

The new Italian emigration between necessity and choice: “Cordless workers” in Athens

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Abstract

Statistics show that the new Italian emigration presents a plurality of directions: alongside the resumption of flows in the direction of the more traditional destinations, there are now migratory currents in the most diverse directions, including areas that are weak or lagging behind Italy. This novelty opens new interesting questions for the sociology of migration.

This contribution highlights the necessity to face the study of “mobility” through interpretative approaches capable of grasping the pluralistic material and immaterial “spaces” designed by the new migratory trajectories. Therefore, we explore the South-South direction, which has remained at the margins of research and debate, trying to add a new piece to the increasingly complex picture of the Italian presence abroad. In the first part of the paper we will focus on some theoretical and demographic aspects considered relevant for the study of the new Italian emigration, with the aim of bringing out the complexity of the phenomenon. In the second part, after a brief methodological note, the results of a qualitative research carried out on the new Italian emigration to Athens¹ will be presented in order to grasp its specific aspects.

Keywords: Italy; Greece; migrant workers; labour migration; new migration.

Introduction

Since the 1980s, migration has rightly been considered a global phenomenon (Calvanese, 1992; Castles & Miller, 1993) and countries with a long history of emigration like Italy have become areas of transit for migrants arriving on their shores but aiming to go elsewhere. In addition, there has been a considerable increase in the emigration of Italian nationals who, unlike previous generations are not motivated only by economic factors. The case of Italy is therefore of particular interest, especially in the study of this new wave of emigration.

Italian migration after the second world war was characterised by a number of features: the massive scale on which it took place, its temporary nature, its dependence on

¹ We report some of the main results that emerged from a research conducted by a working group that was formed at Ce.do.M.-Unisa (Documentation Centre on New Migrations), it has benefited from funding provided by the University of Salerno (Grants no. ORSA174573 – ORSA182349 – ORSA197858): Felice Addeo, Maria Carmela Catone, Angela Delli Paoli, Paolo Diana and Domenico Maddaloni also contributed to the research. A more extensive and detailed account of the work we did is to be found in Maddaloni D., edited by, 2019.

the economic and political situation and the fact that it regarded predominantly the workforce (Pugliese, 2002). Whereas, the migration that has developed in the new millennium displays a much greater diversity with regard to the models and status (Castes & Miller, 2012) of the people involved, who cannot be defined merely as 'economic migrants'. During the 1980s, following the changes that had taken place in the socio-demographic field and in the labour market, Italy experienced both a reduction in emigration and, at the same time, a change in the type of migrants, their origin, their level of education and their reasons for migrating. These transformations, together with the greater national and international mobility of individuals, have extended the concept of emigration, which in this paper is used to indicate human movement motivated above all by the search for work or a better quality of life generally. The aim of this paper is to provide a summary of some results of a research on Italian migration to Athens, Greece. Before entering into the merits of the presentation of our research work, it is necessary to briefly present the picture of current Italian emigration.

The increase in Italian emigration

Although Italian emigration had never ceased completely, it experienced a marked increase in the 1990s and researchers began to study Italian emigration once again towards the end of the decade, almost 20 years after it had been abandoned. By the start of the new millennium a line of research had started analysing the movements in progress in the light of contemporary migratory dynamics (Bevilacqua, De Clementi & Franzina, 2001-2002; Pugliese, 2002; Corti, 2003; Emigration Studies n.155 2004; Calvanese, 2004).

The issue of internal mobility, which had been even more neglected than the study of emigration and was still underdeveloped, emerged thanks to a number of publications highlighting the considerable increase in the phenomenon (IRP – CNR: Bonifazi, 1999); (Pugliese, 2002; Calvanese & Carchedi, 2005).

The internal movement of migrants is obviously bolstered by immigrants to Italy who are in search of better conditions (Bonifazi, 2009; Casacchia et al., 2010), but these studies also detect some new features in these movements: a tendency to "head towards the north-east instead of the traditional industrial triangle bounded by Milan, Turin and Genoa; and the presence of young graduates and high school leavers dissatisfied with the job opportunities in their hometowns in Southern Italy" (Calvanese, 2005, p. 22).

In recent years, some researchers have focused attention specifically on the consequences that this phenomenon has on the areas the migrants are leaving (Piras & Melis, 2007; Golini, Reynaud, 2011; Livi Bacci, 2007; Panichella, 2009), and a research project to analyse this new internal migration starting from the characteristics of the towns of origin was carried out by the National Statistics Institute ISTAT, whose results were published in *Recent Territorial Mobility in Italy* (ISTAT: Cantalini & Valentini, 2012).

In order to better depict the situation in Italy, we will here provide a concise overview of the quantitative extent of the phenomenon, its composition and its directions.

Quantitative extent of the phenomenon, its composition and its directions

The increase in Italian emigration is highlighted in the OECD Report (2016), which shows that by 2014 Italy had become the sixth largest 'exporter' of migrants (out of the fifty countries considered) and, above all, had risen some eleven places in this table in just ten years. Combined with this is the considerable increase in internal mobility which, although not the focus of this paper, should be mentioned here to complete the overview of the migrant situation.

As mentioned above, it is not possible to obtain an accurate quantification of the current wave of Italian emigration for a series of technical reasons. Specifically, studies on internal mobility are based on the transfer of residency as emerges from records in municipal registry offices, which points out the origin and destination of the individual movements but does not express the overall phenomenon, as such movements are not officially recorded.

In any case, these data indicate a marked increase in internal migration: from 2002 to 2014 1,627,000 southern Italians moved to central and northern Italy, with a net difference of 653,000 units, 73% of whom (478,000 units) were young people and of these almost 30% were graduates (SVIMEZ Report, 2016). Mention also needs to be made of the 'long-distance commuters'². The effects brought about by these movements in the mid-long term have become a cause for concern in the scientific community: "the South risks a demographic tsunami" (SVIMEZ Report, 2011). One of the outcomes could be an excessive aging of the population, a fall in the potential for economic growth in southern Italy and a resulting increase in the socio-economic gap between the North and the South (ISTAT, 2007; SVIMEZ Report, 2013).

In order to quantify international emigration, reference is made to the UN Recommendations (UN, 1998), which define international migration as the movement of individuals from their country of habitual residency for a period of at least 12 months. In this respect it should be considered that a migrant does not always change residency at once and that migratory movements are nowadays more complex; for instance they might follow several directions over a short period of time.

In 2016, 189,699 Italians were registered with the Registry of Italians Resident Abroad (AIRE) 57.6% of whom were expatriates, an increase of approximately 6% on 2015. This data can be integrated with those in specific studies, such as the reports published annually by SVIMEZ and Foundation Migrantes.

² They work and live for most of the week in one place and maintain a house and family in another.

As far as the composition of this new wave of migration is concerned, the first difference compared to the past is the higher level of education of those emigrating, as highlighted by the ISTAT and Almalaurea research on Italian graduates. According to the ISTAT (2016) data, graduates over 25 years of age account for 30.8% of those moving abroad, and if those with a high school diploma are added to these, the proportion of Italians with a medium-high level of education leaving the country exceeds 50%, resulting in a consequential impoverishment of Italy's human resources. The emigration of highly qualified individuals mainly regarded northern Italy at first but the tendency in the south seems destined to increase, especially if we consider that southerners under the age of 35 have to face the possibility of long-term unemployment, a growing unemployment rate and the difficult transition from school to work. Furthermore, the introduction of flexible contracts does not seem to contribute to the reduction of the 'experience gap' but, rather, facilitates access to temporary employment in jobs that do not foster further training initiatives (SVIMEZ Report, 2012).

Another new feature compared to previous Italian migration phenomena is the greater presence of women actively seeking work abroad and, when whole families emigrate, an inversion of traditional roles, with the man often following the woman and having less say in the choice of destination (Moffa, 2014).

There are also elements of discontinuity in the preferred destinations of emigrating Italians. According to the data supplied by AIRE and ISTAT (with virtually no significant differences in the data from the two agencies), Germany and the United Kingdom are the preferred countries, as well as France followed by Spain and the United States which continue to be desirable destinations, while the economic crisis has meant that Argentina has been replaced by China and the United Arab Emirates. And, albeit to a lesser extent, movements towards southern Europe, such as Greece and Portugal, have been noted. Hence we are witnessing a move towards areas that have not traditionally been emigration targets and this change is obviously favoured by new means of transportation and communication as well as by the greater economic prospects of emergent nations.

This new wave of Italian emigration also has a characteristic component in which pensioners are emigrating southwards ('sun migration') and eastwards in search of a lower cost of living accompanied by a better quality of life, or simply to join their children who have already emigrated. Another interesting flow concerns entrepreneurs emigrating and taking their businesses abroad, sometimes to relatively unconventional destinations.

In summary, the new Italian emigration differs from the migratory waves of the past for such a complexity that pushes to consider it as a "nebula" (Pugliese, 2018), which requires pluralistic interpretative approaches (Moffa, 2014; Sanfilippo, 2017) that also take

into account the newness. In this framework, it appeared interesting to analyze the phenomenon of new emigration to still little explored areas such as Athens. The presence of Italians in Greece is certainly not new, however it appears, paradoxical that many people from our country have chosen this city as a place of destination (at least temporary) of their mobility path, despite the strong crisis that this region is facing and the high unemployment rates that seem to characterize it.

What are the drivers of Italian immigration in a country which recently has experienced a more serious crisis than the Italian one? What are the reasons that lead to such a choice and who are the protagonists of this choice? These are the questions from which the research began.

Below we focus on the respondents who found a work in Athens³.

Focus on Italian workers in Athens: Methodology

Since a statistically representative sample list of Italians living in Athens was not available, we chose to follow the path of qualitative research. To identify the respondents, we used the snowball sampling technique, trying to balance the group of respondents by gender and age. We conducted 34 in-depth interviews with Italian citizens residing in Athens, either temporarily or permanently, during the period in which the survey was conducted. In these pages we will consider only the component of the sample that refers to the "new Italian emigration", namely the wave of migration that started since 2008, in correspondence with the economic crisis that hit our country (Gjergji, 2015; Pugliese, 2015, 2017, 2018). It consists of twenty-two interviewees, eleven of whom are women.

The interview outline, was defined by our team based on previous research experiences and recent literature. Here we consider the aspects related to job search and job placement of our migrants in Athens. In order to bring out the most significant issues, we examined in particular educational qualifications, individual and family conditions, the absence/presence of family support for mobility, job position, the relationship between professional qualification and type of work performed, as well as previous migration experiences. The analysis also related the above-mentioned aspects to the various phases of the migratory project elaborated by each interviewee: the initial one, the subsequent ones and the future one (whether to stay or leave, and to where).

³ A more extensive version of the results presented in the next few paragraphs can be found in Moffa (2019)

Description of the group interviewed

From a demographic point of view, in line with national statistics, the young component of the new Italian emigration in our sample is prevalent: the majority of cases include subjects between twenty and forty years old.

Only two cases involve fifty-year-olds, two women teachers, who in a mature phase of their lives decided to participate in ministerial competitions to teach in Italian schools abroad, co-managed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their interviews can be considered representative of a new female protagonism inherent in a territorial mobility directed by choices that are not strictly economic and probably attributable to the new forms assumed by the family and by gender relations in Italy today.

Only one case, concerns a pensioner over seventy years old whose story can be included among those most typical of sun migration (Williams, King & Warnes, 1997) and more generally in the lifestyle migration that affects the countries of Southern Europe (Diana & Maddaloni, 2017).

The interviews from this considered set present some clear trend lines that lead to consider this flow as representative of a new cycle of Italian emigration. In general, we do not find profound differences in the levels of education and training, nor in the positions occupied by the interviewees in the Hellenic labor market. Turning to a more detailed analysis, the set studied appears internally articulated by age and is representative of diverse biographical paths.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that all of the respondents had at least a higher education diploma, with a clear prevalence of university graduates; however, there is no relationship between educational qualification and work performed. In addition, it should be noted that the qualifications obtained are among the most varied, ranging from the humanities and social sciences to technical or scientific qualifications. Unlike what has been found in other surveys in the field (Bernadotti, 2015), Italian emigration to Athens is not formed only by graduates coming from educational paths considered weak and not very spendable in our country (such as degrees in humanities or social sciences). This educational variety can be traced back to the so-called Italian overeducation (Caroleo & Pastore, 2013; Brandi, 2014) and therefore confirm the increasing diversification of the new flow of Italian emigration.

It is highlighted that although a significant number of respondents are highly qualified, we are not faced with an emigration that exports skills for high wages.

The economic sector in which the interviewees are inserted is the tertiary sector, both the more traditional one with a touristic character, above all in the field of catering,

and the more advanced and direct services to companies, with a considerable variety of activities, even if a relatively considerable number of interviewees work in a call center. Respondents are placed primarily in the secondary segment of the labor market⁴. in which human capital, in terms of experience and education, is not very valuable. A large part of them have been employed with atypical forms of work, and more specifically as employees in private companies with fixed-term contracts lasting up to three months and with average salaries. In short, among those interviewed, the prevailing component is young people with a high level of education, who enter the labor market in fundamentally precarious conditions and under-employment with respect to their educational credentials. In particular, many of the interviewees work, or state that they are about to work, for a multinational company that offers remote assistance services online or via telephone. In addition, there are a young couple who intend to start a business in the restaurant industry, a pizza maker (with a degree and previous experience as a call center operator), an architect, an airport employee, a market research expert, a teacher at a private school, and a young manager of another transnational company active in the Greek market. The element that unites most of these trajectories is the flexibility of the life (and work) path due mainly to the lack of future certainty in relation to income and employment.

Clearly, the employment condition of the sample is an expression of the Greek labor market which, following the crisis, has the highest unemployment rate in Western Europe⁵. This incoming flow can be explained by the occupational niches offered by the good resilience of the Greek tourism sector, by the persistent charm of Made in Italy in some economic sectors such as catering, and by the offshoring mechanisms of multinationals, but the jobs that can be obtained with relative ease are of a precarious nature.

Factors affecting migratory choices

From reading the interviews it emerges that the motivations behind the choice to migrate lie primarily in the push factors generated in the Italian labour market, due to underemployment, precariousness and low wages. The specificities of the Italian labour market, reflecting deep differences, make it increasingly difficult for young people with high qualifications, who know more than one language and very often have experience abroad, to find employment, let alone a career. Many of those interviewed, who have a high level of qualification, say they are deeply discouraged and disappointed by the

⁴ The "secondary" segment of employment is distinguished by high job insecurity in the face of low wages and rare career opportunities and differs from the "primary" segment, which is characterized by occupations with high wages, contractual guarantees, and career opportunities (Berger & Piore, 1982).

⁵ In fact, according to Eurostat data (2018), the unemployment rate is 20.8% with a gap of almost twenty percentage points from the EU28 average (7.1%), and a youth unemployment rate of 45%. Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics>

lack of adequate opportunities for their educational investment. After having invested so much, they feel cheated in their aspiration for social and economic mobility.

[We were] full of good hopes ahahah [...] I have the highest grades so... anyway there was the hope to find something also another kind of internship, at least a reimbursement of expenses something to be able to have a lesser impact ahahah on the parents. But I didn't find anything, so I started looking for jobs that were not inherent to my training. You get to a certain point and say, "I want to work!" (04F, 33)

Our results confirm that at the origin of the recovery of Italian emigration in the post-crisis period there is the traditional push effect resulting from the conditions of the domestic labor market (Pugliese, 2018). From the analysis of the interviews it emerges that the migration choice is consequent to: a) the full awareness of the high unemployment of young Italians and the long duration of it, very often experienced firsthand; b) the type of job offers in Italy, which appear to be below economic and professional expectations as well as often lacking social security guarantees; c) dissatisfaction with a labor market that reduces professional growth and development; d) the impossibility of achieving economic independence in times considered socially acceptable. It should be noted that this is true both for the regions of Southern Italy, as has already been pointed out in the literature on several occasions (SVIMEZ, 2013, 2014; Giannola, 2015; Pugliese, 2017), and also - and this is a novelty - for the regions of the Centre and North. In our survey, several respondents come from areas in the center-north of Italy: some of them are from Piedmont, Lombardy, Liguria, and Tuscany, to give just a few examples.

The reasons that led our interviewees to seek work outside their own borders, in addition to the factors listed above, concern growing social inequality, distrust of the future prospects of their own country and the desire/need to achieve economic autonomy. We could therefore say that many of them would fall within that quota of young people who emigrate out of necessity, as a result of the crisis and the situation that the crisis has left behind (Pugliese, 2018). These people appear demotivated by an Italian policy that has long since given up on structural and long-term interventions.

I have searched, searched, searched, but nothing, I have had several job interviews, [...] you know those job interviews that waste time. (25M33)

I started to look for a job for a year or so... coming back home of course I looked all over Italy, sending resumes everywhere. (04F33)

In a world marked by globalization, the push factors therefore draw new migratory routes thanks to the low cost and rapidity of means of transport. The interviews show that the choice to emigrate is a natural consequence of the growing segmentation of the labor market and the outsourcing of production processes to areas that are advantageous in terms of production costs and the tax regime of the country receiving the investment. In this perspective, the flexibility of work and the predisposition to

mobility constitute elements that intersect and nourish fluctuating migratory paths, which have found some opportunities for insertion - albeit unstable - in the Greek labor market. This happens because the logic of the implicit contract between company and employee often tends to stabilize the precariousness of the working situation. For the migrants we interviewed, in fact, the region of Athens does not seem to have - at least in the beginning - a specific appeal. At the time of the interview, they had not yet defined their migratory project, considering their stay in Athens as a time-limited phenomenon. Even taking into account the two differences, it can be said that migration to Athens, for many of the interviewees belonging to the wave of new Italian emigration, represents a time of trial. It therefore seems to be the answer to an economic need that cannot be satisfied in Italy, and for many it is a choice considered easier than others.

Of course, absolutely yes [I would go back to Italy]. [...]but the costs are much higher. (05M29)

Actually it's the cost of living that attracted me, [...], being a translator, it's clear that I would also like to go back to Ireland, because I found it very good, but life is very expensive and so um... [...]. (02M37)

Trying to summarize what emerged from the analysis of the interviews: a) Athens represents the attainment of an autonomy that has allowed the interviewees to free themselves from their family of origin by living in a way recognized by all as in any case dignified; b) Athens responds, in the first instance, to the widespread need to find short-term solutions, a characteristic now shared by the new generations for reasons fundamentally attributable to the current structure of the national and European labor market; c) in the initial stage of the migratory project, the choice of destination, in this case Athens, does not seem to have been very important; d) in general, the interviewees state that they have taken advantage of a work opportunity and many of them come from other migration experiences; e) for many, Athens represents (or has represented) only the beginning of a search for work in a "wide area" outside regional or national borders.

So I open the computer and I start looking everywhere... let's see where I can serve, that is, where I can go simply by being Italian and speaking my language, [...]. It was March, [...] I go on those classic sites, um, looking for multilingual staff, and I go to... to see all these... these... these... offers... eh: "required Italian-speaking staff, Greece, Athens, Athens, Athens". (25M33)

At the moment of the interviews, the migratory project does not seem defined: neither for purpose nor for time. The decision to stay in Athens is explained by various aspects, which are not considered decisive, such as: the closeness of Greece to Italy, which makes returns quick and economical; the easy insertion in the secondary band of the labor market, which allows to change jobs with a certain rapidity; and the low

cost of living, which together with the climatic conditions, increases the overall well-being and quality of life.

Moving on to consider the subsequent stages of the migratory path, the interviewees tend to explain that they prefer to stay in Athens not only because they have found a job opportunity there, however precarious, but also because in the city the cost of living is cheaper than in Italy and much cheaper than in Northern European countries. This choice is subordinate to the conviction - in some circumstances supported by previous experience - that even in countries with stronger economies the working conditions offered to them would not be better.

Social identity of new emigrants from Italy: the “Cordless Workers”

Summing up what has been said so far, the group of interviewees represents a specific component of the new Italian emigration, in particular that made up of young people with higher qualifications or degrees. They come from all parts of Italy, even if for the most part from the southern regions, and are part of the secondary segment of the local labor market.

It should also be pointed out that the majority of those interviewed seem to experience repeated entries and exits from the world of work in a completely flexible way. Nor is it certain that in this game it is the business that always dictates the rules. A substantial number of those interviewed have changed jobs or intend to do so, at the cost of accepting the alternation between moments of employment and others of unemployment or inactivity.

I... I have a sort of, maybe, record in Greece: I have changed one... two... three... four jobs, in just over four years without ever being unemployed a day. (25M33)

From what has been observed, precariousness is the dominant characteristic both when referring to the employment situation and to the migratory project, as well as to life paths. It follows that the interviewees tend to move from a short-term perspective. This is, therefore, a flow of immigration from Italy that appears distant, in its fundamental features, from the classic model of Böhning (1967), both for the variety of subjects and for the overlapping of the phases of the migratory path.

In such circumstances, the process of stabilization occurs, if at all, with relative slowness and often appears exposed to the possibility that it may be reversible. This is not so much, or not only, in the direction of Italy, but also in the direction of other countries (although very often the hypotheses of mobility are limited to the borders of the European continent). In this way, a figure is created who responds well, or adapts well, to the needs of companies, a “new European worker” who follows the work and who, therefore, we could define as cordless: young, with a medium-high educational

qualification, with non-specific know-how because he/she does not accumulate skills, a high level of working flexibility and an extraordinary willingness to be territorially mobile. As our interviewee well explains:

I have a temporary [working] relationship, every 6 months they give me a new contract [...] I would evaluate, I would evaluate the opportunity to come back [to Italy], as I evaluated everything. In short, I based my recent evolution on flexibility, that is, on adapting to a new reality, to a new job and to learning. I mean that... without flexibility you can't go anywhere. In fact, I've found myself doing things that I honestly didn't think I would do before I started this experience. (11M41)

It is important to note that many of those interviewed refute the stereotype, unfairly spread by much of the national press, according to which young Italians are distinguished by being accustomed to receiving support from their families of origin. On the contrary, for them the main motivation for both migration and permanence is the need to affirm their full economic independence from their families of origin.

So the point was this...I said, I don't feel like staying here and asking my parents for money again and working for free for someone. (04F33)

This partly redeems the choice of Athens, compared to other European cities: the need for economic autonomy abroad is, in fact, difficult to satisfy in countries where the cost of living is higher. This search for economic independence from the family of origin, especially if we consider the youngest component of the sample, appears to be a specific characteristic of the group examined. In most studies on new emigration from Italy, in fact, it can be seen that the direction of economic transfers does not reproduce the forms of traditional emigration. In general, the studies highlight an absence of economic remittances and the presence, on the contrary, of material supports that start from the country of origin - of economic aid lent by parents to their children (Moffa, 2014).

Among the respondents who fit into a predominantly precarious condition in the labor market in Athens, an emblematic example is represented by those who claim to have arrived in the Hellenic capital to work as call center operators. More precisely, at the time of the interview six respondents were employed in this activity. To these, however, can be added three other experiences, of people who had recently left or were about to enter this activity. Of the nine workers considered, six are university graduates, some with master's degrees, one is an undergraduate and two are graduates. They are evenly distributed in the two age groups 23-34 and 35-49, and three are women. This group of interviewees deserves a specific study because it seems to be the most representative of the more general working condition of many Italians abroad today.

It is now known that in Europe the phenomenon of delocalization (offshoring) has had a considerable impact on work (Gallino, 2000, 2006). The delocalization of services, as in

the case of Call Centers, has led to a change in work paths, which has also seen the activation of migratory movements which follow the companies which delocalize their activities.

The pervasiveness of the globalization economy has produced a growth in call center workers and migrants employed in this sector. They are, in fact, by now numerous the European companies that offer services of outsourcing to the customers, from Countries in which the costs of production turn out lower and there are greater fiscal advantages. This is the case of Greece, Country chosen like privileged center of activity from at least an active transnational enterprise in the field of the services of assistance in remote (help desk) on behalf of a great number of companies of the sector of the computer science and the telecommunications.

As far as our research is concerned, the interviews show that as a call center operator in Greece, for eight hours of daily work in a five day working week one receives on average a monthly salary of approximately 850 euros. This salary certainly appears lower than that offered by the same type of work in other European countries, although not in our country. However, what at first glance would seem to be a rather unattractive offer represents a good opportunity for our interviewees. They explain, in fact, that the salary received allows a relatively comfortable standard of living in a reality such as that of Greece today, where wages reach an average of about 600 euros. They also note that they feel relatively secure in such an unstable labor market.

So with 850 € I can... I can put aside a lot of money and also from a business point of view I do not have much experience. (30F23)

In particular, many of them point out that the contract, even if of short duration, is usually easily renewed. In these circumstances, an implicit contract is created between the company and the worker (Milgrom & Roberts, 1994) which generates an expectation of reassuring work continuity in a general situation of precariousness.

The basic salary is higher than in Greece, everything is covered, there is insurance, and the hours are normal. Let's say that [it's a job that] gives a certain security, stability, what a person requires. (05M29)

One aspect that mattered considerably to the workers interviewed employed in this activity concerns the assistance received in the arrival phase from the company. This group of interviewees reports that they experienced only in a reduced form the "disorientation" (Sayad, 2002) typical of arrival in a foreign country. This is because they were welcomed and cared for by the company.

They set up my bank account for me, did all the documentation I needed, like my social security number and all the other documents. They paid for my hotel, gave me my ticket. [...]. (15M32)

Here, however, a distinction must be made between younger people, under thirty years of age, and those who are older. Among twenty-year-olds, emigration and the search for work are approached with an instrumental approach. In general, the functional value attributed by the interviewees to the migratory experience, considered a passage to respond to an immediate need for autonomy and training, leads them to accept without hesitation jobs with lower professional profiles compared to their own education and training. This behavior, on the one hand, can be considered typical of migration and, on the other, probably takes into account the fact that a high educational qualification no longer represents, in itself, a means of social ascent. It should, however, be remembered here that the interviewees are looking for and/or are employed in non-manual jobs. For younger people, especially those who have recently left the educational system, this is a job that has a superficial impact on the process of defining their identity.

It is not that you do it for life, at least those who want to, have had a previous occupation and want to return to it, do it because it gives help, gives a certain stability, allows them to be covered a little. (05M29)

In contrast, respondents of more mature age often show a different attitude. They tend to appreciate more the character of relative stability that the job at the care service company takes on. One aspect not to be overlooked is the standard of living possible in Greece with a salary level that in Italy would certainly be considered rather low, not able to allow for independent living, especially in urban or metropolitan contexts.

In Italy I would like to come back, and I would like to come back to [Italian city] where I studied, but with an [adequate] salary, in Italy it is clear that you have to have at least more than 1000 euros to stay. (...) to do this same job, this same job can be done even in Rome, with 1000 euros in Rome, but just the room... it costs 3-400 euros. (02M37)

Concluding remarks

In quantitative terms, the increase in Italian emigration is now evident and the considerable rise in migrant numbers from southern Italy is accompanied by a nationwide trend towards expatriation. The phenomenon now seems to have taken on the connotations of a mass emigration.

The youth component has a certain weight in this flow as young people are becoming increasingly mobile for reasons of study and training and envisage their working future abroad in order to improve their quality of life. According to the Toniolo Foundation Report (2016) and the EU's Eurbarometer Report (2016), the willingness to emigrate among young Italians is one of the highest in Europe. Moreover, it is interesting to note how some qualitative studies highlight both the difficulty some young adults have in considering these transfers definitive (Ricucci, 2017) and the frequency with which

many young Italians find themselves accepting casual and unqualified jobs (Gjeorjii, 2015). Therefore, the temporariness of the migratory project reflects a more general planning impossibility, of an existential kind, and can ultimately be traced back to the lack of stability and continuity of employment both in the country of departure and in the country of arrival. In fact, some of the interviewees had already experienced precarious work in Italy, while others were experiencing precariousness for the first time in Athens by moving from one job to another or by dedicating themselves to more than one job at the same time. Surviving” on a day-to-day basis becomes prevalent especially for those over the age of 35. By losing its centrality of identity, work reduces all other aspirations for social improvement. At the same time, for many of the Italians we interviewed, job insecurity takes on the paradoxical connotations of relative stabilization, which at least provides some coordinates for living in the short term, or at most in the medium term, but not in the long term. It does not appear accidental that most of the interviewees belonging to the new wave of Italian emigration do not have a definite attitude towards the future, that is, they are unable to identify specific vocations to pursue.

It could be said that a “space of European connection” has been created, which has clearly reduced distances, both physical and cultural, and which leads to the perception of a “foreign neighbor” that favors extended mobility. The greater predisposition to mobility is, however, primarily due to the increased economic need to look for a job in a country other than one’s native one, a sort of “economic mobility” which, however, remains within a framework of significant experiences that appear typical of new migrations.

In particular, many of the migrants’ behaviors appear to be influenced by age, and therefore by the stage of the life cycle, on a continuum between need and choice. For the group over thirty, economic aspects become a priority, the future becomes shorter and the idea of moving out of necessity prevails over that of a choice dictated by the desire to take advantage of opportunities for personal growth “wherever they are”. For this component, the loss of the centrality of work, determined by the crisis and by a rarefied economic and social policy, leaves room for other directions of change in the identity of migrants.

What can we say, finally, about the self-definition proposed by the new Italian emigrants? It should be pointed out that the interviewees perceive themselves as subjects in international mobility in search of a job, very often recusing themselves from the term emigrant, which takes on a negative connotation, both because it evokes a chapter in the history of Italian emigration in the past (Moffa, 2014), and because it is associated with recent immigration to Italy. It is important in this regard the perception that they manifest in relation to their own experiences on a continuum between need and choice. In this regard, it must be taken into account that the most

recent approaches to the study of international migration emphasize the existence of a dichotomy between mobility and emigration (Sanguinetti, 2016, p. 65). The latter would have a character of necessity rather than of choice. On the other hand, among the strands of research that have delved into movements within the European Union is "the so-called pro-Europeanist perspective that interprets mobility as a bottom-up push toward greater integration" (ibid.). This strand of studies suggests that rather than migration in the strict sense, it is appropriate to speak of international mobility (see in particular Recchi, 2013). As Pugliese explains, "The element that characterizes this 'Europeanist' strand is the belief that the main thrust is not so much based on economic necessity as on a general interest in moving within a European cultural perspective" (Pugliese, 2015 p. 53). In the case of our research, it is not possible to make a clear distinction, since, with the exception of a couple of younger interviewees, the need and the choice to emigrate alternate and sometimes merge.

In some cases emigration was the desired option while in others it was determined by a job market and by welfare policies that do not meet the needs of the Italian population, in many cases the distinction is not clear-cut

In conclusion, the 'new migrations' that Italy is currently experiencing differ in several respects compared to those in the recent past, and the phenomenon is both multi-faceted and complex. We have seen some of the main features characterising the current wave of emigration abroad but it is clear that further, specific investigation is required through qualitative studies aiming to identify the changes in progress and the various facets of the phenomenon because although it is no longer a case of 'cardboard suitcase' emigration, it is equally not just a 'brain drain'.

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