Reconsidering frame analysis from a visual perspective in social movements studies.

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Introduction

While engaging in protest activities, social movements elaborate new meanings related to specific issues and seek visibility for them in the public sphere. In the case study presented in this paper, for instance, Italian activist groups sustaining the Euro Mayday Parade against precarity elaborated new meanings related to the concept of “labour market flexibility” considered from the point of view of those working with short-term contracts and insecure employment. The creation of new meanings related to the (contentious) issue in question was a long-lasting process, which began before activist groups went in the streets to protest and claim for better working and living conditions. During assemblies and preparatory meetings, indeed, activist groups collectively defined what labour market flexibility meant in the daily lives of workers. Due to repeated negotiated interactions among activists, complex definitions of the social problem that labour market flexibility brought with it emerged. In a nutshell, activist groups involved in the Euro Mayday Parade labelled the social problem “precarity” and named those workers experiencing it “precarious workers”. Together with other protest events concerning precarity, the Euro Mayday Parade attempted to render visible in the public sphere the existence of precarious workers and the social inequalities they experienced due to their short-term contracts. They interpreted labour market flexibility in a different way than other political actors, among which left-wing and right-wing political parties and, also, traditional trade unions, did. While engaging in protest activities, therefore, activist groups involved in the preparation of the Euro Mayday Parade also engaged in a continuous process of sense-making that lead to the creation and visibility of new system of meanings related to labour market flexibility.

The process I described speaking about the Euro Mayday Parade is one of the most important activities that social movements carry on before, during and after protesting. Starting from the seminal work of Bateson (1972) and Goffman (1959; 1974), social movements scholars name this complex definitional process “framing” and its outcome as “master frame” and “collective action
frame”. The former are usually “generic” symbolic devices and work as “a grammar that punctuates and syntactically connects patterns or happenings in the world” (Snow and Benford 1992, 138). The latter, instead, are “derivative” and usually linked to specific protest events, such as a rally or a picket (ibidem). As such, they are “action oriented set of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). On the whole, social movements invest a great deal of energy and resources in framing activities, which are crucial tool at different stages of mobilization: they “devote considerable time to constructing particular versions of reality, developing and espousing alternative visions of that reality, attempting to affect various audiences’ interpretations, and managing the impressions people form about their movement” (Benford 1993, 178).

As such, social movement scholars following the frame analysis approach devoted their attention to different, though interrelated, topics concerning framing activities and their outcomes. Some scholars focused on how activist groups carry on the elaboration of collective action frame in the backstage phases of protest and to what extent they succeeded in mobilizing people through negotiated interactions during assemblies and other informal meetings. In this vein, for instance, David Snow and his collaborators showed the relevance of intra-movement “frames disputes” in the construction of collective action frames linked to nuclear disarmament (Benford 1993) and to what extent framing activities were successful in mobilizing people and according to which factors (Snow and Benford 1988). Other scholars, instead, focused more on the outcomes of framing activities, namely master frames and collective action frames, considered as powerful indicators of collective identification processes. For instance, Donatella della Porta and her collaborators employed the concept of master frame to reconstruct collective identities in contemporary transnational social movements and, in particular, to investigate the emergence of the so-called global justice movement (della Porta 2007). In a similar vein, Pierre Monforte used collective action frame as one of the relevant indicators to understand the Europeanization of collective identities of social movement organizations mobilized about asylum issues (Monforte 2008). Finally, other scholars focused on how collective action frames and master frames circulated in the public sphere and went through further definitional work when they meet other social actors, such as the media. In these studies, the concepts of news frame and/or media frame are also used to investigate how collective action frames produced by social movements are represented in the media environment, where struggles for representation and recognition continuously take place. Apart from the seminal work of Todd Gitlin about the SDS in the U.S.A. during the 60s (Gitlin 1980), another relevant example of this branch of research is the
study by Charlotte Ryan about strategies and tactics activist groups might use to gain access for their collective action frames in the mainstream media (Ryan 1991). From a different perspective, also Myra Marx Ferree and her collaborators investigates how social movement organizations in Germany and the U.S.A. were able (or not) to have a voice and impose their frames in the “media master forum” (Ferree, Gamson et al. 2002). Taking into consideration different stages of mobilization, I therefore divide the analysis of framing activities and their outcomes in three sub-fields of research respectively centered on: 1) intra-movement framing activities and their mobilization potential; 2) collective action frames and master frames as indicators of collective identities circulating in the social movement milieu; 3) re-framing activities at the public level by other social actors than social movements, such as the media.1

This paper contributes to the second branch of research outlined above. I consider collective action frames as useful analytical tools to catch significant snapshots of collective identification processes.2 In particular, I aims at adding further understanding of the role that different data sources play in the reconstruction of collective action frames and, hence, of collective identification processes. The first paragraph shall present the case study I chose to investigate: the Euro Mayday Parade against precarity. The second paragraph, shall discuss the methodology I employed to reconstruct collective action frame related to precarity as it developed during the protest campaign in point. I shall do this starting from a general discussion about visuals in the Euro Mayday Parade and then introducing the analytical dimensions I took into consideration to reconstruct collective action frames. I shall finally present the three data sources that I employed to construct relevant data about collective action frame. After having briefly introduced the results of the analysis, the third paragraph shall compare the three data sources with respect to the analytical dimensions presented in the previous paragraph. Conclusions shall sum up the most relevant points emerging in the paper and propose further employment of visuals as data sources from a framing perspective.

2. Case study

1 For another, more complete overview of the frame analysis approach in social movement studies see Benford and Snow (2000).
2 Collective action frames, however, are not the only analytical dimension through which collective identification processes could be investigated. Organizational templates, networks of relations, processes of resource mobilization and contentious performance are also worth considering to understand collective identification processes.
To illustrate at the empirical level the triangulation of data sources, I chose a specific protest campaign named the Euro Mayday Parade. Originally, the parade was a local protest event against precarious employment in Italy. It occurred for the first time in Milan on May 1, 2001 and its name was Mayday Parade. Three activist groups initiated the Mayday Parade: a group of auto-organized casual workers, the Chainworkers Crew (CW), activists belonging to the social centre named the Bulk and the local section of the Confederazione Unitaria di Base (CUB), a radical trade union. As the years went by, the Euro Mayday Parade expanded due to a shift in geographical scale (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 95) that transformed the protest event from a local/national protest campaign, as it was from 2001 to 2003, to a national/transnational one, as it was from 2004 onwards. The involvement of more and more activist groups led to the parade exponential growth. According to the organizers, protest participants in Milan, which were about 5,000 in 2001, became about 100,000 six years later in 2006.

One of the goals at stake in the Euro Mayday Parade was the creation of an alternative system of meaning about labour market flexibility, which was, at the end of the 90s, a sort of “political mantra” crossing the European countries (Beck 2000, 3) and also Italy (Gallino 2001; Gallino 2007). Activist groups involved in these struggles claimed that labour market flexibility, and especially its deregulated version in Italy, was not the best solution to the economic crisis and the unemployment emergency. Rather, it soon became the source of new social exclusion since it led to the emergence of “precarious workers” that suffered from income instability and the lack of (new) social rights. Obviously, this work at the symbolic level was strictly linked to the construction of a collective identity able to include different types of workers in the same social

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3 Throughout the paper, the expression “Euro Mayday Parade” refers to the protest campaign in its entirety, the term “parade” refers to the very parade on May 1.
4 Precarity have many meanings both within and outside the social movement milieu, in which this term and other related expressions had been widely elaborated, also from a theoretical point of view. For a review of some definitions about precarity as elaborated among some activist groups connected to the Euro Mayday Parade see Neilon and Rossiter (2008). In general, “precarity” is linked to the type of working contract, that should be short-term, but it affects individuals in a more general way, since it “affects their behaviors and become existential precarity” (Fumagalli 2007, 29). Translation from Italian by the author.
5 The CW, born in 1999, immediately created its own website in order to promote “… media and mall activism for awareness-building and unionization of precarious workers” (Chainworkers Crew n.d.). For a more detailed history of the CW and its approach to political struggles against economic precarity see Chainworkers Crew (2001).
6 The Deposito Bulk was a social centre born in Milan from 1997 to 2006. Social centre, centri sociali in Italian, are abandoned buildings, frequently owned by the State, that are occupied by groups of people in order to have a space to promote underground cultures and offer auto-organized services to the neighbourhood where they are located. In some cases, social centres are also spaces in which activists live.
7 A large group of workers who did not recognize themselves in traditional trade unions founded the CUB in 1992. Radical trade unions in Italy “… emerged during the 1990s from a series of labour mobilizations. In their forms of action, organizational formulas and discourses, they differed from the three traditional, confederate trade unions – the leftwing CGIL, the Catholic CISL and the UIL – not only in their critique of neo-liberal reforms, but also in their emphasis on direct action, participative democracy and ‘class identity’” (della Porta and Mosca 2007, 6).
8 In this paper, I will focus only on the national level of the Euro Mayday Parade.
9 Source: www.chainworkers.org and Euromayday mailing list at www.euromaday.org
actor. The elaboration of the political category named “social precariat” in the context of the Euro Mayday Parade, for instance, went in this direction.

In Italy, one of the social categories more negatively affected by precarity are, together with migrants, young women (Beccalli 2007). Since the Euro Mayday Parade aimed at elaborating a collective identity that was inclusive and able to represent numerous types of precarious workers, I decided to look at how and to what extent the gender issue was included in the collective identification processes that the network of activist groups involved in the Euro Mayday Parade carried on from 2001 to 2006.

1. Visuals and the frame analysis approach
When began investigating the Euro Mayday Parade, I first focused on call for actions, official declarations and other types of texts produced in the context of the protest campaign. Among the material I collected, however, many documents contained images. The participation to the Euro Mayday Parade in Milan, moreover, let me discover how much “visual” this protest campaign was: there were trucks representing precarity and precarious workers through icons and symbols, postcards and other artefacts in which the visual level played an important role were distributed among participants. The official website of the Euro Mayday Parade also revolved around a specific graphic style and included posters, postcards and other material to be used in order to support the protest campaign. To some extent, therefore, the case study required me to include the visual level in my analysis in order to fully grasp collective identification processes linked to the protest campaign. After considering the role of images in the Euro Mayday Parade (Mattoni and Doerr 2007; Mattoni 2008), I understood that I had to clarify some methodological concerns when including images in the study of social movements. Since I considered collective action frames as one of the significant indicators to see the construction of collective identity, I specifically addressed questions related to the integration of the visual level in the frame analysis approach.

Other authors already inserted this level of communication in their analysis of collective action, especially when it matched with the study of media representation of mobilization. According to Charlotte Ryan, images have an important role in framing activities and the resulting frames, both for social movements and the media (Ryan 1991). She employed analytical dimensions such as “images” in her study about strategies and tactics that social movements develop to obtain media

10 The concept of framing, indeed, proved to be a useful analytical device to understand how social movements and mainstream media interact (Ryan, Carragee et al. 2001).
coverage for their frames. More in general, to consider visual in the study of collective action is not something new. The role of colours in social movements, for instance, was important to understand the creation and discursive maintenance of collective identities (Chesters and Welsh 2004; Sawer 2007). The performative role of visual texts, moreover, was also recognized in recent struggles against precarity in Italy (Vanni 2007). From a different perspective, a recent article on the representation of gender in the global justice movement showed the “gendered representation” of protestors in Czech and British alternative media (Kolarova 2004). Drawing from visual studies, Nicole Doerr and Simone Teune argue the need to consider the visual level of communication in the investigation of social movements and propose a theoretical model that cross various forms of (visual) expression with different lines of interpretation, among which the framing perspective (Doerr and Teune forthcoming).

This paper intends to contribute to the ongoing debate about the role of the visual communicative level in social movements from the framing perspective. In particular, I shall compare the role that different communication levels have in the reconstruction of collective action frames. The next paragraphs shall split collective action frames in three analytical dimensions and, then, outline the three communicative levels at which collective action frames might be constructed by activists and reconstructed by researchers.

3. Analytical dimensions and data sources

According to Snow and Benford, social movements are “signifying agents” (Snow and Benford 1988, 198) that engage in framing activities while organizing protest. Framing activities sustain the creation of meaning related to contentious issues and mobilization in three interrelated ways: they identify the social problem from which insurgents suffer; they single out potential solutions to the social problem in point and they give valid reasons to people for mobilization. These three “core framing tasks” are named respectively: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing (Snow and Benford 1988; Snow and Benford 1992). I used the elaboration of such a definition of framing activities to single out three working dimensions according to which reconstruct collective action frames related to the Euro Mayday Parade. I especially relied on the first two core framing tasks, namely diagnostic and prognostic framing. I assumed that when highlighting a social problem through diagnostic framing, social movements also constructed the collective social actor suffering from the social problem. I split, diagnostic framing in two separated activities, each answering to a precise question related to collective identification processes. In the
first place, the construction of a general “we” answering the basic question: “who we are”. I named this analytical dimension “diagnostic framing A”. I considered, then, the construction of the social problem that the general “we” experience answering another basic question: “what problem do we have”. As for prognostic activities, instead, I only considered the elaboration of possible solutions to the social problem in point. In this case, the basic question was “what solution do we propose”. In short, I had a threefold analytical grid according to which reconstruct collective action frames and single out the role that the gender issue had in them: diagnostic frame A, diagnostic frame B and prognostic frame.

The second step to be done was the construction of relevant data sets providing information about collective action frames. To put it in other words, I had to single out among which empirical material I might catch instances of collective action frames. Documents produced by social movements, such as call for actions and official declarations as usually seen as the places in which collective action frames might be easily see at work (della Porta 2007). They are written texts which are supposed to be the result of collective writing during assemblies. They represent, therefore, the point of view of all the networked activist groups mobilized against a certain contentious issue.

To consider the textual level of documents generated by social movements is certainly important, but relying only on this type of documents risks oversimplifying collective identification processes and imparting only one side, the most public one, of collective identities. This was clear when taking into account the considerable amount of visuals that circulated in the Euro Mayday Parade, as I anticipated earlie. To avoid the risk of oversimplification, I adopted a “triangulation” (Denzin 1975) strategy related to data sources. I used three data sources, each implying a different level of communication at which the elaboration of collective action frames might occur: written documents, visual materials and semi-structured interviews with activists.11 With regard to written documents, I collected 6 calls for action, one for each year the Euro Mayday Parade took place, and other materials produced in the context of the protest campaign. With regard to visual materials, the sample included 22 posters, postcards and other artefacts that

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11 This paper presents some collateral outcomes of my dissertation on media practices developed by activist groups mobilized against precarity. The interviews I rely on in this paper are only a part of those I conducted, which lasted about 1 hour and a half and concerned various themes concerning the media. The initial and final part of each interview, however, focused on the meanings activists attached to the concept of precarity both on a personal and collective basis. I used these parts of the interviews as data sources to reconstruct collective action frames related to precarity. Since I was particularly interested in how and to what extent gender issues entered these collective action frames, I only used 10 interviews, those involving women activists, out of 40.
activist groups elaborated to promote the protest campaign and distributed along the parade.\textsuperscript{12} I retrieved these documents in three ways: downloading them from websites directly or indirectly connected to the Euro Mayday Parade;\textsuperscript{13} participating personally to the parade in 2005 and 2006; thanks to activists I interviewed, who frequently gave me some of the documents and materials they had produced. With regard to semi-structured interviews, the sample I used in this paper included 10 semi-structured interviews with women activists that had been engaged in the organization of the protest campaign.\textsuperscript{14}

4. Comparing texts, talks and visuals

Before comparing the three data sets, it is worth introducing the outcomes of the analysis, which I sum up here in three main points. The first point refers to the (re)construction of collective action frames related to precarious employment: the analysis of diagnostic dimension imparted a twofold definition of precarity, which had both a positive and negative semantic meaning. In the Euro Mayday Parade, therefore, two collective action frames emerged: “precarity as a challenge to face” and “precarity as an opportunity to explore”. The two of them differed with regard to the diagnostic frame, while they presented the same prognostic dimension, which contained the claim for a continuity of income, so as to benefit from labour flexibility without suffering from precarious employment. The Euro Mayday Parade, therefore, directly targeted national governments demanding deep changes in the welfare state system. The second point, instead, focuses on the introduction of the gender issue in the collective action frames. Quite unsurprisingly, the construction of “precarious women”, which often matched the one of “precarious mothers”, was exclusively attached to the negative semantic pole of precarity in the elaboration of the collective action frame and, in particular, concerning its diagnostic dimension.

\textsuperscript{12} Due to the loose and fluid organizational structure of the Euro Mayday Parade, usually each activist group willing to participate to it produced its own materials. Since the Euro Mayday Parade was, after all, protest campaign with a low degree of coordination, call for actions, posters and other materials were also produced to represent the whole network of activist groups sustaining it. I considered this kind of documents and ignored the former because I was interested in the collective action frame related to the whole protest campaign.

\textsuperscript{13} I consulted in particular, though not exclusively, the following websites: www.chainworkers.org and www.euromayday.org.

\textsuperscript{14} When the interviews took place, among 2006 and 2007, among the 10 interviewees 1 was younger than twenty, 5 were older than twenty and younger than thirty, 3 were older than thirty and younger that forty, and 1 was older than forty. When I asked the interviewees to define their employment conditions, 1 defined herself a high-school student, 1 a university student, 1 unemployed, 6 short-term workers and 1 open-end worker. Among the 6 short-term workers, 3 worked in the information and communication sector, 1 in the education sector, 1 in the social cooperative sector and 1 in the academic research sector. All the interviewees defined themselves as near to social centers, squatted spaces and/or grassroots activist groups, except 1 who declared its membership to a traditional trade union.
Consequently, at the level of the prognostic dimension, the request of “rights for precarious mothers” represented the gender issue in the collective action frame.

The third point, finally, was mainly a methodological concern related to the use of texts, talks and visuals data sources to reconstruct collective action frames. While the gender issue was present both in talks and visuals, in fact, it had difficulties in entering the textual level of documents generated by social movements, such as call for actions. To put it in other words, the textual level imparted a partial image of the collective action frame about precarity as it was constructed in the Euro Mayday Parade, which was to some extent completed by the use of visual images representing women. Triangulation of data sources in the study of collective action frames, therefore, proved to be a valid methodological tool to catch the complexity of collective identification processes. At the same time, triangulating texts, talks and visual stimulated some methodological reflections, that I take into consideration in the following sub-paragraphs devoted to the reconstruction of collective action frames related to precarity and the insertion of the gender issue within them.

4.1 Reconstruction of collective action frame
As I already stated above, the analysis of the three data sets showed the existence of a twofold diagnostic frame which recombined in one diagnostic frame. In the call for action of the Euro Mayday Parade, indeed, precarity was a risk to face, but also as an opportunity to explore. On the whole, people that experienced precarity as a living and working condition, was framed as a composite social subject, that included different types of workers and a variety of social categories all suffering from the social problem in point. The basic collective name for this social subject was ‘precarious workers’ though other expression were also used in the course of the Euro Mayday Parade. In order to limit the degree of challenge that precarity bring in individual lives and, at the same time, maintain the positive sides of being short-term workers, the Euro Mayday Parade proposed the introduction of “basic income” for everyone. This would lead to income continuity despite the discontinuity of jobs.

That said, it is interesting to see where prognostic and diagnostic frames stand in the three data sets each related to a specific level of communication. The three data sets, in fact, were not homogeneous in term of framing activities. To put it in other terms, it was like there was a sort of

15 In 2003 and 2004, for instance, the term ‘social precariat’ was used to indicate similarities with the old class of proletariat.
specialization in framing activities according to the communication level at stake. The following table presents in a synthetic way what emerged from frame analysis:16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Textual level</th>
<th>Visual level</th>
<th>Spoken level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic Frame A</td>
<td>Precarity as a challenge</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Precarity as a challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Precarity as an opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic Frame B</td>
<td>Composite social subject</td>
<td>Composite social subject</td>
<td>Composite social subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creative Precarious Workers</td>
<td>Creative Precarious Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prognostic Frame</td>
<td>Income Continuity</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Income Continuity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 – The construction of collective action frames about precarity in the Euro Mayday Parade

From the table above, two features are immediately evident. In the first place, the construction of diagnostic frame B, answering the question “who are we” passed through the three communicative levels. In the second place, it was possible to establish which communicative level was denser in terms of symbolic elaboration related to the three framing tasks: the spoken level was the densest in that it imparted both positive and negative sides linked to precarity; the textual level came immediately after, since it focused on negative sides linked to precarity only; the visual level, finally, was the less dense of the three communicative levels, since it seems to have a role only in answering the question “who we are”.

Already at this stage of the comparison among the three levels of communication, it is possible to see how the textual level is an important indicator of collective action frame, though it especially imparted the negative semantic pole linked to precarity, there mainly considered as a social problem or, better, as a challenging risk to face. This is probably due to the nature of documents produced by social movements, whose main objective is to mobilize people and thus usually emphasize existence of social problems, implicitly asserting that one of the possible solution is to

16 At the visual level of communication, the emergence of the diagnostic frame B “creative precarious workers” is not due iconic representations, but to the fact that activist groups mobilized in the Euro Mayday Parade created a variety of visuals tools to communicate. It is the practice of producing visuals, more than the content of visuals, which let this specific diagnostic frame B emerge.
demonstrate against those blamed for them. At the same time, the spoken level of communication imparted the twofold semantic interpretation of precarity that many among the interviewee intended as both a constraint and an opportunity. Once again, the type of data and the way in which they were constructed might explain why there is this difference among the textual and the spoken level of communication: during interviews, activists had a reasonable amount of time to reconstruct the meanings they attached to precarity. For this reason, they were free to depict precarity not only as a challenge to face, but to reflect further on the positive implications of being a short-term worker. The visual level of communication, finally, combined with the other two levels of communication. However, it only reinforced meanings already expressed in texts and chats, without adding significant meaning to prognostic frame B.

4.2 The Gender Issue in Collective Action Frames about Precarity

The role of the visual level, however, changes when considering the specific gender issue within the more general collective action frame related to precarity. Before considering this topic, it is worth discussing briefly to what extent the gender issue entered the collective action frames related to precarity in the Euro Mayday Parade. As I said earlier, the construction of “precarious women” and “precarious mother” was always linked, in the collective action frame, to the negative semantic pole of precarity, perceived as a risk to face. This is evident when considering the diagnostic frame A, answering the question “what problem we have”. There, the main issue is the difficulties that precarious workers meet when thinking about their future. They cannot plan their lives on a medium-term basis and, consequently, they do not feel engaging in projects like buying a home or having children. This aspect appeared to be even more important when considering women. It is not by chance, indeed, that the category of “precarious mother” emerged from the analysis. As for precarity in general, the collective action frame linked to the Euro Mayday Parade highlights that problems that precarious women and mother experience are not due to the lack of stable and permanent jobs. It is the lack of social rights, among which income continuity and, speaking about precarious mother, social services like crèches, that transformed precarity in a risk to face rather than an opportunity to explore. In line with this, the prognostic frame expresses the need for precarious mothers, more than women in general, to have access to such rights. On the whole, it is clear that the gender issue entered the collective action frame matching the issue of maternity. Precarious women, therefore, were especially weak as potential mothers.
That said, the gender issue did not cross the three communicative levels in the same way. Therefore, it was not homogeneously present in the collective action frames about precarity, as it is clear in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Textual level</th>
<th>Visual level</th>
<th>Spoken level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic Frame A</td>
<td>Difficult planning for women</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Difficult planning for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic Frame B</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Precarious women</td>
<td>Precarious women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Precarious mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prognostic Frame</td>
<td>Rights for precarious mothers</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Rights for precarious mothers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 – The gender issues in collective action frames about precarity in the Euro Mayday Parade

As I said, the Euro Mayday Parade is a recurrent protest campaign. If first took place in 2001 and it still continue to be organized, involving thousands and thousands of protestors in Italy and other European cities. The table above ignore the diachronic dimension of the Euro Mayday Parade and thus, also, differences in the elaboration of the collective action frame related to precarity, which developed as the years went by. While I decided to consider only the stable dimensions of the collective action frame related to precarity and to conflate different years, this became problematic when looking at the gender issue. According to the table above, the diagnostic frame A included also the gender issue at the textual level, but only from 2003, when first women were mentioned in the call for action, and more extensively in the next years. In the previous years, in fact, posters, postcards and other visual tools represented precarious workers as both men and women, while call for actions did not explicitly address the gender issue.

As it happened for the collective action frames about precarity, the visual level of communication mostly worked in the reconstruction of the diagnostic frame B. Images were used to evoke those social categories experiencing precarity. Among them women were extensively represented in posters, postcards and other visual materials. The visual level, indeed, was important to introduce an issue that the textual level of communication missed and that the spoken level of communication, instead, extensively referred to: the presence of women among precarious
workers, the specific problems that precarity might pose to them and the possible solutions that had to be found in order to free precarious mothers from their difficulties. To some extent, the visual level translated into images what activists I interviewed expressed through words and what call for actions and other written documents related to the Euro Mayday Parade missed. Differences among the three levels of communication suggest that the introduction of the gender issue in texts was slower than the representation of the same issue through visuals. With this regard, it also suggests that the network of activist groups sustaining the Euro Mayday Parade did not developed a shared discussion about gender and precarity culminating in the insertion of the gender issue in call for actions and other official documents. The issue stopped to be only evoked through images or briefly mentioned in call for actsins when some activist groups belonging to the so-called third generation of feminists, such as the Sexy Shock based in Bologna, began to participate to the Euro Mayday Parade (Fantone 2007). The employment of images, texts and talks as data sources imparted a richer reconstruction of collective action frames related to precarity. As I illustrated here, moreover, the triangulation of data sources evoked intra-movement dynamics that translated at the level of symbolic production.

Conclusions
The aim of this paper was to assess the relevance of different communication levels in the reconstruction of collective action frames when studying social movements. Since collective action frame are relevant snapshots of collective identification processes, the inclusion of the visual level might render more accurate such snapshots and, obviously, collective identities as they emerge from mobilizations. Starting from a single case study, the Euro Mayday Parade, I compared three set of data sources, each corresponding to one specific level of communication: the textual, the visual and the spoken level. The results presented above rely on one specific case study in which visuals actually had a relevant role in mobilization. As such, these results might not be generalized. They certainly are, however, a relevant stimulus for further discussions about the role of visuals in social movements and, also, about the use of visuals as data source in social movements studies.

On the whole, I argue that the triangulation of data sources in the reconstruction of collective action frames imparts a more comprehensive picture of what social movements are saying about a certain contentious issue. In certain cases, moreover, the combination of different data sources might render visible intra-movement dynamics to be further explored in the reconstruction of collective identification processes, otherwise difficult to assess. Despite the claim that visuals, in
particular, might provide more information about social movements than written texts, the analysis I proposed above showed some limits of the use of visuals in the reconstruction of collective action frames. In the Euro Mayday Parade, indeed, they seemed to act especially as iconic indicators of new subjects experiencing precarity. They represented in a pictorial manner the collective name that activist groups used to identify the protesting “we”. In doing so, they also took into consideration the singularities that collective name included and the differences among those singularities experiencing precarity. The fact that visuals especially act in the construction of protesting “we” is also due to one choice I did in the analysis: I only focused on images and ignored the written texts that sometimes matched with images, such as slogans, which also contained claims and demands of precarious workers. Considering these texts as part of the visual language would probably impart a more comprehensive analysis of visual communication in social movements, whose role would be even more important in the construction of collective action frames, since usually slogans act as prognostic framing devices.

To conclude, this paper focused on the role of visual, compared to other communication levels, in the reconstruction of collective action frames. It gives a theoretical contribution to the branch of research that aims at reconstruction collective identities using collective action frames as valid empirical indicators of collective identification processes. As I briefly explained in the introduction, the frame analysis approach in collective action frames is also made up by two other lines of research: framing activities leading to the construction of collective action frames and re-framing activities by other social actors than social movements, such as the media. More empirical research is needed to understand the role of visuals in both of them. With regard to framing activities as such, for instance, since the visual communicative level proved to be so relevant in introducing the gender issue in the collective action frame related to the Euro Mayday Parade, it is also possible to think that visuals are also important in framing activities as such. In specific social movements settings, such as transnational protest campaign, visual tools might function as a means of translation among activists speaking different languages. I already anticipated this issue when looking at the “upward scale shift” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 95) that occurred in the Euro Mayday Parade, which moved from the national to the transnational geographical level (Mattoni 2009). It would be worth developing this topic in social movements studies looking at how activists actually use a variety of visual tools in face-to-face interactions and computer-mediated-communication to perform framing activities. With regard to re-framing activities by social actors other than social movements, such as the media, it would be interesting to look at how visual tools created by social movements are used in the media environment and
with what effects on the re-framing of collective action frames. Speaking about the Euro Mayday Parade, for instance, the icon of San Precario, the protector saint of all precarious workers was took out of context and used in other media outlets (Mattoni 2008). It would be worth reconstructing the travels of visuals produced in protest context to understand what happen to collective action frames that images bring, at least partially, with them. A more complex study of visuals from a framing perspective, therefore, should also include the use of images before mobilizations occur and in the latent stages of social movements and after mobilizations occur, when icon and symbols created by social movements became objects that carry collective action frames but, at the same time, are open to new interpretations.

References


