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Italian immigration: the origins, nature and evolution of Italy's migratory systems

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Abstract

This article reconstructs the historical development of foreign settlement in Italy. It shows how Italy is part of a number of different migratory patterns, some of which are interconnected, while others are quite strongly differentiated. This diversity means that the standard images that link Italian immigration with a high degree of social marginalization do not correspond to the more complex realities, and by focusing on short-term aspects simply conflate highly differentiated patterns of migration into one single type. The article begins by reconstructing the patterns of foreign settlement in Italy since the time of Unification and then goes on to analyze the mechanisms of contemporary migrant flows to demonstrate how these derive from very different sets of motives and expectations. The motivations also explain why different immigrant groups respond to the different forms of regulation adopted by the Italian state. The article concludes by reviewing the data presently available on the numbers of foreigners currently in Italy, which indicate that over the last twenty years those numbers have decreased.

Keywords

Immigration, Italy, statistics.

'New' is the adjective commonly used to describe immigration in Italy. This adjective refers to the beginning of the influx, which is usually fixed at the middle of the 1970s when the migratory balance in Italy became positive. This adjective also implies a difference between old and new immigrations, thus underlining the difference of the current influx compared to those of the past. More specifically, this discontinuity refers to the structural mechanisms of immigration. Classical migrations, first among them that of Italians, are assumed to be of workers who move in response to the demand of the countries importing labor. The immigrations of today are considered to be quite different. They are viewed primarily as migrations of the poor and destitute, governed by push factors such as war, famine and poverty within the countries of emigration and relatively independent or at least partially autonomous from the pull factors (Maciotti and Pugliese 1991).¹ Furthermore, the beginning of immigration to Italy is located in the adoption of restrictive policies on the part of European

countries where immigrants traditionally settled. Italian immigration, in other words, is viewed as a fallback choice with respect to more 'natural' or desired destinations (Zincone 1994; Pugliese 2002).

The assumption of this difference naturally has consequences for the actual integration of immigrants in Italy. For example, in spite of problems of integration, the mobility of individuals in the past was viewed as a positive factor, able to generate reciprocal benefits in the economic sphere. Today, instead, it is seen as a potentially negative factor, a harbinger of problems, insecurity and marginality. As one of the best historical reconstructions of contemporary Italy states:

the immigrants who were able to remain in Italy lived in conditions of extreme poverty, and they succeeded only with great difficulty in finding stable occupation . . . many were unable to find any real work, and they were reduced to a squalid survival in immigrant reception centers, in abandoned farmhouses of the Po Valley, in parking lots for campers or on construction sites. . . . The segregation of the indigent Italian population was, in their case, all but complete.

(Ginsborg 1998: 124–5)

In the following pages, we will provide analyses that highlight how this remarkably widespread interpretation of the migratory process in Italy is far from adequate. The stated difference between old and new migrations actually underplays the important similarities between existing immigrations to Italy and the intra-European and transoceanic migrations of the past. Contrary to what one may believe today, past immigrations were not marked by great stability and integration. And the levels of autonomy and instability of contemporary migrations are not nearly as high as one thinks. We will argue, therefore, that there is no solid empirical reason to sustain that immigration to Italy is radically discontinuous compared with other modern immigrations. More specifically, we will sustain that the outcomes and impacts of immigration are very different from the visions of pauperism so common in the literature. Italy is part of a plurality of migratory systems, at times interconnected and at others highly differentiated. If some segments present risks of marginality and elevated difficulties of integration, many others not only do not manifest these problems, but actually show signs of relative economic and social success. Finally, we will show how some of the most noticeable peculiarities in Italian immigration derive more from the concrete choices of Italian migratory policies than from the structural dynamics of the influx.

In the following pages, our starting point will be the observation that emigration and immigration are nothing less than two alternative modalities: immigration in Italy existed long before 1973. If the quantitative dimensions were extremely modest, it was nevertheless grounded in fairly structured local migratory systems (section 1). Second, we will concentrate on the genesis of the current influx, documenting how these movements had begun long before the closing of borders on the part of traditional European countries of immigration.

We will show that legal developments between 1970 and 1986 document how Italy had adopted, at least implicitly, the same restrictive behavior as other European countries (section 2). We will then reconstruct how, within ‘immigration’, there is a plurality of differentiated and for the most part separate migratory systems. In other words, Italy does not have only one type of immigration but many (sections 3 and 4). Finally, we shall focus on the spatial distribution of influxes in different Italian provinces. The data reveal that immigrants of certain nationalities are concentrated in particular provinces, while other national groups are widely dispersed throughout the entire country. These differences can be attributed to work opportunities, geographical proximity, national and local policies and, not least, networks. We will then show how this spatial concentration has on the whole been weakened over the course of the last twenty years.

I Foreigners before immigration

The presence of foreign residents has long been a feature of Italian society. While foreigners in the post-unification period were very different from those we now call immigrants, this category was in any case far less homogeneous than we tend to believe today.

One category of foreigners present in the post-unification period was made up of refugees. Between 1861 and the beginning of World War I, Italian migratory policies were liberal, substantially in line with those of other European countries. From the Hungarians transferred to Turin after the revolutionary movements of 1848 to colonies of exiled Russians – among them Herzen and Bakunin – along the Ligurian coast, refugees, well known to the authorities, have long been present in Italy (Leenders 1995). While of limited dimension, their presence was felt in many Italian urban centers: between 1919 and 1933 immigrants from the growing Soviet Union settled primarily in Milan, where they established businesses, Italo-Russian social clubs and Orthodox churches, which are still exist today. The Armenian massacres produced further influxes of refugees, who became part of the economic and commercial fabric of many cities, even coming to dominate certain commercial niches. Refugees as well as students, merchants and industrialists arrived from Albania. Between 1933 and 1938 – when the approval of racial laws radically changed the situation and all foreign Jews who had entered Italy after 1919 were forced to abandon Italy and her colonies – German Jews were received in the country on the condition that they did not carry out anti-fascist political activity. Although they are not much studied, these influxes of refugees are at the root of Italian legislation on immigration and on the presence of foreigners (Leenders 1995).

Not all foreigners present in united Italy were refugees, however. The Italian censuses – the limits of this source notwithstanding – show that between 1871 and the outbreak of World War II, foreigners made up around two or three per

thousand of the Italian population (Table 1). These figures are without a doubt modest if one considers the entire country, but they testify to the existence of territorial and professional structures. European countries that border Italy and are joined to her through geopolitical bonds are among the most represented: Austria-Hungary, Germany, France, Yugoslavia and Switzerland appear regularly on the list of main nationalities. From these countries came affluent individuals, professionals, landowners, industrialists and members of the ecclesiastical orders. But so too did farm hands, sailors and domestic workers employed by families in Milan or other northern cities. Also on the list were foreigners from non-European countries: Americans, Russians, Argentines, Brazilians and Turks. And foreigners from nations far less represented began to appear, among these the Chinese, whose arrival goes back to the 1920s. Mostly small businessmen, probably from France or other European countries, the Chinese first established themselves in Milan and then moved to Bologna or Tuscany where they entered the silk and fertilizer industries (Pan 1999: 319–21; Cologna 2000).²

In addition to refugees and workers were those ‘elective residence’ immigrants, attracted by Italy’s image as a Mediterranean land rich in history and natural beauty. In this framework we can place other, less noted and insufficiently studied influxes of foreigners. After unification, for example, German, English and Russian communities were established on Capri. The members of these communities were of the upper middle classes and the lesser nobility who were attracted by the less repressive social customs and laws

Table 1 Foreigners in Italian censuses, 1871–2001

Year	Foreign residents	Non-resident foreigners	Total foreigners	Resident Italian population	Foreign residents per 1000 residents	Total foreigners per 1000 residents
1861	–	–	–	22,182,377	–	–
1871	–	–	60,982	27,303,509	–	2.2
1881	–	–	59,956	28,953,480	–	2.1
1901	37,762	23,844	61,606	32,965,504	1.1	1.9
1911	–	–	79,756	35,845,048	–	2.2
1921	89,517	20,923	110,440	39,943,528	2.2	2.8
1931	83,027	54,770	137,797	41,651,617	2.0	3.3
1936	73,920	34,677	108,597	42,943,602	1.7	2.5
1951	47,177	82,580	129,757	47,515,537	1.0	2.7
1961	62,780	–	–	50,623,569	1.2	–
1971	121,116	–	–	54,136,547	2.2	–
1981	210,937	109,841	320,778	56,556,911	3.7	5.7
1991	345,149	279,885	625,034	56,778,031	6.1	11.0
2001*	987,363	252,185	1,239,548	56,305,568	17.5	22.0

Source: Italian censuses, various years;

* provisory data published at www.istat.it

regarding sexual behavior than those of many other countries, where certain behaviors were still punished. Accordingly, from 1860 onwards, Florence, Rome, Naples, Capri and Sorrento saw the establishment of ‘Uranist communities’, as Ulrichs defined homosexuals in the 1800s (Barbagli and Colombo 2001). Though quantitatively modest, these exiles, dissidents, revolutionaries, nobles and professionals (but also sailors, farm hands, domestic workers and nannies) constituted the first settlements of foreigners structured by area and profession, as well as the first group addressed by Italian migratory policies. The regulations introduced to manage these groups have played a significant role in the administrative management of the influx of foreign workers.

2 The genesis of immigration in Italy

A fairly rich bibliography exists on the beginnings of the migratory processes in contemporary Italy. In general, the research identifies the oil crisis of 1973 as the turning point and the beginning of immigration towards Italy. This is the moment in which European countries that traditionally imported labor adopted a restrictive policy (Sciortino 2000). The beginning of immigration in Italy is thus viewed as a fallback choice in response to the closing of traditional European destinations. This research is based primarily on data about residency permits, a crucial source for studying the legal component of immigration. According to the data provided by the Ministry of the Interior, residency permits increased from 147,000 in 1970 to 450,000 in 1986 (Bonifazi 1998: 121). Even without taking into consideration the illegal component, which deserves a separate discussion, the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s witness a consistent increase of the legal component of immigration (Macioti and Pugliese 1991; Bonifazi 1998).

This description, however, is based on a gross over-estimation of the ‘natural’ growth of the legal component in Italy. The data used up to now actually include numerous expired residency permits that were not cancelled from the archives; their accumulation over time falsely inflated the data regarding permits. Even though the presence of expired permits in the archives has always been known, the full extent was not. Therefore, we asked the Ministry of the Interior to provide us with a revision of the data applying to 1980–1991, including the net data of expired permits. The data thus obtained reveal quite a different story from the one with which we are familiar.

Let us begin with the 1970s. Even though we do not have new data for these years, a careful look at the available data reveals that legal immigration did not increase in the 1970s. The available data, which still include the expired permits, show an absence of significant variations in the inventory of residency permits (Table 2). The only significant growth of the legal presence of foreigners during this period takes place between 1970 and 1974, before the oil crisis and the adoption of restrictive policies on the part of other European countries. For the three years after 1974, legal immigration remains stable, while there are only marginal increases later.

Table 2 Permits at 31 December of every year

Year	Permits	Year	Valid permits	Year	Valid permits
1970	143,838	1980	198,483	1990	548,193
1971	156,179	1981	207,660	1991	648,935
1972	167,961	1982	209,548	1992	589,457
1973	175,746	1983	207,373	1993	649,102
1974	186,423	1984	194,562	1994	677,791
1975	186,415	1985	194,559	1995	729,159
1976	186,713	1986	207,201	1996	986,020
1977	191,503	1987	282,783	1997	1,022,896
1978	194,062	1988	297,315	1998	1,090,820
1979	205,449	1989	320,104	1999	1,340,655

Source: Elaboration of data from the Ministero degli Interni. The data for 1970–1979, which include expired permits, refer to permits with a validity of more than three months. The data for 1980–1999, which exclude expired permits, refer to residency permits with a validity of more than one month. The years in which there was an amnesty are indicated in italics.

Let us now turn to the 1980s, for which we have more solid and previously unanalyzed data. There is a basic consensus in the literature that the number of residency permits increased considerably in the 1980s. This argument finds confirmation in the data available up to now, which provide the number of residency permits, including those that had expired, for each year. According to the data we have now obtained, in which expired permits are excluded, this growth is not verified in the least. The first appreciable increase in the number of legal immigrants actually occurs much later, with the amnesty of 1986 (Law 943/86). Before the amnesty, the inventory of foreigners legally present never increased significantly. For every 100 permits in 1970, there were only 144 at the time of the first amnesty, not the 313 mentioned up to now in the literature.

It is possible to draw two conclusions from the analysis of these data. First, legal immigration in Italy did not begin in 1974, but earlier. Thus, immigration was related to causes internal to Italy, which the fallback effect may have intensified but certainly did not create. Italy, therefore, was not merely a second choice for immigrants who could not enter other countries. Although it occurred in Italy later than in other countries, Italy was already an autonomous destination in the immigration systems that affected all of post-war Europe (Massey 2002: 25).

Second, the growth of immigration in the 1970s and 1980s occurred within the context of large-scale closure of legal entry points, making it practically impossible for foreigners to obtain a residency permit. It is noted that waves of foreign workers such as maids, responding to a recognized demand for local labor, often entered the country under tourist visas and then stayed on illegally (Andall 2000; Parrenas 2001: 39–48). The data presented here show how the phases of growth in the number of residency permits coincide with amnesties for the legalization of status, at least until the enactment of the *Testo Unico* of

1998. Waves of illegal immigration during the 1970s and 1980s were only absorbed with the amnesties of 1986 and 1990. In 1991, the number of residency permits was actually more than triple that of 1985. Many factors that suggested a fallback immigration by ‘marginal figures’ in reality are the effects of Italian governmental policies during those years, which, despite the high demand for foreign labor on the part of small and mid-size businesses and households, left open only the backdoor of illegal entry. Thus the hypothesis that legal and illegal immigration in Italy increased in the 1970s does not find support in the data. The increase was only in illegal immigration, as can be seen in the amnesties of later years, and which was the result of Italian policies towards migration. Therefore, it is not helpful to distinguish between an illegal immigration of ‘marginal figures’ and a legal immigration of ‘workers’. If two components did exist, they were confused by policies of restriction of legal entry.

An analysis of the progress of foreigners who could take advantage of the amnesties shows convincingly that, once freed of their illegal status, the overwhelming majority succeeded in maintaining a legal position (Carfagna 2002).

3 The many types of immigration in Italy

Researchers have identified various types of migratory influx, based on criteria such as ambitions of the immigrants themselves (Reyneri 1996), the variations in the type of work they seek (Ambrosini 2001; Pugliese 2002), and the length of stay (King and Rybczuck 1993: 191–2). In the following pages, we aim to present a typology of these same fluxes based on the notion of a migratory system and focusing on the sum of connections shared by the countries of emigration and immigration (Castles and Miller 1998: 23–4). We will consider primarily the variables of nationality of the immigrants and the historical periods in which the migrations began and were consolidated. In this way we hope to show how Italy is involved in several migratory systems that begin in different historical moments and that, at times, exhaust themselves because they alter the social, economic and political premises that led to their existence. The list we present, while by no means complete, aims to highlight in particular the migratory systems that have been most overlooked in the available literature.

Post-colonial migrations

Post-war decolonization had important migratory ramifications in all European countries. On the one hand, colonists, administrative and military personnel returned home; on the other, citizens of former colonies who had reason to abandon their liberated countries moved in the same direction as the ex-colonizers. From 1940 to 1960 between 550,000 and 850,000 Italians returned to Italy from the former colonies and the rest of Africa (Bade 2000: 335). In some cases these homecomings were directly responsible for post-colonial migrations

as Italian entrepreneurs, officials and executives brought with them foreign service personnel. Thus the first Tunisian immigrants who arrived in Sicily in 1968 were following Italian entrepreneurs who had abandoned the country in response to the nationalization efforts in 1964–1969.³ The low cost of the voyage from Tunisia to Sicily transformed an Italian region known historically for emigration into one of the first bridgeheads of immigration from southern Mediterranean countries. By the 1960s a minor flow of emigration had also opened from Eritrea (an Italian colony from 1890 to 1941), made up of people who had served under the colonial government, had maintained ties with Italian families or had followed families of Italian professionals, executives or businessmen returning to Italy.⁴ An indirect effect of post-colonialism is derived from the high number of Italian technicians and officials who worked in oil-producing countries from the end of the 1960s to the middle of the 1970s. Their presence there seems to have had a similar effect, with immigrants following them to Italy.

Work migrations and active recruitment

It is often said that Italy, contrary to other European countries of traditional immigration, never had a period of active recruitment, an explicit and formalized policy aimed at searching for new workers on the international labor market. While this is undoubtedly true, this fact should not, however, lead us to conclude that the role of the demand for labor in Italian migratory systems is negligible or marginal. It is more accurate to connect this absence to the periodization of the Italian migratory process and to the implied and fragmented character of such demand, which can in turn be linked to the nature of the Italian economy (Ambrosini 1999, 2001; Reyneri 2004). Bearing in mind this difference in the structure of the demand for foreign workers, immigration to Italy is in fact similar to the ‘classic’ migrations of workers. This type of immigration begins with the arrival of seasonal workers from Tunisia who are employed in fishing and agriculture in Sicily, with cross-border commuters from Yugoslavia to northeastern Italy, and with domestic workers in the big cities. For thirty years Tunisian immigration has linked Italy’s southern regions with the southern coast of the Mediterranean. The first Tunisians arrived at the end of the 1960s, recruited as seasonal farm workers by local landowners interested in cheaper labor. By the mid-1970s, this wave of immigration had spread into new sectors such as fishing and into new areas of the island (Cusumano 1976). Over time, similar waves of seasonal work link sub-Saharan Africa and Campania through the tomato harvest, and, after 1989, eastern European countries with Trentino through the apple harvest.

A second case of active recruitment pertains to domestic work. Already by the 1960s, waves of workers had arrived from East Africa – linked to Italy by its colonial past – as well as from the Philippines and the former Portuguese territories (Andall 2000; Parrenas 2001). These immigrations, initiated by

organizations connected to the Catholic Church, were made up of workers with work contracts (Andall 2000: 125, 127), often through Italian agencies in their home countries (Anteri 1981: 154, 158), as well as workers with tourist visas.

A third element of labor migration is connected to industry. In 1977, the hiring of Middle Eastern workers in factories in Reggio Emilia caused quite a stir (Anteri 1981; Bonora 1983). Immigrants from Senegal and Ghana were subsequently hired as unskilled laborers in quarries, small and mid-size steel mills, textile and food factories in the 'deep north', provinces of Bergamo, Brescia and the Veneto.

While hirings of this type became a stable component of the labor market, temporary or semi-legal workers were absorbed by the craft and building industries. The hiring of Yugoslav laborers for reconstruction work following the earthquake in Friuli led to a new influx and the recomposition of a migratory subsystem that had united Italy and the Balkans for more than a century.

In addition to waves of unskilled laborers, there is also a structured influx of foreign citizens from OCSE countries who assume important positions in the world of business, corporate management, and the cultural and fashion industries. This is true above all in Milan, the economic capital of the country and the Italian city most closely resembling the paradigm of the 'global city'.

Students

Students are a significant presence in Italy from the beginning of the thirty-year period under study. The role Italy played in oil-producing countries in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the low cost of university studies, the lack of numerical restrictions on enrolment, and frequent use of scholarships as tools of cooperation in development all contributed powerfully in drawing foreign students to Italy. In 1970, 27,000 of the 143,000 Italian residency permits were granted for study purposes. This figure increases in absolute value to arrive at 100,000 out of 645,000 in 1988 when, largely owing to more restrictive policies, the number of posts available to foreigners in the universities begins to decline. If in 1984 foreign students made up 2.7 per cent of the university population, in 1994 they represented only 1.4 per cent (Natale and Strozza 1997: 285). Table 3 shows the presence of certain nationalities at the beginning of the historic series; for the most part students in Italian universities are first in the classification of residency permits at the beginning of this time period. For example, more than 6,000 of the 8,400 Iranians who obtained residency permits were qualified as students.

Refugees

At the end of 2001, Italy was home to 8,571 asylum seekers, refugees and other individuals under the supervision of the United Nations High Commissioner

Table 3 Classification of the first ten countries for numbers of residency permits – only PVS; total of permits on December 31; percentage of the first ten nationalities out of the total of permits; 1970–1999

1970			1980			1990			1999		
Yugoslavia	6,460	4.5	Iran	8,399	4.2	Morocco	63,809	11.6	Morocco	155,864	11.6
Argentina	2,068	1.4	Yugoslavia	6,472	3.3	Tunisia	31,881	5.8	Albania	133,018	9.9
Iran	1,752	1.2	Philippines	4,107	2.1	Philippines	26,166	4.8	Philippines	67,386	5.0
Poland	1,504	1.0	Ethiopia	4,048	2.0	Yugoslavia	22,335	4.1	Rumania	61,212	4.6
Venezuela	1,477	1.0	Egypt	3,139	1.6	Senegal	21,073	3.8	China	56,660	4.2
Brazil	1,406	1.0	India	2,535	1.3	Egypt	14,183	2.6	Tunisia	46,773	3.5
India	1,057	0.7	Jordan	2,411	1.2	China	12,998	2.4	Yugoslavia	41,234	3.1
Syria	975	0.7	Cape Verde	2,168	1.1	Poland	10,933	2.0	Senegal	40,890	3.1
Turkey	930	0.6	Libya	2,080	1.0	Brazil	9,364	1.7	Egypt	34,042	2.5
Libya	860	0.6	Argentina	2,018	1.0	Sri Lanka	8,747	1.6	Sri Lanka	31,991	2.4
All	143,838		All	198,483		All	548,193		All	1,340,655	
Total		12.9	Total		18.8	Total		40.4	Total		49.9

Source: Elaboration of data from Ministero degli Interni. Permits at 31 December of each year; 1970–1979: permits valid for more than three months, including expired permits; 1980–1990: permits valid for more than one month, excluding permit expired more than two months earlier; 1999: permits valid for more than one month, excluding those expired.

for Refugees (UNHCR 2002: table 2). This is a fairly modest figure compared with other European countries: in Italy, the number of claims for asylum has traditionally been very low, fluctuating between 2,000 and 3,000 requests annually in the 1980s. Until 1990, only citizens from the Soviet bloc were recognized by Italy as potential asylum seekers, with the minor exception of a group of Chilean citizens in 1973. Growth in requests for asylum began in 1998, so that the number reached 33,000 in 1999 (UNHCR 1999). In addition to an increase in numbers, there was a shift in the provenance of the requests: the Balkans (in particular from Rumania, Kosovo and Albania), Kurds of Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi nationality, and Afghans.

Self-employment

The presence of self-employed immigrants, foreigners or minorities constitutes a well-known sociological phenomenon that has drawn the attention of the discipline since its origins. In Italy, research on this theme is still in its early stages, even if some in-depth studies are now becoming available (Ambrosini and Abbatecola 2002). From investigations at the local level, we are learning that noticeable variations exist in the number of individual businesses compared with the total number among different nationalities. In Milan, one of the most economically advanced areas of the country, Chinese, Egyptians and Tunisians demonstrate particularly high levels of entrepreneurship (Ambrosini 2001: 156).

Youth

Another migratory system that has affected Italy is that of young immigrants from Mediterranean cities. Coming from middle-class families and with an average education, they chose Italy as a fallback after the closing of other traditional destinations, first and foremost France. These young people arrive with the aim of 'exploring the west', of gaining experience and access to goods unavailable in their home countries, and of quickly taking advantage of opportunities. They are youth who consider their exclusion from the west's bounty a political injustice. From middle-class families in their home countries, they take as their point of reference middle-class youths in the country of arrival, complete with their customs and lifestyle (Reyneri 1996: 325–6; Colombo 1998: 39–54). The exploratory, risky and opportunistic nature of this migratory influx is well represented by the engagement in the so-called *trabendo* or contra-band importation of consumer goods to their countries of origin, which are then distributed through informal markets (Colombo 1998; Peraldi 2001).

4 The variety of origins and time spans of Italian immigration

We have seen that Italy is involved in not only one immigration, but many. This multiplicity is also visible in the national origins of immigrants and the time span

of the birth, life and death of these migratory fluxes. In the last thirty years, Italy has witnessed many migratory influxes from diverse areas. They did not all begin together, nor did they continue with the same energy; in fact, some essentially dried up despite their being perceived at the outset as potentially inexhaustible. Even those fluxes with a continuous increase have often altered their internal composition as a result of changes in the composition of new people arriving and others leaving.

The high rate of departure of immigrants is well noted by scholars of international immigration. For instance, it is calculated that one half of all Italian immigrants to the USA during the period of mass emigration returned to their country within a few years, if not a few months (Bade 2000: 175). For a number of reasons, studies on immigration to Italy have not yet dedicated sufficient attention to the exit mobility of immigrants. In many cases it seems that studies on entries or on past presence are taken as accurate indicators of actual presence (Dalla Zuanna 2003). However, there is reason to claim that, in Italy, exits play a significant role in the changes in the immigrant population: according to our analyses, in 1994 only 76 per cent of those with residency permits expiring in that year actually renewed them. Given that the rate of Italian naturalization is negligible (Pastore 2004) and that only a small proportion of those participating in the asylum of the following year had previously held a permit (Carfagna 2002), the level of non-renewals indicates a significant outflow of migration, either back to countries of origin or elsewhere. In this respect, Italian immigration follows normal patterns.

Not surprisingly, the entries and exits of immigrants cause notable changes which can easily be observed in the variations of composition by nationality of foreigners in Italy. Only five of the most represented nationalities in 1980 were as represented ten years earlier. And of the ten nationalities with the largest presence in 1999, only one was included on an analogous list in 1970.⁵ In 1970, Yugoslavs were the largest immigrant group, followed by Argentines (some of whom were probably second- or third-generation Italians), Iranians and Poles. With the exception of Yugoslavia, Italy was at the time part of a migratory flow not characterized by spatial proximity. Twenty years later, however, it was the southern Mediterranean that dominated the Italian immigration scene. In 1999, an equally significant change began with a marked increase of foreigners from Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

Table 3 documents these changes. Some early fluxes from developing countries such as Iran, Poland, India, Libya, Cape Verde and Eritrea diminished in importance. In other words, the first immigrants were not pioneers of a mass immigration. It could be that the flow stopped, entries merely replaced exits, or there was only modest growth. The range of nationalities present at the beginning of the 1970s was gradually reduced, so that if, at the beginning of the series, the first ten nationalities constituted 12 per cent of the total present, today they constitute 50 per cent.

5 The geographic evolution of immigrant settlements

The structure of immigrant settlements does not rest on chance nor on individual preferences (White 1993: 52): social and demographic research on international migration has long observed how the evolution of a migratory flow is accompanied by the existence of very pronounced levels of territorial concentration (Money 1999: 9–10, 47–53). The elevated concentration has diverse causes: it reflects economic factors such as the differentiated distribution of work opportunities, geographic factors such as proximity of borders, as well as direct or indirect political choices such as decisions regarding locations to settle refugees, exiles and asylum seekers. The territorial distribution of foreigners in Italy has traditionally drawn the interest of researchers (Maciotti and Pugliese 1991; Bonifazi 1998; Caritas 2002). Most of these analyses, however, have considered immigrants in general; and, when they took into consideration single nationalities, they did not examine the changes in levels of concentration over the course of time.

Table 4 shows the overall territorial structure of immigration in Italy as well as the individual structure of the ten most numerous nationalities. The influence of the distribution of work opportunities is clearly visible in the strong presence of immigrants in northern and central Italy. At the same time, however, the pull factors vary according to the nationality. Philippine immigrants initially settled in Milan, Rome and Naples, where they became a structural component of the domestic labor market; the Senegalese are highly concentrated around Bergamo and Brescia, having been employed for some time in local industries. The Chinese arrived in Milan, Rome and Florence; in the first two cities they eventually established themselves in the restaurant business, while in the third they founded their own businesses in industry. The Tunisians, on the other hand, have traditionally settled in western Sicily. Geography also influences immigrant destinations. For the Albanians, Bari remains an important center, while for people from the former Yugoslavia, Trieste and other provinces of the Trivento are privileged destinations.

Once the first choices are made, they influence subsequent ones. Immigration's past weighs on its future.⁶ These processes are based on informal networks, or rather interpersonal ties connecting immigrants, former immigrants and non-immigrants in the places of origin and in destinations, not so much through national connections as much as relations of family, friends and nearness to the country of origin (Massey *et al.* 1993: 448). Once the flux has begun, potential immigrants can lean on those who immigrated before them for welcome, help in finding housing or work and in facing the psychological cost of the move, and at times even money for the purchase of a ticket, according to the chain model of immigration. This means that, once begun, international immigrations tend to expand until the network contacts reach such an extent in the exit zone that all who desire to emigrate can do so without difficulty (Massey *et al.* 1993: 449–50). It has been aptly observed that 'networks migrate; categories stay put' (Tilly 1990: 84).

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The importance of informal networks is a consolidated element in social research on immigration. The influence of networks, however, cannot be taken for granted. This concept is useful in the measure in which it is seen as presenting different states in different empirical situations. Some groups of

Table 4 Percentage of residency permit holders in the first three Italian provinces for the first ten nationalities and for the total of immigrants; provinces that register the greatest presences of immigrants for the first ten nationalities and for the total of immigrants; only PVS; 1980–1999

		% permits				
		<i>in Italy</i>	<i>three provinces</i>	<i>1st province</i>	<i>2nd province</i>	<i>3rd province</i>
Morocco	1999	11.6	20.0	Milan	Turin	Bergamo
	1995	11.1	19.0	Milan	Turin	Rome
	1991	12.8	24.4	Milan	Turin	Rome
	1985	0.5	24.2	Reggio Emilia	Perugia	Milan
	1980	0.4	35.8	Rome	Milan	Reggio Emilia
Albania	1999	9.9	17.0	Milan	Rome	Bari
	1995	4.1	17.0	Bari	Rome	Milan
	1991	3.8	16.8	Milan	Bari	Lecce
	1985	0.2	59.1	Caserta	Trieste	Milan
Philippines	1980	0.2	55.2	Trieste	Rome	Milan
	1999	5.0	67.6	Rome	Milan	Florence
	1995	4.9	66.8	Rome	Milan	Florence
	1991	5.6	75.2	Rome	Milan	Naples
	1985	1.1	46.5	Rome	Milan	Naples
Rumania	1980	2.1	68.0	Rome	Milan	Naples
	1999	4.6	47.3	Rome	Turin	Milan
	1995	1.9	29.4	Rome	Milan	Perugia
	1991	1.3	36.0	Rome	Milan	Naples
	1985	0.5	35.9	Milan	Trieste	Rome
China	1980	0.5	57.9	Latina	Rome	Milan
	1999	4.2	43.2	Milan	Prato	Florence
	1995	2.2	52.4	Milan	Rome	Florence
	1991	2.4	60.5	Rome	Milan	Florence
	1985	0.5	48.7	Milan	Perugia	Bologna
Tunisia	1980	0.3	59.8	Rome	Bologna	Milan
	1999	3.5	22.2	Ragusa	Milan	Trapani
	1995	4.2	23.6	Ragusa	Rome	Milan
	1991	6.4	27.9	Ragusa	Palermo	Rome
	1985	0.9	53.9	Trapani	Perugia	Palermo
Yugoslavia	1980	0.6	50.5	Trapani	Rome	Milan
	1999	3.1	33.5	Vicenza	Trieste	Rome
	1995	4.6	35.7	Rome	Vicenza	Trieste
	1991	4.0	35.8	Trieste	Rome	Vicenza
	1985	3.3	52.3	Trieste	Perugia	Rome
1980	3.3	52.0	Trieste	Rome	Milan	

Table 4 Continued

		% permits				
		<i>in Italy</i>	<i>three provinces</i>	<i>1st province</i>	<i>2nd province</i>	<i>3rd province</i>
Senegal	1999	3.0	29.6	Brescia	Milan	Bergamo
	1995	2.8	26.4	Bergamo	Milan	Brescia
	1991	3.3	22.9	Milan	Bergamo	Cagliari
	1985	0.1	59.8	Perugia	Rome	Brescia
Egypt	1980	0.1	53.2	Rome	Perugia	Bologna
	1999	2.5	76.0	Milan	Rome	Brescia
	1991	2.9	79.2	Milan	Rome	Turin
	1985	1.1	52.9	Milan	Rome	Reggio Emilia
Sri Lanka	1980	1.6	71.0	Rome	Milan	Reggio Emilia
	1999	2.4	52.0	Milan	Rome	Naples
	1995	2.2	53.6	Rome	Milan	Naples
	1991	1.9	57.0	Rome	Milan	Palermo
All	1985	0.4	51.4	Rome	Naples	Milan
	1980	0.5	73.8	Rome	Naples	Milan
	1999		32.7	Rome	Milan	Turin
	1995		35.0	Rome	Milan	Florence
	1991		38.5	Rome	Milan	Naples
	1985		47.7	Rome	Perugia	Milan
	1980		46.8	Rome	Milan	Perugia

Source: Elaboration of data from Ministero degli Interni. 1980–1990: permits valid for more than one month, excluding permit expired more than two months earlier; 1991–1999: permits valid for more than one month, excluding those expired.

first-generation immigrants activate stable and vast chains, while others work far more modestly. Some networks are crucial for potential immigrants, while in other cases their importance is meager or nil. In some cases the importance of the networks increases over time, while in others it decreases. In particular, the informal networks' structure and functions interact with structural characteristics of the areas of settlement and with policies and regulations implemented by the state, as well as with social differentiations in the original society.⁷

The flexibility of the networks is particularly evident in the analysis of territorial concentration. If we consider the first ten nationalities, we see how they are strongly differentiated in terms of concentration level (Table 4). In 1999, the last year for which this analysis is possible, the concentration is particularly strong for Egypt and the Philippines. More than two-thirds of these populations are concentrated in just three provinces, while the concentration of immigrants with residency permits from Sri Lanka, Rumania, China and Yugoslavia is medium and low for immigrants from Tunisia, Morocco and Albania (Bonifazi 1998: 167–9).

Time is a factor that strongly influences the dynamics of settlements. In

general, concentration diminishes with time. In 1980, little less than half of the foreign population resided in three provinces. Today the three provinces with the highest number of immigrants host barely one-third. As we shall see below, this overall reduction does not seem to depend so much on the arrival of new immigrants of other nationalities as on a general diminution of concentration. In 1980, nine of the ten major nationalities presented levels of concentration equal to 50 per cent. Today four of these present concentrations of less than 33 per cent and only three present levels above 50 per cent (Table 4). For example, Tunisian citizens represent the oldest national category of those mentioned, given that they have been present since the mid-1960s. In the last twenty years, the concentration of Tunisians has gone from 50 to 22 per cent. A similar level occurs for the Senegalese and, in a less pronounced way, for immigrants from Morocco and ex-Yugoslavia. Even the concentration of the Chinese, who are often considered to live in self-made ghettos, has diminished and the location of their main communities has shifted.⁸

The territorial concentration thus presents notable variations depending on the nationality of the foreigners. Concentration also varies over time, with settlements becoming places of transition, and vice versa. To identify the more consolidated areas, we studied national groups that were not necessarily large but that have been in Italy for a long time. This allowed us to see if the current areas of greatest concentration are the same as those where the communities resided before 1986, that is, before the first amnesty. Table 5 shows the oldest groups, defined here as those in which a consistent number is present before 1986 in one of Italy's 103 provinces. Our analysis reveals twenty-two nationality-province pairings in which more than 15 per cent of the documented presences were recorded before 1986.

A first result reveals that age of the community and high concentration do not necessarily coincide. The province of Genoa, for example, has a small Indian community, a third of whom has lived legally in Italy for more than sixteen years. Citizens of the former Yugoslavia who have been here a long time are based in Turin rather than Trieste. Egyptians, as we have already seen, are highly concentrated in Milan despite the presence of a community established long ago in Reggio Emilia. If Milan, as Table 4 shows, is the province with the second highest concentration of immigrants, the city is not where we find the oldest communities. Of the twenty-two cases presented in the table, today only four (Egyptians, Brazilians, Indians and Philippines in Rome) have residency permits at a rate higher than 10 per cent (column 4); and only three others (Yugoslavs in Trieste and Rome, Tunisians in Rome) represent provinces in first place for levels of presence (even with concentration levels of less than 10 per cent). In all other cases, we are dealing with nationalities very deeply rooted in the province, of pioneers that evidently did not give rise to migratory chains or who constructed bases for immigrant fluxes that later moved elsewhere.

The weight of the past on future territorial structures is considerable, even if it varies with the characteristics of the migration, the nationality and the diverse

Table 5 Oldest county-level presences by nationality

Nationality	Province	% present before 1986 in province	% of permits in province compared to national total in 1999	% of permits per nationality compared to total of permits	Permits in Italy
India	Genoa	34.7	1.3	2.1	27,568
Yugoslavia	Turin	31.8	1.2	3.1	41,234
Egypt	Reggio Emilia	28.4	1.8	2.5	34,042
Yugoslavia	Trieste	27.0	9.8	3.1	41,234
Egypt	Florence	24.7	2.2	2.5	34,042
Croatia	Turin	23.7	1.6	1.2	16,508
India	Florence	23.7	1.9	2.1	27,568
Ghana	Rome	21.1	2.3	1.5	19,972
Yugoslavia	Rome	20.3	7.5	3.1	41,234
Philippines	Naples	20.2	2.6	5.0	67,386
Egypt	Rome	19.4	20.6	2.5	34,042
Brazil	Rome	19.0	23.9	1.4	18,888
Philippines	Palermo	18.9	1.1	5.0	67,386
India	Rome	18.9	27.2	2.1	27,568
Sri Lanka	Genoa	18.4	1.7	2.4	31,991
Nigeria	Perugia	18.2	1.8	1.5	20,056
Philippines	Rome	17.9	36.8	5.0	67,386
Philippines	Turin	15.8	2.7	5.0	67,386
Tunisia	Trapani	15.7	6.1	3.5	46,773
Tunisia	Rome	15.4	5.8	3.5	46,773
Egypt	Turin	15.3	4.4	2.5	34,042
Tunisia	Agrigento	15.2	1.4	3.5	46,773

Source: Elaboration of data by Ministero degli Interni. Residency permit holders as of 31 December 1999 who entered Italy before 1986; percentage out of total of presences of the same nationality in the same province that issued permit; only PVS with a number of permit holders above 1 per cent of total, provinces with at least 1 per cent of total; percentage of presences of the same nationality in the province compared to national total; percentage of permit holders of same nationality out of total of foreigners with residency permit.

social composition of the early and subsequent immigrants.⁹ But our data also show that only some of the provinces with high national concentrations today coincide with those of older national communities. The weight of the informal networks in the management of settlements, therefore, is neither unique nor undisputed. On the one hand, its role grows together with the growth in social capital mobilized through the networks: the greatest concentrations are found where a strong original community has a sort of monopoly, through word of mouth, on access to employment possibilities. This is the case with Philippine women who work as maids. On the other hand, this role is positively correlated with legal entries, given that the channels for such entry provided by Italian legislation – family reunion, sponsorships or, indirectly, the specific request of a worker abroad – have always strongly favored potential immigrants with

significant immigrant contacts already present and capable of activating the procedure or of guaranteeing the worker to the employer. Legal channels of entry, in other words, reinforce the role of the networks in that those who are already settled in the country can communicate opportunities, prepare documents and provide guarantees. It is worth considering, however, that Italian immigration policy is based on the basic rejection of active entry in favor of backdoor or illegal entry followed by amnesties (Sciortino 1999). In Italy, this type of regulation has weakened the regulatory function of the networks and paradoxically made it easier to arrive in the country without having to count on help from fellow countrymen, friends or relatives.¹⁰ Therefore it is possible that the amnesties have altered the context in which decisions to migrate are made, making movement that is independent of pre-existing communities easier. Once again, the apparent peculiarities of Italian immigration can be seen more as a product of the policies implemented than the effect of immigration itself.

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Notes

- 1 There is a convergence on this issue with those who underline how contemporary immigrations are the result of subjective instances of liberation, flight, international disobedience or other concrete forms of globalization (Dal Lago 1999; Mezzadra 2001).
- 2 In the immediate post-war period, the Chinese community counted in the census already exceeded 700 members, and the settlements in Milan, Rome, Bologna, Florence and Prato were already registered in the census.

- 3 See the studies of Cusumano (1976) and Slama (1986). Today foreigners of Tunisian nationality are the seventh largest group with residency permits.
- 4 Often the pioneers of these influxes were women such as D., a maid for the family of a director of an Italian bank at Asmara and whose father had fought as an *askari* alongside the Italians. She decided to continue working for the family when they returned to Italy (Galeazzo 1994: 382–3).
- 5 The changes shown by the net data used here are decidedly superior to those noted previously, presumably because the number of expired permits out of the total varies according to nationality and naturally grows with the passage of time.
- 6 This general principle, defined through cumulative causation, postulates that every single migration generates a series of irreversible changes in individual motivations, social structures and cultural values that in turn alter the context in which the succeeding decisions are made, typically fostering further emigration (Massey *et al.* 1993: 451).
- 7 The source of network ties is fairly national; in most cases it is sub-national, through family or friends, or super-national, as in the case of religious ties. As a result, migratory chains originating in the same country of origin can have various destinations. Let us consider again the case of Egyptians, who have increased their level of territorial concentration. The Egyptian community in Reggio Emilia that originated in the 1970s was still visible in the first half of the 1980s, but it did not construct a consolidated chain as in Milan and Rome. This was not because the Egyptian immigrants of Reggio had moved to Milan in search of new opportunities, bringing with them their migratory network. The Egyptian community at Reggio still exists, yet there are differences in the networks: the Egyptian community at Reggio Emilia, initially comprised of lower-middle-class Egyptian citizens who migrated to work in the foundries is quite different from the community in Milan, whose members are mostly upper-middle-class Egyptians who in the 1980s chose Milan in order to develop businesses through networks based more on family than on ethnic ties (Ambrosini and Abbatecola 2002: 214–15).
- 8 Even at the provincial level the concentration of various nationalities is less stable than one might expect. Turin, which is now the second city for Moroccans, became so only in the late 1980s. Bologna was the second city for the Chinese in 1980 and played an important historic role for this community, but in 1999 it is no longer among the first three communities, which have moved to Rome, Milan and Tuscany.
- 9 An analysis of the distribution in provinces of residency permit holders on 31 December 1999 who had arrived before 1986 compared with those who arrived after 1997 confirms the tightness of the relation ($R^2 = 0.74$). If the provenances of these are considered separately, however, the same analysis produces remarkably different results. Considering only the nationalities that appear at least once among the first ten in Table 3, we find on the one hand Egypt and the Philippines, whose community structures depend closely on those of the past ($R^2 = 0.99$), and, on the other, Yugoslavia and Tunisia, whose current community structure depends less on that of the past ($R^2 = 0.37$ and 0.51 respectively). Albania has been excluded from the analysis because, before 1986, there was an excessively small number of presences in the country.
- 10 A survey conducted in Lombardy in 2002 documented that, in Italy, legal entries were made almost exclusively by immigrants who had at least one nuclear family member or other relatives in the country. Those who enter the country illegally are far less likely to have family contacts present (Sciortino 2003).

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Appendix. Sources used

The data that provide the basis for this article are the results of original research by the authors starting in 2000. Early research was conducted in the original archives of the CED of the Italian Ministry of the Interior based on a specific request to the Office of Statistics at the Department of Internal and Territorial Affairs at the Central Office for

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Documentation and Statistics. We thank them for their collaboration. For the first time, legal residency permits valid in 1980–1991 and excluding expired permits were analyzed; the files produced contain information on permit holders regarding their nationality, sex, province that issued the permit and the reason for stay. We then analyzed the files of residency permits from 1991 to 1999 in their ISTAT version, excluding expired and duplicate permits. We took into consideration information regarding nationality, province issuing the permit, province and municipality of residence of permit holder (this last item only for 1999). Thirdly, we consulted the original tabulations of residency permits as of 31 December published by the Ministry of the Interior from 1970 to 1979, also making use of the archive for these dates compiled by A. M. Birindelli and P. Farina, whom we thank.