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The Mobility of Migrants in Italy: Shifting between Statuses and Places

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The Mobility of Migrants in Italy:

Shifting between Places and Statuses[1]

Abstract

In this paper, we consider migrants as mobile actors, people who make choices about where they go and under what title, but people whose choices are limited by a range of factors including migration regimes, social networks and social and economic capital. The key questions considered relate to 'status' mobility - how and why do migrants move across categories such as documented/undocumented[2] migrant, labour migrant, family member, asylum seeker, refugee; and geographic mobility – what factors cause some migrants to move and move again, from one country to another and within countries. Finally, the manner in which these two questions are related and how they affect processes of migration, settlement and community formation are considered.

While it is accepted that immigration to the European Union is now highly differentiated on a number of levels (Kofman forthcoming, Morris 2001, Guiraudon 2000, Bovenkerk et al 1999), little attention has been paid so far to the mobility of migrants between the different migration status categories constructed by receiving states, or to the continued mobility of a growing number of migrants who sojourn for long or shorter periods en route to Europe, or continue to move from one European country to another. In this paper, which is based on fieldwork carried out in Italy in 2001/2, we consider migrants as mobile actors, people who make choices about where they go and under what title, but people whose choices are limited by a range of factors including migration regimes, social networks and social and economic capital.

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[1] This paper is based on a research project carried out in Italy (funded by the British Academy – Grant No. SG32546) and forms part of a larger project, which is funded by the British Academy (SG34119) and the LSE. The research explores migration, citizenship and processes of inclusion and exclusion in Italy, France, Germany and the UK. The Italian project was a particularly fruitful one as it challenged the research framework and yielded a number of new insights, especially in relation to mobility between legal categories, and the continued physical mobility of people after they had made the initial move away from their country of origin.

[2] The terms documented and undocumented have been chosen as they are more neutral than 'ir/regular' or 'il/legal' and because we use 'ir/regular' in relation to the kind of work a person does – i.e. whether or not they are employed in the shadow economy – not in terms of continuity of employment, though the two may be related.

For an increasing number of migrants, their choices as to how and where they go are limited by the traffickers or smugglers that they are forced to use (Koser 2000, Morrison 2000) as a result of increasingly restrictive migration regimes, and by the amount they can afford to pay such people. Clearly all migrants are mobile, but there seems to be little research that actually focuses on this mobility as an ongoing process, as a series of departures and arrivals (though forthcoming work by Jordan & Düvell will help to fill this gap). This geographic mobility is paralleled by mobility between different migration statuses (undocumented, asylum seeker, refugee, guest-worker, denizen etc). Morris (2001), Kofman (forthcoming) and others have drawn attention to the stratified rights of migrants, the different bundles of rights that adhere to the different statuses of migrants, but one of the most striking features to emerge from the fieldwork carried out in Italy was that many of the people we spoken had experienced two, three or more of these different statuses – and on occasion slipped backwards and forwards between them.

The key questions considered here relate to this status mobility - how and why do migrants move across categories such as documented/undocumented migrant, labour migrant, family member, asylum seeker, refugee; and geographic mobility – what factors cause some migrants to keep moving from one place to another. Finally, the manner in which these two questions are related, and how they affect the processes of migration, settlement and community formation is considered. We situate the findings with a brief outline of immigration to Italy[3], especially its particularities in relation to some other European states, and the political and legal context in which this immigration occurs. Following a short overview of the research on which this paper is based, we move to a discussion of the key questions outlined above, before considering their significance within the processes of migration, settlement and community development.

[3] See Macioti e Pugliesi 1998 and Sciortino 1998

Immigration in Italy[4]

Italy as a migration destination is distinct for a number of reasons. It became a country of net immigration and a destination for significant numbers of migrants later than Britain, France or Germany, for example. Zincone (1994) and Macioti & Pugliese (1998) suggest the shift occurred in the 80s, though immigration actually began to increase in the 1970s as Britain, France and Germany closed their borders in response to the economic downturn (Martiniello 1996). Although many of the migrants arriving in Italy still intended to travel onwards to other wealthier European states with more established migrant communities, more of them were remaining in Italy because it was difficult for them to move further North. However, Italy has never been solely a transit country. A substantial proportion of these 'migrants' consisted of Italian emigrants and their children returning from abroad (Macioti & Pugliese 1998: 5)[5], while others continued to follow paths to Italy established by the Church and other networks formed during Italy's brief colonial history.

Italy had remained a country of emigration much longer than most other European states and this experience, as in Ireland, is an intimate part of 'national' identity, part of the national mythology. While there are regional differences in many states, and often a rural/urban distinction, in Italy the regional divide is particularly sharp, both in terms of emigration and immigration. The greatest proportion of Italy's emigrants left from the South and from Sicily (others from this region migrated to the industrial North) and this experience seems to account for a different response to migrants referred to by some of the interviewees. As one respondent put it – 'the North of Italy is like the rest of Europe –

[4] The fieldwork took place over a period of five months, during which interviews were carried out with migrants, policy-makers and NGOs. Most of the interviews took place in Rome, though some interviews were carried out in Milan and Turin in the North, and in Lecce in the South. Given the heterogeneity of the migrant population in Italy, there was no intention to interview representative sample of migrants. Instead interviews were conducted with as broad a range of people as possible, especially in terms of legal status and length of residence.

[5] The Bossi-Fini Law (2002) creates a quota for such returnees from Argentina in particular. In future research, we hope to compare the situation of this group with the German Aussiedler from East Europe.

racist. In the South, they are ignorant about us, but they are good people (*brava gente)*' (*40SM*). This divide is reflected in the stronger support for anti-immigrant parties, such as the *Lega Nord* in the North of Italy (in spite of the high demand for migrant labour in this region – Zamagni 2000).

Nonetheless, the strength of the Left (by comparison with the rest of Europe) and of the Catholic church in Italy has led to overt expressions of solidarity unseen in other European states, culminating in January 2002 in Rome in a 100 000 strong march against the more restrictive laws introduced by the centre-right government. In spite of a strong presence on that demonstration, the level of self-organisation of migrants remains low, especially by comparison with Britain, for example. One explanation for this is that the migrant population in Italy has tended to be much more heterogeneous than in the traditional immigration states (Caritas 2002), while others have attributed the lack of self-organisation to the role of the Church and to historical factors (Danese 2001). These and other explanations will be considered later in the paper.

While some North European states actively recruited labour from abroad (including from Italy), labour migration to Italy was largely spontaneous until the late 1990s (Campani 1993). There was no equivalent of the guest-worker schemes that marked the German migration experience, nor the recruitment drives by British agencies and employers in the West Indies. While the Catholic Church assisted in the search for employment, occasionally providing contacts with families in Italy looking for domestic workers (Macioti & Pugliese 1998:105-6)[6], this was on an individual and informal basis. The work that people found for themselves on arrival was often in the informal sector and precarious, though more or less regular and stable (Ambrosini 2000: 146). The size of the informal

[6] This was borne out by a number of the interviewees in our study, who had come to Italy as a result of mediation by members of religious orders who had provided contacts to Italian families and references for the domestic workers.

employment sector in Italy (Reyneri 1999), the *de facto* 'open door' policy (Zincone 1994; Martiniello 1996) of Italian governments until the late 1990s[7], and the more or less regular 'regularisation' programmes introduced by governments since 1986 have all influenced the processes of migration and settlement in Italy.

Italian governments became more interventionist in this policy area both as a response to increasing numbers of migrants entering with and without documentation, but perhaps even more in response to developments in other European countries and in the EU. While Italy had traditionally been a transit country for migrants heading North to France and Germany, and to a lesser extent to Britain, the shift from a country of net emigration to one of net immigration was accelerated from the mid-1980s onwards as a result of increasing restrictions on entry to other European states, and the movement of people from the Balkans fleeing conflict and economic collapse in that region. It reached a peak in 1991 when thousands of people arrived in boats on the coast of Italy from Albania. That a significant proportion of entrants, though how large is impossible to say, appeared to be entering without going through the normal entry controls was increasingly the subject of media and public attention. These '*clandestini*' were frequently linked in the media and public discourse to increases in crime and demands for the control of 'clandestine' migration grew.

While it might be argued that the increase in the numbers of migrants in Italy seemed to warrant some kind of government response, Martiniello argues that 'Italian migration policy is largely inspired by the European policies…and by the orientation proposed by the European Commission in terms of migration policy in 1985' (1996:239) and Pastore (1999) has pointed out that the Martelli Law (Legge 39/90) was passed just before Italy

[7] Macioti & Pugliese (1998) and Zincone (1994) outline the provisions of Act 943 (1986), though pointing out that effect was not really given to this law. As Zincone points out, the discrepancy 'between laws and their administrative implementation is typical of the Italian political system' (1994:131).

signed the Schengen agreement in 1990, that this law was subsequently amended in 1993 by the law that ratified Schengen. Subsequently, the Napolitano-Turco Law (Legge 40/98) was part of Italy's drive to become a fully paid up member of the Schengen border-free zone. Interviews by the author with Italian civil servants in 1999[8] confirmed that Italy's immigration policy agenda largely followed that of the EU – though its implementation might not be all that the agenda-setting member states would wish. Nonetheless, associations lobbying on behalf of migrants have also sought to play this card where EU policy is more progressive than national policy[9]. The Napolitano-Turco law, while it included a number of progressive provisions relating to the right to health and education of all migrants (introduced under pressure from the associations), including undocumented migrants, also contained a number of repressive measures designed to placate its Northern neighbours – especially relating to expulsions.

Italy had come under direct pressure from individual EU partners such as Germany, to control its external borders (Schuster 2003 *forthcoming*; Pastore 1999; Martiniello 1996*)*. Germany's support for the Dublin Convention was driven by the assumption that many of those claiming asylum in Germany (for example, Kurds from Turkey) had travelled through Italy, and should be returned to Italy to make their claims. Nonetheless, although many of the Turkish Kurds we spoke to in Rome had spent time in Germany and then been forced to leave and headed South, this was due less to the Dublin Convention and more to Germany's insistence that the PKK is a terrorist organisation and their consequent refusal to grant Turkish Kurds asylum. In general, the Dublin Convention has proved overly bureaucratic and cumbersome to administer.

[8] Interviews with civil servants in the Ministry of Labour and with Italian members of the High Level Working Group on Asylum – November 1999.
[9] Interview with Annemarie DuPré (Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe) Rome 10 October 2001

More recent arrivals had come directly to Italy from Turkey, explaining that 'Italy was now their only hope in Europe'[10]. All of our Kurdish interviewees, and other Turkish Kurds we spoke to informally, hoped to go to Germany once they had regularised their status. The response of our Kurdish respondents to the German asylum policy was to move temporarily, they hoped, to Italy (and in 2 cases to Belgium) where they believed they had some hope of changing their legal status. This link between physical and status mobility was found also in other groups in our study.

The Study

The study focuses on the process of inclusion and exclusion of migrants and minorities in a number of European societies. We chose a broad understanding of each term, so that inclusion is taken to mean having access to, in this case, Italian territory and political, social and economic resources, such as information, political participation, social networks, education, healthcare and work. By exclusion we mean from the territory, through visa regimes, borders controls, restrictions on access to work, movement, education, healthcare and social networks, but also from society generally through racism, xenophobia and prejudice.

The study combines interviews with policy-makers, NGOs, and migrants themselves with an analysis of Italian policy and legislation, as well as an examination of primary and secondary literature in English and Italian. Interviewees were contacted using gatekeepers, such as church and migrant organisations and snowballing, where early interviewees, encountered at meeting and demonstrations, would take me to the hostels and squats in which they lived and introduce me to friends, family and acquaintances. The interviews with migrants took place either in people's homes, or in the offices of charities that

[10] Interview with Turkish Kurds, ex Mattatoio, Rome 6 December 2001

functioned as informal labour exchanges. They were structured around a questionnaire, devised during earlier fieldwork and revised with the assistance of a small group of migrants from different countries at the start of the fieldwork in Rome. The open-ended questions covered three main areas: life before migration, the events and journeys that occurred between leaving the country of origin and arriving in Italy, and life in Italy, including the benefits and difficulties it brought. It was during these interviews that attention was drawn to significance of status mobility. The interviews were supplemented by conversations with street peddlers and those who slept in Rome's parks and streets.

Status Mobility

During the fieldwork, it became clear that since their arrival in Italy the overwhelming majority of the interviewees had found themselves fitting more than one of the migrant categories we had identified. In some cases, people had been documented, then become undocumented, regularised their status temporarily and then subsequently found themselves once again without a residence permit. This shifting between categories is here referred to as status mobility. That it was so widespread among our (admittedly small and unrepresentative) sample seemed at the very least to indicate a high level of insecurity of status among a proportion of Italy's foreign population[11]. The work of Bloch (1999, 2002) has highlighted the significance of security for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Britain and our research suggest that this applies also to migrants elsewhere (Schuster and Solomos 2002). For this reason, it seems important to look more closely at this phenomenon.

The migrants interviewed included labour migrants, both skilled and unskilled; people who had come to join their partners or other family members; asylum seekers (including those

[11] The level of mobility across these categories was unexpected and alerted us to the need to consider this factor in the other countries we are studying.

returned from other EU countries, especially Germany) and refugees; undocumented migrants who had either entered and remained without papers or who had entered with a visa or temporary residence permit, but then either failed to renew it after it expired or failed to apply when one became necessary. Statistics reflecting the changes of status outlined by our respondents are unavailable and would obviously be difficult, if not impossible to compile, since they cannot accurately reflect such complex processes. The *Dossier Statistico – Immigrazione* produced annually by Caritas Rome is nonetheless an important document, offering some indications of trends over time. Table 1 is compiled from their latest *Dossier* and indicates the many reasons for the residence of foreigners in Italy:

Table 1

Resident Migrants in Italy – Motives for Residence	**2001**	**%**
***Work**	**800,680**	**58.8**
** Self-Employed*	89,498	*6.6*
** Employed*	650,787	*47.8*
**Unemployed*	60,395	*4.4*
***Family Reunion**	**393,865**	**28.9**
***Other**	**168,085**	**12.3**
Religious	48,898	*3.6*
Elective residence	44,635	*3.2*
Study	30,790	*2.3*
** Applying for Asylum*	5,115	*0.4*
Other	38,647	*2.8*
Total	**1,362,630**	**100**

Source: Elaborazione Caritas – Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2002 su dati del Ministero dell' Interno

While the sample of people interviewed during the fieldwork was not representative of those resident in Italy, it did include at least one person from each of the marked (*) categories. At the time of the interviews, 4 out of 5 interviewees had residence permits (the proportion of asylum seekers and refugees interviewed was higher than their proportion in the migrant population – 20%). However, approximately 65% of the interviewees had been without papers at some stage since their arrival in Italy.

The majority of resident aliens in Italy give work (58.8%) as their reason for residency. The second largest group are family members (28.9%). There are no figures in this table for those with refugee status, but they are included in the category *Other* (38,647)[12]. The number of people awaiting the outcome of their asylum claim is very low (5,115), reflecting perhaps not just Italy's underdeveloped asylum system, but the preference of those seeking asylum for countries where they can find larger communities of co-nationals. As in Europe generally, the main categories of those seeking asylum are people from the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Turkey, all of whom have established communities in Germany, Britain and France[13], but not in Italy. The numbers of Afghanis, Iraqis and Turks/Kurds in Italy are so small that they do not feature on Caritas' table of countries of origin of legally resident migrants in Italy, while people from former Yugoslavia number just over 40,000 (Caritas 2001: 121), very few by comparison with Germany in particular.

Reyneri[14] argues that few migrants enter Italy with a residence permit (1999: 83), although the numbers are obviously very difficult to quantify. However, many do enter legally on tourist visas and a small number on student visas (which do not give them the right to work) and only later become undocumented. In Italy there is a great deal of attention paid to 'clandestini' – but as was pointed out in the Caritas Dossier (2001), and as representatives of the main unions stress, the majority of migrants in Italy are legally present. For many this is a result of one of the four regularisations programmes employed by Italian governments (in 1986, 1990, 1996 and 1998 – for details see Martiniello 1996 and Reyneri 1999). Presumably the regularisation of domestic workers, carers and other

[12] In 2001, Caritas put the number of refugees at 23,000. Personal communication Antonio Ricci, Caritas Roma (31 July 2002).
[13] In Germany there are almost 2 million Turkish people, of whom a high proportion are Kurds, 662,000 people from the former Yugoslavia and more than 72,00 Afghanis.
[14] While the fieldwork on which this article was based was carried out in Rome, our findings closely mirrored that of Reyneri whose fieldwork was conducted in Milan.

workers announced in 2002 will again augment the numbers of documented migrants in Italy.

Those who are undocumented had often entered Italy legally, having either come from countries, particularly in Latin America, from which no visa was required or they had entered on a tourist visa, that is, they were 'documented' or 'legal' for the first few months of their sojourn in Italy, only losing that status when they stayed after the expiry of their visa or residence permit or breached the conditions of entry or residence (for example, by working). Following regularisation programmes, many then become 'documented' again, receiving both a residence and work permit – though sometimes only temporarily.

Even those who managed to regularise their status and who had obtained a residence and work permit were sometimes unable to maintain their new status. The regularisations were often for limited periods of one or two years[15], which meant that some who had been undocumented became undocumented again if they were unable to renew their residence permits. The shifts from one legal status to another made by people were often multiple and complex – sometimes because of circumstances beyond their control, such as an inability to maintain the circumstances that rendered their permits valid (for example, prolonged periods of unemployment), or due to a change in circumstances in the country of origin. An example of the latter case was the woman from Congo who, having been a privileged migrant for many years (the wife of a diplomat) became an asylum seeker looking for work as a domestic servant when Mobutu was ousted from power.

Usually, when status changed as a result of circumstances the migrant could not control, it was from a higher or more secure status to a lesser status. Improvements in status tended to be a result of migrants adopting strategies and responding to opportunities that presented

[15] My thanks to Sergio Briguglio for pointing out that a migrant can only avail him- or herself of a regularisation once. If it lapses, even for only a few days, the migrant may become undocumented once again because of an inability to renew his or her permit.

themselves, sometimes as a result of government policy (that is, regularisations), though there is no guarantee that such improvements in status will be permanent. The two-thirds of our respondents who had been undocumented at some point feared that the new Bossi-Fini law would mean that they would be unable to renew their permits and would become irregular.

The Napolitano-Turco Law for the 4th time in 12 years created the opportunity for some of the thousands of undocumented migrants resident in Italy to regularise their status, and, as a result, to move from the shadow to the regular economy. One could get a two year residence permit, provided it was possible to prove that one met certain criteria relating to accommodation, employment and date of arrival in Italy. However, different *Questura* (police stations) or *Ufficio Stranieri* (Aliens Office) interpreted the law differently, some refusing documentation that others would accept, some *Questura* accepted informal letters as proof of tenancy or work, while others insisted on more formal documents. Some interviewees commented that the proofs could change from morning to afternoon, depending on who they saw. At a meeting in the main *Questura* in Rome[16], Nicola Calipari, the head of the *Aliens Office* noted that many of the work contracts produced as evidence of employment when renewing residence permits were dated only a few days previously. In interviews and conversations with Romans, people explained that the employers, who preferred to employ people without paying tax or insurance would sometimes agree to offer a contract just before their employee's residence permit expired, but that once it was granted they would revert to an informal arrangement. Where employers were unwilling to produce a contract, another Italian friend might agree to sign one. Such strategies and collaborations enabled the migrants to secure their residence in

[16] The meeting (15 November 2001) was between the Head of the Aliens Office and representations of a number of associations who wished to express concern about the renewal of residence permits, conditions in the accommodation centres for refugees and 'old' unresolved regularisation cases (those outstanding since 1998).

Italy, and created the possibility of moving into regular employment, though this did not necessarily follow.

Aside from the regularisation programme, Napolitano-Turco also introduced legal channels for the entry of labour migrants and those seeking work from abroad, though particular countries with which Italy reached agreements, such as Albania, Morocco and Tunisia were granted annual quotas. Such quotas are almost always contingent on readmission agreements. For example, when Morocco did not co-operate sufficiently in facilitating the return of its citizens who were in Italy without permits, its quota of labour migrants was cut[17]. Nonetheless, it was an important departure that allowed people to enter and remain legally. The decision to suspend these 'quotas' in 2001 was greeted with alarm by trade unions and others who argued that people would once again be pushed into 'illegality'[18]. However, the labour market demand for seasonal workers meant the government had to allow a quota of such workers into Italy, and throughout 2002 increased it to 56,000[19] together with 3,000 self-employed persons.

Another important innovation of the Napolitano-Turco Law was the sponsorship scheme, which allowed anyone legally resident in Italy to invite someone to Italy for work or to look for work. Under this provision, not only businesses, but also individuals were allowed to sponsor people who to enter Italy for a year to look for work. The sponsor, who could be an Italian citizen, an authorised association, or a local body such as the Commune di Roma, guaranteed that the new arrival would have accommodation, food and healthcare (i.e. that he or she will not be a charge on public funds) while they searched for work. If they found work, their residence permit was extended, if not they were required to return at the expense of the sponsor to their country of origin at the end of the year. Although there

[17] Interview with Giulia Falzoi, International Organisation of Migration (IOM), Rome 23 January 2002 and Giovanni Pinto, Ministry of Interior, Rome 17 November 2001
[18] Interview with Alyoune Gueye, CGIL, 2 November 2001, Rome
[19] The initial quota in February was 33,000, augmented in March by an additional 6,400, in June by 6,600, and by 10,000 in July (email from Sergio Briguglio).

were problems with the scheme, the quota of 15,000 sponsorship places in the first year was exhausted in a few days[20], it was still an important channel as it allowed people to enter and try their luck legally, i.e. without incurring large debts to traffickers or smugglers. However it should be noted that many of those who entered in this way had earlier been present in Italy without papers, but having found a sponsor, left to return again with documents – a further example of the capacity of individuals to use the opportunities presented to move from one, insecure, status to a more secure status.

Almost all migrants in Italy have a more or less *insecure* status. Even refugee status is *de jure* not a secure status, as it carries with it only the right to a temporary, renewable residence (and, perhaps, work) permit[21]. Although the number of people claiming asylum in Italy is still comparatively low, it is rising, partly as a result of the Dublin Convention, but more due to greater restrictions in other European countries. Although the Napolitano-Turco law introduced *Carta di Soggiorno*, the conditions that have to be met (5 years legal residency, and a non-fixed contract of employment at the time of application [paying taxes and social contributions, etc.]) are so strict that in the first 3 years after their introduction less than 40,000 had been issued[22]. Until recently, *Questura* had also demanded that the applicant should have been in possession of valid work permits for the five years, but a circular from the Ministry of the Interior (3 July 2002) stipulated that the last condition was not necessary and it is expected that this will mean that the numbers of people in possession of a *Carta di Soggiorno* will increase considerably from now on.

However, this promise of increased stability for some was matched by the possibility of increased instability for others. The Berlusconi government initially suspended the

[20] According to unofficial data, in 2001 the same quota of 15,000 was exhausted within a few hours and amounted to only 10% of the actual applications to sponsor someone from abroad.
[21] Renewal of the residence permit is dependent on the continued status as refugee. The permit is initially granted for two years, and then is usually granted for a further 4 years. Before this second period expires the refugee should become eligible for the *Carta di Soggiorno* and ultimately for naturalisation, though this remains at the discretion of the state.
[22] Interview with Dr Compagnucci, Ministry of the Interior – 8 November 2001

'quotas' for migrants, arguing that no more should be allowed in until work had been found for the unemployed in Italy. However, relatively quickly it changed tack and followed what has become a tradition by now, introducing a limited regularisation for domestic, care and other workers (to take effect in September 2002). The regularisation of these workers was recognition by the government of something the public had been aware of for some time - the extent to which Italian society and economy relied on migrant workers to care for the elderly and the very young, in particular especially since the Italian welfare state is much slimmer than that of Germany, France and even the UK.

The Bossi-Fini law will nonetheless make the status of migrants in Italy even more precarious, since the period that they are allowed to remain if they become unemployed has been reduced from one year to six months. Our research findings indicate a high degree of awareness of these proposals (though there was also considerable confusion about the details) and that many migrants, new and established, were unsettled and concerned by these developments, which could once again mean that they were living without documents and without protection from expulsion. Although the law did not actually come into force until June 2002, 4 months after the fieldwork ended, it became clear during the research that already the different *Questura* where migrants are required to register and renew their permits were anticipating the restrictions. Those people interviewed whose permits were coming up for renewal were very unsure whether they would be renewed and whether this would mean their status would change and they would become 'illegal', although nothing else in terms of employment or accommodation had changed for them.

One of the questions asked of the migrant interviewees was which single event had the greatest impact on their quality of life after arrival in Italy. For those who had always had some kind of 'legal' status, the answers varied. In some cases, it was learning to speak

Italian, finding a particular job, making a contact or being joined by their partner/children. For those without documents, it was invariably the acquisition of papers. When asked why, the response was always the same – having documents meant that they could return home to visit family and friends – they could become geographically mobile again.

Geographic mobility

For sometime now scholars have been arguing that migration is not just a simple trajectory, that is, a migrant leaves country a for country b, either temporarily but regularly as a seasonal or 'guest' migrant, or he or she gradually relinquishes the dream of returning home, and instead, marries and settles and founds a family, this second generation growing up with a greater or lesser sense of being part of that society. While many migrants in Europe do fit this profile (in Britain, France and Germany settled migrant and minority communities account for 5%-10% of the total population, and amount to several million people (Grillo 2001)), there are other migration trajectories.

More recently, a discourse of transnationalism has emerged, meaning 'the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (Basch et al 1994:7; Grillo 2001; Vertovec 2001, see also the website of the ESRC Transnational Communities Programme at www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk). What unifies both of these positions is that, in spite of the talk of transnational spaces and border crossings, the migrant is still primarily seen as moving between (only) two (nation)-states – that of origin and that of settlement. A partial exception is research that focuses on elite migration, that is, the migration of professionals and the management of, for example, TNCs (Miles and Satzewich 1990, Jordan & Düvell forthcoming 2003).

Our research points to the experiences of a group of people, whose experiences are testimony to the variety of migratory movements, which may be single, unidirectional journeys, but which are also often continuous, circular or return journeys giving rise to transnational networks and communities of people whose lives and loyalties transcend the boundaries of different nation-states (see also Solomos and Schuster 2000, Jordan and Düvell 2002). The experiences of the people are marked by their physical or geographical mobility. Some people we spoke to had set out for a particular destination, but had spent prolonged periods, sometimes years, in Italy (and other countries) en route. This continuing mobility seems to be stronger in Italy than in Britain[23], France or Germany. Italy continues to be a weigh station on journeys further North and West.

Sometimes the serial sojourns are due to financial difficulties, or to the traffickers to whom people are in debt. In other cases it is because of the policies of transit and destination states that place hurdles across paths to final destinations. One of the interviewees in Rome, from Bangladesh[24], had spent two years in Korea but was forced to leave because of the collapse of the currency. Others had paid money to traffickers to get to Europe but been abandoned en route. In one case, an undocumented migrant had spent 8 months in the Ukraine, where he was imprisoned for begging to survive while he waited for his parents to raise more money for the traffickers.

Perhaps the most extreme version of this geographical mobility were 'refugees-in-orbit' – individuals for whom no state would take responsibility, and who were forced to travel from one country to another seeking asylum. The Dublin Convention was supposed to be a solution to this problem, specifying the country responsible for examining a claim. However, asylum seekers are still travelling from country to country seeking protection.

[23] Although Britain, for example, was also a transit country for migrants intending to travel on to the US and Canada, this began to change after the end of the Second World War, and for some time Britain has been predominantly (though not exclusively), a destination country.

[24] Interview with undocumented man from Bangladesh, Vittorio Occupato, Ostia 2 December 2001

Some Kurdish asylum seekers we met had made for Germany, crossing through Italy. They may spend months or years in Germany, before their claims are rejected, returning to Italy either to try for asylum there under an assumed name[25] or in the hope that they can survive in Italy in the shadow economy until such time as they can take advantage of a regularisation.

One interviewee had spent four years in Germany as an asylum seeker, then a further year without papers when his claim was rejected. He then went to Belgium where he tried once again (under an assumed name) to claim asylum. During the next two years he moved back and forward between Belgium and Germany, until his claim was rejected (his deception was uncovered when his fingerprints were checked). Having travelled to Portugal, Spain and Switzerland, he decided to try for asylum again in Italy. In total, he had been moving from one country to another, with longer and shorter sojourns for seven years. This was one example of the determination of asylum seekers not to return to countries where they feared persecution and of the difficulties involved in returning rejected asylum seekers to their country of origin. The net result is a growing population of people in a precarious situation, unable to plan or prepare for a future.

Another interviewee had spent four years in Germany, before deciding to try and re-establish himself in Turkey. After two years, he decided to leave once again, conditions having worsened there. This time, however, he decided to go to Italy 'because it was possible to enter and because they give asylum to Kurds'[26]. This view was echoed by another Kurdish asylum seeker, who said 'I knew I had to come Italy, it was the only place we had a chance for asylum'[27]. Others among the interviewees had spent up to two years in Italy, before attempting to return to Germany again (though again, some had made

[25] This has become increasingly difficult since Eurodac, the centralised European computer that stores the fingerprints of asylum-seekers and others, became operational. Two of the Turkish Kurdish asylum seekers interviewed had been discovered in this way.
[26] Interview with Turkish Kurds, ex Mattatoio, Rome 6 December 2001
[27] Interview with Turkish Kurds, ex Mattatoio, Rome 6 December 2001

occasional brief forays north to visit family). Italy's more sympathetic response to Kurdish asylum seekers was a decisive factor for many of those we met in choosing Italy. For many their plan was to move on to Germany once their status was secure. For other asylum seekers, such as those from Congo-Kinshasa, they had little choice about their final destination as they were dependent on traffickers or friends who would get them on the first plane out.

For others, their reason for choosing Italy was contacts provided by churches in their home countries[28], or because of kinship or friendship chains[29]. In such cases, the intention was usually to spend about two years abroad[30], sending enough money home to educate others or to start up a business and then to return home. However, among those interviewed were a number of people who having, returned to their countries of origin for a longer or shorter period, came back to Italy again – in some cases because they could not settle at 'home' again, in others because of a renewed financial crisis or worsening political circumstances, or for other reasons[31].

Other migrants chose to split their time between host and home states. For some, such as the Senegalese interviewees, this 'shuttle migration' was possible because of the lack of visa restrictions that Italy had imposed on their home states. Though the interviewees from Kenya and Ecuador found it more difficult to travel back and forth because of the cost, they had chosen to come to Italy in the first place because no visa was required. Others (Algerians, Sri Lankans) chose Italy as a first destination because, although visas were required, they were not difficult to get. However, as Italy followed the example of other

[28] Two Kenyan interviewees spoke of assistance they had had from Italian missionaries.
[29] This was especially true for women from the Philippines, but also Bangladeshis, Cameroonians, Ecuadorians, Kenyans, Pakistanis and Sri Lankans.
[30] Each person interviewed who voiced such an intention said that they had hoped to stay for just two years. In some cases, they had revised this to five, in others they no longer put a definite limit on their stay, but were certain that they would return home.
[31] In one case, a woman returned to Tunisia with her daughter when her marriage broke up, but ill-health and the difficulty of finding work meant she had to leave her daughter with her parents and return to Italy for treatment and work.

European states and introduced visas for nationals of more states, this movement between countries has become more difficult.

Sometimes migrants 'secondary' migrate – having arrived in one part of Italy – they the move to another. In some cases they became part of a traditional 'seasonal' migration. Depending on the harvesting of different crops in different parts of Italy, temporary labour shortages arise that are filled through the seasonal movement of non-EU migrants. As Martiniello (1996: 231) points out, this fits with the traditional model of internal Italian migration. Many undocumented people arriving in Italy arrive in the South, where they remain until they can regularise their status because it is easier for them to find work, accommodation etc. in the shadow economy. Once they have papers, they then move north where they hope to find 'regular' work (i.e. paying taxes and social insurance contributions) settle, and send for their families[32]. Nonetheless, some of the people interviewed who had followed this trajectory found that the scarcity of accommodation or level of racism and discrimination in the North meant that they preferred to move to Rome or further south (these were in the minority).

Settlement and Community Formation

What impact does this continued mobility in and out of different migration statuses and communities have on the migrants themselves, on their communities and on their host communities? We have no firm answers to these questions yet, but the interviews, discussions and conversations with migrants have raised issues that need further investigation. We would suggest that the lack of stability, both in terms of location and legal status has serious implications for the formation of communities, for their sense of security and their capacity to argue for greater protection and equality. Perhaps most

[32] Interview with Alyoune Gueye, CGIL, 2 November 2001, Rome

importantly, this mobility, both geographical and between migration statuses, means that there is a growing population in Europe whose interests are scarcely represented in public fora.

Perhaps it is because we view the Italian situation through the British experience, but the weakness and paucity of migrant organisations seems particularly important. Although there are significant communities of Moroccans (159,599), Albanians (142,066), Romanians (68,929), Philippinas (65,353) and Chinese (60,075) in Italy (Caritas 2001) these communities are dispersed throughout Italy and are not as numerically strong as the communities formed by people from the former colonies of Britain or France or by the Turkish and ex-Yugoslav communities in Germany (see ftn.9). If these populations were represented in some capacity other than their nationality, for example – migration status, length of residence etc., there would be less cause for concern. However, since what organisations there are, are by and large organised around nationality[33], this segmentation of migrant communities makes it difficult to agitate for rights in the same way that many migrants and minorities in Britain the 70s did when united behind the term 'black' or the way in which the lack of papers in France brought together the *Sans Papiers* (which served as an umbrella identity even when migrants in France also tended to cluster in national groups).

A number of interviewees commented on the different levels of organisation between the different national groups, so that the Senegalese seemed to be very active in the trade unions (the migrant representatives in the two main unions CGIL and CISL are Senegalese), while Albanians, Moroccans, Philippinos and Tunisians, the largest groups in

[33] Interview with Cheikh Tidiane Diop, Senegalese Community Association, Florence 2 November 1999

Italy are much less politically active[34]. Many of those in community and migrant organisations spoke of the difficulties they face in getting the 'critical mass' necessary to make their voices heard and to access resources. One of our interviewees, from Senegal, had lived, worked and been politically active in the north of Italy, but had become weary of the racism and the struggle against it and had moved south to Rome, where he was no longer politically active.

Most of those who had access to office space, telephones, fax machines, etc. were dependent on the churches. This was particularly true in Rome, where *Migrantes* a Catholic organisation hosted Cape Verdean, Philippine and Polish organisations[35]. Nonetheless, critical mass seems independent of actual numbers. Although the total population of Bangladeshis in Italy is just over 20,000 (1.5% of the entire migrant population) there are in Rome two Bangladeshi organisations that have offices and are vociferous in arguing for the rights of their constituency. The leaders of these organisations, who appear to believe they are in competition with each other, wield a certain amount of power as a result of links with the police, which reinforce their own power within the community[36].

Although many of the migrants who come to Italy are Catholic, they also tend to divide and congregate in different parishes in Rome, and the same is true of Russians and Ukrainians who have 'their' particular Orthodox churches. While it is true that the Catholic Church has been a strong and constant champion of migrants' rights in Italy, it is also true that church organisations have tended to speak for migrants, rather than encouraging their self-organisation. Danese has suggested that the Churches play a conservative role, enabling migrants, especially those from the Philippines, to endure, rather than change

[34] Interviews with Gaia Danese EUI, Florence 9 September 1999 and Jonathan Chaloff CENSIS Foundation, Rome 21 September 2001.
[35] All of these organisations were run by and primarily, though not exclusively for women.
[36] Interviews with Mohammed Kibria, Bangladesh Association, Rome, 8 June 2000 & and Jonathan Chaloff CENSIS Foundation, Rome 21 September 2001.

their situations[37]. While this may be true to an extent, Church representatives have also on occasion been more radical than many on the left in Italy.

The largest group entering Italy are from Islamic countries, but once again, where people have formed associations, they tend to be national associations (Algerian, Bangladesh, Moroccan, Pakistani etc.). On the one hand, this is unsurprising, people are unified by a common language, but on the other hand when national groups are relatively small, and the challenges they face are broadly similar (legal status, employment, accommodation) this segmentation militates against the creation of any strong voice.

This lack of a voice is exacerbated by a complaint frequently voiced by policy-makers (and not just in Italy), which is that the 'community leaders' or 'representatives' that do come forward are not representative. There are a very small number of high profile first generation migrants in Italy, such as the journalist Maria de Lourdes Jesus, who is both a role model and an advocate for migrants. However, these are the exception rather than the rule in Italy. The two main trade unions CGIL and CISL have as their representatives Souleyman Sanghare and Alyoune Gueye from Senegal, but it hard to avoid the impression that these two men are 'tokens'. It seems that a more common trajectory is that once migrants have established themselves they tend to concentrate on their own careers and withdraw from politics and campaigning.

Conclusion

Although many of Italy's migrants do come directly from the Philippines, Senegal and Ethiopia, for example, and do not move beyond Italy, returning more or less regularly for visits home, our initial impressions are of a growing proportion of people who for various reasons move and keep moving from one place to another and from one migration status to

[37] Interview with Gaia Danese EUI, Florence 9 September 1999

another. From the discussion in this paper, the two forms of mobility do seem to be linked. The increasing likelihood of having one's asylum claim rejected by one and possibly more countries is driving a growing number of people to keep moving in the hope of finding security somewhere. Mobility within Europe is also encouraged by the different possibilities of regulating one's status depending on where one goes/is. This mobility has certain implications for the social, political and economic inclusion of migrants, in that it makes the articulation and promotion of migrants' varied and changing interests very difficult.

The mobility described is clearly not a problem when it leads to an improvement in an individual's personal circumstances or status, or when it is freely chosen. However, from the interviews in Italy, it seems that the choice exercised is very limited and that the shift between migration statuses is often to a less secure status. This insecurity makes it very difficult and sometimes impossible to build and maintain the kind of family and social networks that are essential to human thriving. This applies both to networks 'at home' and in the 'host society'. While modern communications mean that phonecalls and emails sustain links with families and friends over thousands of miles, the need to acquire papers in order to be able to see and hold partners, children, parents, extended family members and friends was clearly evident in the responses to the questionnaire.

While the first reaction on acquiring papers was almost inevitably to return home, to renew contact with loved ones, the impact on life in the host country was also very strong. The acquisition of papers meant that plans for the future could be made, and that there was the possibility that they would be realised. In future research, we hope to trace the development of new social and family networks in the host society and investigate the interrelation between such development and security of status.

A secure status did not automatically lead to greater involvement politically in the host society, sometimes quite the opposite. Among the interviewees were a number who, having acquired papers sought only to build a 'normal' life, to become invisible. This is a phenomenon commented on by Alyoune Gueye (CGIL), Souleyman Saghare (CISL), and Pape Diaw of the Senegalese Association in Florence. Only those who are secure in terms of status can afford to be highly visible, whether in Unions, associations or in politics. For those without any status, or with only a temporary or insecure status, the costs of involvement may be considered too high. Though it is too early to claim a direct causal link between this unsettled status – in both senses – and the weaknesses of migrant organisations, it is a link that we believe necessitates further investigation. In the larger project, which compares the Italian situation with that in Britain, France and Germany, it is a factor we will explore in greater detail.

In terms of economic inclusion, there are some resonances between the findings from this study and those of Jordan and Düvell (2002) and Reyneri (1999). Undocumented and documented migrants in Italy find it relatively easy to enter the shadow labour market, a market in which there are also large numbers of Italians, though there is a certain stratification according to sector. However, while migrants may work alongside Italians, spend money in Italian markets, pay rent to Italian landlords, their interaction is severely limited, especially if they are not only working, but also present without a permit. Among the Bangladeshi and Pakistani people, many bought the goods they sell in the street from their co-nationals, Peruvians, Ecuadorians, Philippinas without permits worked for co-nationals who had permits, Poles and Ukrainians shared cleaning jobs with their co-nationals. Most lived with co-nationals (though some did share with other foreigners), often renting from a co-national because it was otherwise extremely difficult who would be prepared to sign a tenancy agreement with someone who was undocumented.

These insecure migrants did not visit shops, cafes or cinemas, but survived on meagre rations bought in markets, saving and or sending money home. They live most of their lives unprotected by laws or the society which they serve.

Although many of these people are forced to move by political, economic and or social factors, and though their choice of destination is often severely constrained, nonetheless it is clear that migrants are exercising choice at some level – their resilience, determination and preparedness to engage in serious long-term planning was extraordinary. Having said that, there were desperate people among the interviewees who found it impossible to conceive of a future, much less make plans, and who felt themselves to be powerless, trapped and unable to move out Italy or out of 'illegality'. The numbers of such people are growing and they are having children, creating a second generation without security of status and forced to move and keep moving. The response of European governments has been to attempt to reduce these numbers by making it more difficult to enter Europe and to survive in Europe. This policy is clearly not working. We would argue that there is a clear need for a radically re-thinking of migration regimes that continue to be predicated on increased controls and token nods towards the integration of 'settled' and 'legally present' migrants.

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