub-cultural participation, externally driven participation and the radicalization of the repertoires of action. However since the exclusionary context in Milan is the same for all migrants, political context alone cannot explain why some migrant communities use certain modalities of action and not others. The author resorts to the meso level, namely organizational networks, to explain why some migrant groups are more inclined to use certain repertoires of action. She demonstrates that among Egyptians, links that organizations build with other organizations are crucial for accessing all different kinds of political activities while among Filipinos, isolated organizations or small clusters of ethnic organizations are not likely to facilitate access to the political sphere (p. 58).

While certain types of organizations (migrant or not) generally promote certain types of political action repertoires, it is less clear why some migrant organizations like for instance those of Filipinos and Egyptians in Italy have different strategies to cope with an exclusionary political context in the host country. Migrants' individual and organizational behavior might be influenced not only by the current political opportunity structure in the host country, but also by deeper cultural patterns rooted in the country of origin. For instance Voicu and

Tufiş (2017) have shown that immigrants' confidence in political institutions is influenced by two confidence contexts: one from the origin country and one from the host country. As confidence in institutions depends on the values formed during early childhood, the international migrant's confidence in political institutions in the current country of residency will be influenced by the confidence context from the country of origin (Voicu and Tufiş 2017). In other words, political behavior patterns formed in the country of origin might have lasting consequences in terms of immigrants' attitudes and behaviors towards the political sphere in host countries. Thus, to fully grasp the effect of political context on migrant political participation, it might not be sufficient to compare levels of political engagement among immigrants for instance living in Milan (Filipinos or Egyptians) with immigrants residing Stockholm (i.e. Turks and Chileans). Migrants in these cities not only face different political contexts, but they also have different origins and cultural backgrounds which should be taken into account. This also has research design implications for the study of political integration suggesting that context in both host and origin countries might influence migrants' political participation. Moreover, macro contextual circumstances might significantly interact with meso (organizational) and individual level variables in influencing migrants' political participation. Therefore, multilevel statistical models might be more suitable for assessing the interaction effects between factors situated at various layers.

Overall, the book provides a timely discussion of the intermediary role of organizations in mobilizing migrants' political participation in exclusionary contexts. Despite several limitations in terms of research design and data collection the book is clearly structured and develops interesting hypotheses that contribute to the scholarly literature and could provide a solid basis for future research.

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