

Italy and migration over time

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Recent trends of Italian migration

In considering the population movements that affect our country, incoming movements are no doubt at the top in catalysing the attention of social scholars and decision-makers as well. In the 2012 Statistical Report on Immigration, drafted by Caritas/Migrantes, we read that in Italy there are five million *foreign*, that is to say non-Italian citizens, 8.2% of the overall population, resident in Italy, a figure that includes 1,000,000 E.U. Citizens, 87% arriving from the 12 new member states. In this report other data confirm that a non-Italian, *foreign*, component is now a structural component of Italian society, that is to say the relevant percentage of minors, mostly born in Italy (23.9% to non-E.U. Citizens) along with the celebration of more than 17,000 marriages between Italian and non-Italian citizens and the granting of Italian citizenship to 56,000 incomers (Caritas/Migrantes, 2012).

In the Fondazione Migrantes reports, for example the 2012 report on Italians living abroad, there is also valuable

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information on outward movement from Italy, not only on the size and vitality of the ex-patriot Italian communities (the number of Italian citizens registered in AIRE, the register for Italians living abroad) being over 4,000,000, 47.9 % women) (Fondazione Migrantes, 2012). Data is to be found on the dimension of expatriation, territorial connection to departure and arrival areas and the size of related financial remittance. In the first decade of the 21st century, annulments of residency abroad amounted to 450,161 while the entries for repatriation came to 404,952, with a negative migration balance of 45,209; average annual expatriation stood at 41,000, distributed in an irregular way, with an intensification over the last two years. The decade 2000-2010 confirmed the permanent and progressive reduction in external emigration, with an annual reduction of about 3,000 and even more for repatriation, amounting to 8,000, in comparison to the 1990s. Nevertheless, there is also a physiological continuity, not without relevant figures, and moderate only if compared to statistics from the 1960s and 1970s.

Once linked to the emigration and immigration areas, figures and percentages show strong territorial structures. 44% of population register annulments occurred in southern regions, 39.3% in northern ones and 16.8% in central ones. As for destinations, despite a modest incidence of out-migration movements, Europe remains the primary destination with 69.2% of arrivals, 64% of which being E.U. bound, now with a tendency heading towards the new nations of youth immigration, France and Spain more so than Germany (Recchi, Favell, 2009). Expatriation towards America, even if considerably augmented, does not exceed 20%, 4% in the case of Asia or Africa. If the Fondazione Migrantes reports signal important continuities of figures from the past, in recent years empirical literature has noticed the emergence of

'new mobilities' (Tirabassi, 2011), which have highly skilled migrants as their protagonists, migrants whose concern is the improvement of their knowledge or the appreciation of their intellectual capital in major European cities such as Erasmus-Socrates students who went abroad for study and remained for work, however there are also technicians and skilled workers working for peripheral branches of Italian firms due to production decentralisation; this decentralisation being an elusive phenomenon that is not easily quantifiable owing to its being mostly internal to the European Union and in any case characterised by impermanence in employment, as in all spheres of life (Avveduto, Brandi, Todisco, 2004).

In the mid-1990s, with the numbers of non-E.U. citizens so great as to see Italy become a country of immigration, Italians continued to emigrate, albeit in inferior numbers to the past. Historical north-south migration, ending in the 1980s, has begun anew and is still an enduring phenomenon. However, this internal migration has a new face, that is to say, oriented towards the north-east of Italy, where regions, like Veneto, historical heartlands of Italian outward migration, have now transformed themselves into 'migratory magnets', this being based upon a learned and well-trained workforce. Movements often do not imply a change of official residence, as they now have taken on more the character of long distance commuting. Paying particular attention to the territorial structure of Italy, a country which is at the same time a land of internal arrivals, departures, and short-medium distance movement, would seem useful in both heuristic and methodological terms so as to interpret territorial mobility as a complex, and yet not unambiguous or mechanically determined, phenomenon.

Dilemmas and complexity in historical analysis of

migration

Historians are highly sensitive to the issues of complexity. The same holds for the analysts of international migration, who consider migration as an 'extraordinarily complex reality', based upon 'a multiplicity of forms and models of migratory behaviours, not only of migratory phenomena, in which boundaries and reciprocal relations are extremely weak and changing, so that any mere classification of historical migratory processes is an extremely schematic abstraction' (Bade, 2001, p. 4). Studies on international migration have proven that migration does not have linear trends or exclusive origins in economic, political, ideological/religious, ethnic/nationalistic, or more recently, environmental issues. Often it concerns departure and return to and from different destinations, changes in migratory strategies, temporary stays, and moreover, is characterised by a multitude of reasons behind migration and the heterogeneous nature of the persons concerned.

As for the territorial profile, current empirical studies go beyond the classical distinctions between outbound, inbound, and internal migration, supporting the thesis that the different migration phenomena are so deeply linked to each other as often to converge. Consequently, in order to define these overlapping phenomena, the more general terminology of territorial mobility is suggested by the historians of migration. Yet what is more characteristic of the current reality is a system of international mobility increasing in its complexity due to its entirely unprecedented qualitative features, not because of its quantitative dimension, which has grown only in absolute terms. Think to the growth in number, accelerated over the last twenty years, of the countries of origin and destination of the migrants or the simultaneous presence in a given territory of patterns of emigration, immigration, and brief

stays preceding further transfers. This is what is happening in Italy but can also be observed in the Maghreb, in the neo-European countries of eastern Europe, and in a number of Asian countries.

Even the traditional terminology has proven itself inadequate in explaining the current complexity and diversity of migration and the new forms it assumes, since the 1990s promoting the introduction of significant semantic changes into the public debate and scientific literature. No more do we speak of 'Italian emigration', a term which harks back to migration from the traditional areas emigration, but rather 'Italians in the world' or 'Italians who live in the world' (Rome 2000, 1st Conference of Italians in the world; following the 2nd National Conference of Emigration, 1988, also held in Rome) (Ministero degli Esteri, 2000). In addition, owing to the ease in movement now permitted by the reduction in travel and communication costs, no longer 'emigrant' or 'immigrant', now 'transmigrant' better explains the tight interconnection within migration between departure and arrival areas and frequent commuting between these areas along with the construction of relations across national borders. Scholars with a background in anthropology make use of the term transnationalism, a term also adopted by political scientists, social geographers, sociologists, and historians. Transnationalism is conceived by some as an interpretative paradigm of contemporary migration which underlines its assumption of the centrality of the family and social networks, extraterritorial identification, that is belonging to communities and cultures that are not delimited by nation states. Other scholars conceive of it more as a term that suggests a phenomenon that is definitely elitist in relation to contemporary migration, however at the same time limited to the sphere of human relations and not to the general activities or practices of

migrants (Ambrosini, 2007; Gabaccia, 2000; Levitt, Glick Schiller, 2004; Glick Schiller, Basch, Blanc Szanton, 1992). Those who are interested, in particular historians, in the rebuilding of the formation process of a given identity, in particular within the sphere of new young migrants, debate plural localism (whether the places of departure, arrival or temporary stay ought to be considered as conditioning) and glocalism (departure and arrival places experienced in a global way) (Miranda, Signorelli, 2011), while Bauman supports the thesis that the new young migrants merely define their own identity as one of not-belonging to any one place (Bauman, 2006).

The French demographer Hervé Le Bras (Le Bras, 2002), theorises a very great change in the nature of mobility, on the appearance of a new 'mobility without uprooting', a mobility that, because of the new communication technologies and the velocity and democratisation of travel, does not necessarily imply any transfer of residence and, therewith, social 'uprooting' or 'upheaval' from places of origin, hence the term 'mobility without uprooting'. In this phenomenon Le Bras sees an aporia or uncertainty that derives from global transformational processes. These processes, in favouring the development of transport systems, have strengthened and not weakened the roots people have in the places they were born, have lived and have socialised. As a result, reduced costs and reduced travel times allow people today to move with greater ease and even work in places very distant to their own residence without being forced to lose their consolidated emotional and social ties. However, Le Bras postulates that this is only a repetition of a well-known phenomenon in the history of human societies, since it was experienced in the past by many people migrating over short or long distances, and not a new phenomenon linked to the characteristics of globalised societies. Considering the period of the Great

Emigration of the late 19th and early 20th century from Europe to the New World, the revolution in sea travel allowed an ever increasing number of migrants to cross the Atlantic, yet at the same time these migrants could also return, after only a few years, to their respective departure communities and maintain their family ties unchanged.

The Italian debate

Moving on more closely to the theme conferred by the organisers of this conference, 'Migration and the history of Italy', a little reflection is proposed on the theoretical and methodological advances that derive from recent historiographical debate and perspectives on migration in Italy. Advancements are referred to that belong to the intense and innovative period of studies on territorial mobility that started at the end of the 1970s, driven by dwindling mass migration, which since the early post-First World War era had started to look outside of Europe, abandoning the transoceanic wave of migration and the more prosperous areas of Italy. Some social scholars, including historians, sociologists, and demographers, hurried to diagnose an 'end of emigration', substantially a radical modification of the characteristics of migration phenomenon, as highlighted by the entirely different role Italy was then assuming within the migratory systems of Europe and in synchronisation with the most advanced nations. In 1973, for the first time after 100 years of mass emigration, a report by the Italian Bureau of Statistics showed a positive migratory balance for Italy in relation to other European countries. Two years later, the same occurred with regard to non-European countries. Even traditional Italian northward migration from the South started to diminish in intensity and change in the same

direction from the large cities in the Central Italy and the North-West to the municipalities on the outskirts of urban areas or even urban peripheries.

A rapid change in migration phenomena in Italy was not alone in bringing about the aforementioned new era in studies and opening up research to new surveys and analyses. It was also supported by new interpretative paradigms that became popular in the field of historical research in the 1970s. In relation to this, the *Quaderni Storici* journal launched the provocative proposal of micro-history as an alternative to the traditional macro-social historiographical models. In 1978, with the establishment of the journal *Storia e Società*, 'social history' was being introduced into the historiographical debate as a new vein of research that rendered any merely economic interpretation of social realities as appearing definitely simplistic. The axis of historical research was starting to change direction in comparison to the past by placing evermore increasing attention upon the local contexts and lives of individual people.

In addition, research on migratory movements could not avoid the fascination of these new historiographical suggestions. In this way a new historiographical era was opening, rich in studies and able to broaden the horizons of research continuously. All this now asked for integrating the historical studies with the other social sciences, under the evident influence of the increasing economic and social importance that realities of migration were assuming in Italy. This period of historical studies is still ongoing and its most interesting synthesis is to be found in *Annale* No. 24 of the *Storia d'Italia* edited by Paola Corti and Matteo Sanfilippo (2009, published by Einaudi). Furthermore, it is sustained by a proliferation of specialised books and essays but also novels as well as by high level of interest amongst the media regarding the history of migration, in addition to

successful television programmes and films, and finally public recognition of the presence of Italians in the world following the 2001 act granting the right to vote to Italian ex-patriots.

Turning attention once more to the historical analyses of migration in the 1970s, these analyses re-examined, by moving a little away from migration, some of the crucial phases of the economic and social history of Italy. They introduced new elements of reflection into the historiographical debate and a new interpretation of the first phase of Italian industrialisation was proposed; a parallel effort was made for economic reconstruction during the post-Second World War era in order to explain the fundamental role played during the period by emigrant remittance, initially from Veneto, Piedmont, and Lombardy and later from the southern regions of the country, in allowing the balance in the national budget, in a sort of 'hidden' mechanism of Italian capitalism, and thus in allowing non-traumatic processes of modernisation in Italy. It was mostly the vital contribution of the economic and social sciences that enriched the studies on migration with issues, methodologies and new feasible time-frames. The historical and demographical syntheses, based on formal and objective statistical and documentary sources (period literature, parliamentary surveys, etc.), on the whole had a descriptive structure, concerned with singling out the quantitative dynamics and economic components of migration and thus opening up the possibility for detailed surveys. Focus then shifted, as far as the long term, from large territorial entities (the South, or 'Mezzogiorno', the North, or 'Settentrione') towards well-defined areas, not but a little coincidental to the political and administrative districts. The history of migration, when enriched by a blend of economic, anthropological, and sociological analyses, succeeds in becoming a heuristic lens through

which the economic and social processes that influenced local communities might be read. The studies on the exodus from mountains, Alpine areas in particular, which were the first in being massively hit by emigration, 'a factory producing men to work for others' according to Braudel (Braudel, 1986, p.37), constituted a highly innovative laboratory for surveys and experimented complex analytical methods that were able to go beyond the traditional interpretation of the depopulation of mountain societies; methods that were based upon the importance of economic factors including employment supply and demand as well as demographic factors including the populations and available resources, that is to say disequilibria illustrating heuristic reductionism and incompleteness.

Historical reflection on emigration from Apulia recognised a great level of disarticulation. Within the migratory regional macro-models the historical analyses distinguished different geographical-functional micro-models, thus building around them the new areas of research and acknowledging the ambiguous and not so simple interpretability of the migratory process and the presence therein of a merging of factors varying in significance and nature. Making reference, as an example, to a case-study on which the author of this paper carried out research (Binchi, 2006) on the Apulia region in Italy, the historical studies on migration in the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century show a distinction between two different models of migration, corresponding to the two sub-regional districts of Apulia, differing in structure and geography; the Daunia Apennines, at the northern confines with Campania and Molise, and the coastal cities in the area around the city of Bari in central Apulia. This research clarified the modes of integration in terms of rural and urban emigration during the first Apulian migration phase.

Irreversible choices of emigration were linked to a total absence of alternatives (in the Apennines) and more complex and finalised choices (central Apulia) were linked to the varied framework of urban demand for labour; between temporary transfers from rural areas and the hardship and disruption of arriving in an aged urban society of the *ancien régime* along with the production, administration and modernisation of cities. Even the eventual destinations were different for the two districts: urban migration, in contrast to rural transoceanic and American migration, oriented itself towards the old commercial routes of central Apulia with the East and the Balkans, to the south with Egypt, and to the north with central Europe via the Adriatic and Trieste.

The detailed analysis permitted by the convergence of historical and social disciplines moved the objective of research away from the national dimension towards the local dimension and simultaneously involved shifting the focus of attention from collective dynamics to individual and family dynamics. What emerged was the central role of networks of friends and relatives in determining and defining migration, destinations, easing the search for employment and the social insertion of migrants into their new arrival communities thus bringing the migratory experience to an end. To this may be added the social relationships amongst those already having undergone a migration experience far from their own communities of origin and those, alternatively, preparing to undertake such an experience. By building communication networks, along which indispensable information was transmitted, migration decisions were influenced. These communication networks consisted of a wide range of individuals and social phenomena, not the individual relationships typical of traditional migration. In this way, interpersonal or human resources, not material resources, regulated

population movement throughout the territory, organising and focussing it into specific directions and not others. Consequently, migratory phenomena in some given emigration areas might show up significant and relevant figures whereas other areas remained marginal, in general areas in which a minority of individuals and families, of varying number, could be involved.

The idea of the central role of the 'family network' was supported, in particular, by those historians who referred to the *new* 'economics' of migration, an historiographical approach that sought the origin of the decision to migrate within the family context, and in this way explained the subordination of migration to familial and collective interests, but never individual ones. An example of this is the additional income in support of the family that arrived from abroad so as to protect that same family from expatriation or the attempt to utilise economic resources better on the part of the family in countries characterised by a dynamic economy or even reassure political stability. Some have also mentioned 'globalisation from below', that is to say the globalisation of families with their networks of relationships. This thesis sees families as social protagonists with the ability to react to the problem of being in an undesired location and thus seek out a different future elsewhere, not only to bring their migratory experience to an end through the building of interpersonal networks.

As for the revision of the limits of the timeframe of migration, the new 'longue durée' surveys established that mobility to and from Italy had its roots in a distant past. The first emigrations of merchants, artisans and gipsies populations date back to the late Middle Age and not to the great transoceanic exodus at the end of the 19th century. This not only challenged the theses of the initial historical surveys, above all it dated migration back to the pre-unification period of Italian history, so considering the

unification of Italy as a mere political-institutional event which for migration lacks any time categorization value. As for immigration, Luca Einaudi (2007) was one of the first scholars to write on the presence of 'foreigners' as a constant phenomenon in pre-unification Italy, this being due both to high levels of commerce and also long domination by foreign powers. In the 'longue durée' the phenomena of continuity in the movements of people between the modern and contemporary eras were clear, as well as the connections existing between outward and internal migratory patterns. A longstanding tradition of local mobility, a 'culture of mobility', was assumed as a paradigm for the interpretation of migration. It was this tradition that had created and supported the patterns of migration during the modern and contemporary era and in some way explained their levels and rhythms (Tirabassi, 2005).

Evolution of research theories and methods

New theoretical and methodological scholarship, as a 'living' value to migration, strategies, social and family relationships, and the culture of mobility, have seen the concept of 'migratory space' be redefined and its interpretation in territorial terms broadened in order to include the relational and interpersonal dimensions. Tarrius (2001) introduced the notion of 'circulatory territories' or 'territories of circulation' into the historiographical debate in order to explain how migrants construct 'specific territories of circulation' that do not compete with 'local societies', that is to say spaces whose boundaries are defined by the social system of relationships created by the migrants and not determined merely on a geographical basis.

Finally, some reflection is required on what may be considered the most innovative of the recent historiographical scholarship, having a theoretical and methodological base. I here refer to overcoming the so-called non-nomadic paradigm, i.e., the interpretation of non-nomadic life as the natural inclination of people as opposed to mobility being an exceptional condition; an interpretation which led to the paradox of legitimising the separation between the studies on nomadic/mobile societies and non-nomadic/non-mobile societies. There is now a widely-held historiographical idea that derives from the historians' perception of the need to broaden the migratory timeframe and reconstruct geographical mobility by surveying long(er) periods. This view has led historians of migration to reflect upon the limits, addressed with severe criticisms, presented by a large part of historiography, that is to say the fragmentation and repetitiveness of much research, also caused by the proliferation of territorial surveys (as it was stated sarcastically: 'no bell tower existed without its own history of emigration'); the descriptive character and the excessive specificity that for a long time have affected research on the theme and impeded any heuristic and methodological outcome, and, finally, the separation between the history of migration and the socio-economic history of the country. The reflections by Ramella and Arru, published in 2003, on introducing research on internal migrations in modern and contemporary Italy, seem useful in order to face this last and crucial historiographical issue, i.e., the connection between the history of population mobility and the history of Italian society (Ramella, Arru, 2003). In support of their thesis that internal mobility emerges from the analysis of a long period as a very 'Italian structural' characteristic which has left an indelible mark upon the life of the country, Ramella and Arru write that mobility offers a 'different

potential observation point' from which essential features of the profile of Italian society may be studied. Therefore, the suggestion proposed by the two historians is that any partial and, what is more, local approach to the issue of migration has to be overcome and that this issue ought to be considered rather as a heuristic lens through which to interpret the history of Italian society and its transformation processes.

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