

Migrations, from the second postwar period to the present day

In a reality like that of Molise, historically characterized by major and recurrent processes of foreign-bound mobility, the choice of emigration as the monographic theme of this issue of the journal hardly requires justification. There is no aspect of contemporary Molise—from demographic equilibria to economic organization, from social evolution to cultural change — that can be exhaustively dealt with without taking the region's migratory history into account.

The reasons for our decision to focus on the migratory dynamics of the second half of the twentieth century, instead, will require some clarification. As experts know, historical and social studies on this period have lagged behind, at the national as well as the international level. Only over the last few years are we beginning to witness a different attitude among scholars and in the social sciences. This change is likely to have been spurred by the irresistible multiplication of migratory trajectories at the global level, which are revealing the structural and irreversible character of these phenomena and, at the same time, accompanying Italy's transition from a country of departure to a country of destination.

As regards Molise, the neglect of scholars goes beyond the theme of migration to encompass the whole twentieth-century history of the region, a serious investigation of which only began a few years ago. So there are only a few studies to refer to, albeit reliable, to investigate the subject we have chosen here. This limitation should probably be regarded less as the result of scholars' belated interest in a crucial historical phase as much as a consequence of an enduring historiographical distance from what, for the sake of brevity, I will call "social history." With the due exceptions, as I was saying. There is a risk here of continuing to look at the modernization of Molise—at the very time when economic considerations are dominating political and social life even too pervasively—prevalently in terms of individual incomes, managerial classes and institutional architectures.

In the specific field examined here, our first objective should be to overcome a condition that one could define, and not out of a taste for paradox, as schizophrenic. On the one hand, we register an almost total denial of the exodus that irreversibly devastated the traditional social and productive organization of the region from the end of the war to the mid Seventies. On the other, we witness a recurrent exaltation of Molisan "greatness" in the world as a liturgical

sublimation of the experienced social and human trauma and a promise of healing and redemption. The path to a critical re-examination of migratory phenomena in Molise over the last half century is thus somehow marked out by the very contradiction that is its point of departure. It is a matter of bringing back out to light and placing in the correct social and political context what happened to tens of thousands of people and has vanished from common awareness, of recovering this diffuse migratory experience, not just in terms of statistics and flow descriptions, but also in evolutionary terms, at both ends of migration, and also highlighting possible relational systems between these two poles. On the side of Molisan society, confronted as we are with such a structural and long-lasting phenomenon, we should no longer limit ourselves to dwelling on the massiveness of the exodus, but develop an awareness of the more modern and unprecedented forms of national and international mobility practiced especially by the new generations. Without disregarding, of course, the most recent and unexpected development in our social life, that is, the long-term permanence of foreigners in Molise, which should be regarded not as an additional and different phenomenon, but as an organic component of the whole range of migratory processes in which our region is involved.

Due to the current gap of knowledge and studies on these themes, the first commitment of our journal was to assemble an indispensable repository of information and data. It may seem a paradox, but even though they do not concern remote times, many of the data provided here, even from public-domain sources, have remained unknown so far, at least in terms of systematic knowledge. All the essays published here have contributed, to different degrees, in filling this gap, and those of Cristiano Pesaresi and Franco Pittau, and my own, address it directly. Pesaresi, in particular, uses statistics on office of vital statistics deletions to estimate the magnitude of the exodus in the first three decades after the war, highlight its main flows, and point out essential connections between this phenomenon and the socioeconomic conditions of Molise during in this period. In spite of its necessarily one-sided reliance on office of vital statistics deletions—a dependable source for transoceanic emigration, less so for some European migratory flows, such as those to important immigration countries like Switzerland and Germany—the resulting picture finally provides a comprehensive overview of the mobility of Molisans, both internationally and within Italy and the Molise region itself.

In my essay, I try to take the next step and look at the exodus of Molisans in a “total experience” perspective, connecting the emigrants’ abandoning of their places of life and work to their settling in the host societies and the path of integration and social

advancement that they usually followed in these countries. In this case, too, there was an unprecedented effort to assess—with all the uncertainties deriving from the gaps and discontinuities in the documentation—the size of the Molisan communities that formed in the destination countries. The second part of my essay deals with aspects of institutional policy actions in this field after the creation of the regional institute, the character that Molisan associations took on in the period under scrutiny and aspects of the difficult transition they are presently going through, and the memorial, literary and critical representation that emigration has stimulated abroad in the culture of Molisans by birth or origin.

Marinaro and Pittau evaluate statistics about foreign arrivals in Molise and the formation of stable immigrant communities in the general context of the migratory processes Molise has been involved in over the last sixty years. This is a new phenomenon, and one that is certainly connected to international migratory trajectories at the global level. The authors, however, place it in the broader context of a long-lasting mobility that used to involve the whole Adriatic area, and which brought Albanians and Serbo-Croats to our region. The latest perspectives are those striving to define the characteristics and scope of the region's entry on the national immigration scene. The investigation is fleshed out with data on the social condition of immigrants, the trend to naturalization, the jobs performed by immigrants in different sectors of the local economy, and the gradual stabilization of the new generations. Qualitative observations highlight the potential for integration the region has been showing, a potential which the authors quantify by means of indexes measuring the attractiveness of an area, job availability, and social integration.

This initiative of ours to advance knowledge of the migratory history of Molise in the second postwar period would have had a limited scope and little significance had it remained confined to a local dimension, without connecting to the political and institutional landmarks, both national and international, that provide the coordinates by which one can trace the indispensable historical and social context. This is why we decided to precede our analysis of migratory phenomena and the actual forms they took on with some essays setting a general framework. We commissioned these essays to two major experts in this field, Andreina De Clementi and Michele Colucci, whose recent investigations have opened up a new perspective on the study of Italian emigration in the second half of the twentieth century, and one that may also function as a catalyst for further investigations at the regional and local level.

Andreina De Clementi assembles a complex mosaic picture of southern Italian emigration in the first few decades of the life of the Republic. The land question, and especially the limited benefits

derived from the agrarian reform, was the crucial factor in a transition where people's departure from their native towns was preceded by their abandonment of the countryside, through a series of intermediate stages which eventually led to actual emigration, both within Italy and abroad. This southern-Italian perspective helps to bring into focus the backdrop of local phenomena such as the exodus from Molise and, above all, highlights the dominant characteristic of this phase of Italian emigration, which went through a gradual process of "southernization." De Clementi separately examines the three different exodus paths—transoceanic, European and national—pointing out the peculiarities and criticalities of each. She dwells on the differences observable in continental areas and on the immigration policies of individual destination countries, as well as the not equally harsh experience of migration to the industrial areas of the Italian Northwest. De Clementi's essay also includes, as is customary in her research in this field, a passage on the role of women. As we all know, to them fell the grievous task of replacing the men in family responsibilities and farm work. At the same time, however, an opportunity that was completely unprecedented in the southern mentality opened up to them, that of emigrating on their own at a young age to look for work. Finally, the returns of the emigrants' savings on their departure realities made themselves felt especially in the form of improved life conditions, building a comfortable home, and further expansion of smallholder property. However, the drain of human resources and the rarity of productive reinvestment confirm a judgment that is not new, but describes the actual state of things: the dramatic social sacrifice of emigration has not brought the Italian South to go any further than a modernization without development.

In the second introductory essay on the subject, Michele Colucci deals with one of the most significant novelties of post-World War II emigration, that is, the strong commitment of institutions and states in promoting and regulating the phenomenon, differently from what had happened in the first migratory wave. This interventionist orientation was the result of a tense political debate among the forces that were preparing to build the democratic regime. In this debate, the Catholic component prevailed—in which Alcide De Gasperi's position was clear-cut and far-sighted—along with the Socialist one advocating policies to protect migrants. The attitude of the political and unionized Left was more complex. It oscillated between the acceptance of emigration as a "lesser evil"—as long as it occurred under specific and possibly unrealistic conditions in terms of the protection of workers' rights—and a search for alternative solutions, most notably Giuseppe Di Vittorio's middle-to-long-term Labor Plan. At any rate, when immediately after the end of the war unemployment and social malaise became uncontainable, the government turned to emigration as the only possible way to address people's need for work and

income, as well as a means to wrest the weapon of protest from the hand of the opposition, reopen international dialogue channels with states needing labor for reconstruction and the extraction of raw materials, consolidate the lira, which was threatened by major depreciation, and redressing the state's serious trade deficit. Actually, Italian emigration did not attain the programmed rate. Still, worker mobility was used as a characterizing theme of Italy's international policy, and indicated as Italy's specific contribution to the construction of a common social space on the occasion of the stipulation of European agreements.

The new form of internal and international mobility that set in a few decades ago, after changing conditions in some of the destination countries and the early Seventies petrol crisis spelled the end of mass migrations, brings us to the current situation. Here the analysis, of a necessity, needs to be fine-tuned to highlight the different nuances of a phenomenon that is only partly measurable with data from offices of vital statistics, as it was largely temporary in character. Oliviero Casacchia and Massimiliano Crisci's essay provides the first reliable data both on long-period domestic and foreign mobility in the decades straddling the beginning of the new century and on more recent temporary mobility of young high-school and university graduates, which has drawn a lot of attention and raised much discussion.

As regards the first aspect, the authors confirm Molise's role as a bridge-region between a South that is once again on the move and a still attractive Center-North. At a first glance, the statistics seem to point to a fairly stable resident population. When you break down the data, however, it turns out that the balance of mobility within Molise is negative, mainly due to the depletion of age-groups of study or working age. As regards interregional mobility, Molise attracts migration from the Italian South and provides migrants to the Center and North, where the labor demand is higher. As regards the foreign migratory balance, the limited outgoing flows have been more than compensated by foreigners moving into Molise, and who move within Molise faster than Molisans themselves.

It is harder to study temporary migration, due to the lack of statistics and specific studies. According to an academic definition, what we are looking at is "flexible mobility for unsteady workers." This difficulty is a cause for concern, as today this is one of the most common forms of work mobility and is increasingly extending its range. This endless going back and forth to and from the migrants' official place of residence can be aptly described using categories originally employed to characterize recent past migrations towards Switzerland and Germany. I am referring in particular to the circular character of this mobility and the multiplicity of real places of residence and the places where immigrants have their interests and where they live their lives.

Today, the phenomenon of long-distance commuting towards the Center-North has become widespread and almost endemic. Lately the list of destinations has come to include some towns in the European countries closest to Italy. Once again, Molisan participation is vigorous. Among long-distance commuters, they are second only to the Lucani, and the region holds first place in departures of university graduates, partly because Molise has the highest rate of young university graduates among all the regions of the Italian South. As Casacchia and Crisci's meticulous analysis shows, this propensity produces significant results, since university graduate unemployment rate, which is above 60% for those who stay in the region, drops dramatically when they move to other realities.

Sebastiano Martelli's essay on the "American" Rimanelli, which concludes this exploration of Molisan emigration in the second postwar period, projects into a literary dimension the existential and social questions dealt with by the previous essays. The study answers two basic needs. One is to complete the critical profiling of the most important living Molisan writer who for over a century was a voluntary exile in America, finally going beyond his "Italian" narrative experiments of the 1950s, which for decades was all that a stagnant literary criticism knew about his work. The other is to register the cultural, psychological, memorial and linguistic forms that the direct experience of "exile" inspired in one of the most important Italian writers in North America, paralleling the experience of so many other immigrants. The task Martelli has set himself is a very complicated one, as the "merging of times, places, and characters" in the Molisan's writing retains its cohesiveness only by virtue of "a native, almost animal strength of writing creativity." Like many other Molisans, driven by need and the hope for better prospects, the unorthodox writer from Casacalenda turned to America as a "security exit" to escape Italy, or rather, the literary cliques he did not managed to fit into. The impact with the new reality, first experienced in the academic world, where he had found employment, destructured his previous scale of values and expressive codes. Unlike the traditional migratory imaginary, made up of memory and umbilical cords connecting back to the homeland, Rimanelli's imaginary situates itself among the ashes of the original archetypes, has an avid taste for extreme life and literary experiences, and is open to the boldest of experimentalisms.

After some decades of American life, however, a "death wish" drove Rimanelli back to Molise, which he chose as "the place from which to start over again." The medium of this new and unexpected phase was dialect, no longer the language of a rejected past but serving as an anchor for Rimanelli's polyhedral and indefatigable linguistic experimentation. Reflection on his father's death and his mother's

existential fading away, combined with reflection on immigration, allow Rimanelli to bring closer together two anthropological worlds that had long been in conflict, the world of his roots and the “new (and different) world.” A space for meditation and creativity is constituted, one that is human and ethical even before being literary.

In conclusion, what prevailed in the choice of the monographic theme of this issue of the journal was a need to recover materials and produce a historical framework for a phenomenon that is as close in time as it is distant in terms of our knowledge of it and of detailed study. And yet, in the above essays there are problematic points which, although deserving of further investigation, already stand out in their full complexity. Nor could it be otherwise with a phenomenon that was closely intertwined with the most deep and sudden mutation ever known by Molisan society, namely, the modernization of the Sixties and Seventies of the last century. Massive emigration was indeed the most acute contradiction of this phase, in the sense that it seconded the changing of still archaic living conditions and, at the same time, it was the highest cost paid by the people and the land. Due to its magnitude and intensity, migration became a permanent factor of imbalance and accentuated dependence on public subsidies.

However, this now broadly agreed-upon historiographical judgment should not inhibit our understanding of the change that occurred even in the world of Molisans abroad. Here, albeit in different continents in nations, Molisans found positive social integration and rather widespread cultural improvement. Today we can thus view their reality in a post-migratory perspective, as an opportunity vis-à-vis Molise’s own need for development. In this different perspective, it is no longer they, the emigrants, who are the problem, it is we, who are now in rough straits and have discovered that we had been living in an island of happiness that actually does not exist, and never did. So what our migratory history can teach us is how a still essentially introverted and peripheral reality can crawl out of its shell and try to internationalize itself in a global context, or, to pun on the name of our own journal, to become “glocalized.” This is the terrain on which Molisans in the world can cooperate with the most open component of the region’s society and with local institutions in a common effort to look beyond the difficulties of the present.

Such an engagement, however, requires a clearly defined identity capable of keeping these forces together and attract the vast Molisan diaspora in the world, albeit within an elastic and open network. This identity should have several articulations: cultural, environmental, institutional, and connected lifestyle quality. It should be a plural identity, also incorporating the social and personal experiences and cultural expressions of many generations of Molisans outside of their region of origin. In other words, we should strive for something very

different from erecting statues of improbable Samnite warriors, as some Molisan communities have done. What we need is a critical formulation of a modern identity, to reflect back to first-generation immigrants a different image of Molise than the backward and dismal one they fled. The new generations should be helped to find the original distinctive landmarks they need to actively experience the intercultural climate that has permeated the reality they live in. I would argue that overall in the research proposed here the issue of the new generations emerges as the most complex and hard to untangle, due both to the varied range of our interlocutors and to the need to find effective and far-reaching forms of dialogue with them. As the descendants of old and new emigrants become further integrated into their host societies, the distance from and cultural gap with the traditional imaginary of their families becomes wider. Many are now again showing an interest in Molise under the spur of intercultural trends and the dizzying evolution of social networks. But this will not suffice if they do not find at the other end a cultural proposal based not only on the history, traditions, literature and religiosity of Molisans, but also on environmental protection, investment, professional and training opportunities, and a quest for a human measure in human relations, food production and consumption, etc.

Besides young people of Molisan origin, there are the young protagonists of a silent temporary mobility, which is tending to become permanent, especially for those with the higher cultural and professional qualifications. This can be seen as a resurfacing of the “southernness” of Molise, which the euphoric push towards self-sufficiency of the Seventies seemed to have ousted. The most urgent task seems to reliably assess the magnitude and characteristics of this phenomenon. The answers that some Molisan exponents of this “new mobility” gave to our questions, which are included in the present issue of the journal, suggest that we should give up all hope to curb or contain this trend. This would be unthinkable in the present conjuncture. What we should do is encourage the formation of relational networks so that all these important energies and competences will not be totally lost to us.

As part of this approach striving for a better and more conscious utilization of the resources of the region, especially its human resources, we should also commit ourselves to hosting, integrating and educating young foreigners who come to Molise and choose to live and work in this old emigration area. We should do this not only because it is our duty to be hospitable and supportive—our history as emigrants should make this an easy task—but because this is an opportunity to introduce vital energies into the future of Molisan society.

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