

Molisans between transoceanic vocations and the lure of the Continent

by Norberto Lombardi

1. The opening up of hyper-rural Molise

After the armies had passed through Molise, on the morrow of the end of World War II, Molisans' main preoccupation was not leaving their land and looking for better job and life prospects abroad. There were more immediate concerns, such as the return of prisoners, the high cost of living, rebuilding bombed towns, restoring roads and railways, restoring the water and electricity supply, and finding raw materials for artisanal activities. The recovery of the area was thus seen in a rather narrow perspective, as the healing of the wounds inflicted by the war to local society and the productive infrastructure, or, at most, as a reinforcement and development of traditional activities. The only sector where this perspective broadened was that of interregional transportation. The hope was to overcome the isolation of the region, although as a long-term project.

When one peruses the local pages of the more or less politically engaged newspapers and journals that appeared with the return of democracy, and when one looks at institutional activities, especially those of the Consiglio provinciale di Campobasso, one is even surprised by the paucity and belatedness of references to the theme of emigration, deeply rooted as it is in the social conditions and culture of the Molisans.¹ For example, one has to wait until 1949 for a report from Agnone, one of the historical epicenters of Molisan migration, to appear in the newspaper *Il Messaggero*.² The report

¹ For an overview of the phenomenon of migration in the history of the region, see Ricciarda Simoncelli, *Il Molise. Le condizioni geografiche di un'economia regionale*, K ed., Roma 1972, pp. 105-127; Francesco Citarella, *Le condizioni geografico economiche del Molise e la diffusione territoriale dell'emigrazione transoceanica*, in Idem (ed.), *Emigrazione e presenza italiana in Argentina*, CNR, Roma 1992, pp. 319-348; Gino Massullo (ed.), *Storia del Molise*, voll. IV e V, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2000; Idem, *Grande emigrazione e mobilità territoriale in Molise*, «Trimestre», XXVIII, 1994, 3-4, pp. 497-522; Norberto Lombardi, *Il Molise fuori dal Molise*, in Gino Massullo (ed.), *Storia del Molise in età contemporanea*, Donzelli, Roma 2006, pp. 535-640.

² On migratory trends in the town of Agnone and their destinations in the course of time, see the well-known book by William A. Douglas, *L'emigrazione in un paese dell'Italia meridionale. Agnone tra storia ed antropologia*, Giardini, Pisa 1990.

points out that the active population is declining dramatically, and advocates at least putting a check on the departure of workers, who, the writer argues, are leaving because it has become fashionable and because of the deceptive lure of America.³

Actually, the war and the events of its immediate aftermath had reawakened, although in a covert and indirect manner, old urges that had been dulled by the ruralization pursued by Fascism,⁴ and stirred up a new restlessness, especially among the low-middle classes. The passage of the allied armies, well supplied with provisions and generous with the local population, had stirred up memories of the *Mereca bona*, the “Good America,” which had attracted hundreds of thousands of Molisans, helping them to improve their condition both on this and on the other side of the Atlantic. The fleeting and unexpected visits of soldiers, the sons and grandsons of old immigrants, had caused the idea to sink in that these connections did not merely survive in family stories, but could be recovered and strengthened. The more so because the deluge of packages from those by now remote relatives that flooded southern towns in the immediate postwar period seemed to confirm a readiness to bring relief and a hospitality that promised to reactivate tried and true mechanisms of kinship solidarity. Paradoxically, considering the character of Fascist economic and demographic policies, Molisan workers’ request to participate in the colonization of East Africa, a request that had been only partially granted,⁵ and their experiences abroad, however occasional, in the framework of labor agreements between Italy and Germany, had fueled their feeling that the solution to occupational problems could be sought, as it had for a long period in the past, outside of the boundaries of the region.

The veterans who had had the opportunity of becoming familiar with more open and dynamic realities were starting to become restless and show the first signs of impatience with difficult life conditions and too rigid family hierarchies. Prisoners of wars, in particular, had heard about the existence of more decent and better paid jobs than those available in the Molisan countryside. In some cases, as in Australia, they had even had working experiences as prisoners of war, which they later tried to renew as free men, this time in the framework of an international mobility regulated by agreements between states.

In sum, the war had accelerated the process of cultural estrangement of those classes who could not find an answer to their primary needs for work

³ Guido Carlomagno, *Emigranti ed emigrazione*, “Il Messaggero”, 21-1-1949, p. 2.

⁴ On Molisan society and economy under Fascist rule, see G. Massullo, *Dalla periferia alla periferia* in Idem (ed.), *Storia del Molise in età contemporanea*, cit., pp. 475-486.

⁵ Cf. Daniela Serio, *Il lavoro italiano nelle colonie. Il Molise e l’Africa Orientale (1936-1940)*, Iannone, Isernia 2003, pp. 20 ff.; N. Lombardi, *Il Molise fuori dal Molise*, cit., pp. 584-85.

and better life prospects because of the backwardness of provincial society and economy. All the more because Fascist policies first, then changed international conditions, had caused outgoing flows—which for fifty years had played a fundamental role in regulating the demographic and occupational balance—to run dry, bringing the population up to its historical maximum⁶ and thus determining an unsustainable imbalance with available resources.

Social unrest thus grew rapidly, partly because it was objectively difficult to meet the demand for jobs and income in a backward economic context—whose most dynamic sectors, first and foremost the flour mills and hydroelectricity,⁷ had suffered the most from the war—and partly because of the lowering of the tolerance threshold for life conditions that were now perceived as less and less bearable.

These feelings were actually not totally new. As early as the second half of the 1930s, the demand for labor outside of agriculture, often echoed by the local and provincial organizations of the Fascist regime, had intensified and caused cracks to form in the artificial climate of social peace imposed by the government. An explicit testimony of this can be found in the correspondence of the prefects of the time with the government and the Commissariat for Migrations, where the request to find employment for Molisan workers in the colonies and in the major infrastructural projects of the regime sometimes become pleading and insistent.⁸ In comparison, the attitude of the Prefects who followed one another in Campobasso in the postwar years is surprising, even disconcerting. In their reports, bureaucratically drawn up from one month to the next, the problem of employment and income is almost exclusively addressed in terms of public order and emergency responses to natural calamities. The word “emigration” does not appear even once, even in the years from 1947 onward, when it started to increase markedly.⁹

The structural limitations of the economy of the region and the backwardness of the life conditions of a large majority of Molisans were

⁶ At the time of the census of 1951, the resident population of Molise numbered 407,000, 115.5% that of 1861, larger by 30,000 units than that of 1931, and by about 20,000 than that of 1936. Cf. Luigi Nocera – Fabrizio Plescia, *Il Molise tra i censimenti del 1936 e 1951*, «Almanacco del Molise 1995», pp. 210-217.

⁷ A detailed overview of war damages to public and civil infrastructure can be found in Amministrazione Provinciale di Campobasso, *Relazione sull'attività svolta dal 1944 al 1952*, Arti Grafiche Di Mauro, Cava dei Tirreni 1953, pp. 210-233. Information on the milling and pasta-making sectors can be found in the same volume, pp. 502-04. See also Roberto Colella, *I danni di guerra e lo sminamento* in Giovanni Cerchia (ed.), *Il Molise e la guerra totale*, Iannone, Isernia 2012, pp. 353-368.

⁸ ASC, Gabinetto di Prefettura, 085-0854 e 115-0799-23-18.

⁹ ACS, PS 1944-46, b. 29, f. Campobasso; ACS, PS 1948, b. 16, f. Campobasso; ACS, PS 1949, b. B 5, f. Campobasso; ACS, PS 1950 I sez., b. 10, f. Campobasso.

nevertheless such as to trigger an expulsive spiral that affected a sizable part of the population over a period of about thirty years, notwithstanding support and assistance policies addressed especially to farmers. The productive and social organization was revealing itself to be less and less compatible with the needs of a constantly growing population, with a birth rate which initially more than made up for the migratory hemorrhage. It is indeed remarkable that the emigration of the younger age-groups did not significantly impact the population growth rate. In the regional capital city, for example, the birth rate went up from 100 in 1901 to 207 in 1951, as compared to 195 in the other regional capitals of Italy, and the Italian average of 135.¹⁰ The stagnation of emigration in the 1930s and during the war thus led to an imbalance between population and resources, which became tangibly manifest only after the fall of Fascism and the restoration of the conditions for international mobility. The typical reproductive habits of the rural world, further stimulated and exalted by Fascist pro-fertility propaganda, were a significant factor in the demographic dynamics of Molise. In this regard, it is worth noting that in the postwar period the percentage of the population employed in agriculture was still fairly close to that of 80% registered ten years earlier.¹¹

This imbalance is not fully reflected in the official unemployment rates, since in most cases the need for work and income remained latent in vast strata of agricultural underemployment. Actually, the official statistics for unemployed and non-employed people in the years immediately after the war is fairly close to that recorded in the immediately preceding years. Only when, from the 1950s onward, the government started to launch substantial public infrastructure programs did employment office registrations increase significantly.¹²

After the closing of American outlets, Fascist immigration curbing policies and exalting of the “national” role of farmers, combined with a centuries-old inurement to difficult life conditions and an inferior diet, contributed to perpetuate for some decades a static and closed perception of the rural world,

¹⁰ Camera di Commercio Industria e Agricoltura di Campobasso, *Caratteri economici e disoccupazione della Provincia di Campobasso (monografia a cura del dott. Primiano Lasorsa)*, Dott. Luigi Macri edit., 1953, p. 4.

¹¹ According to the census of 1936 (the data of that of 1951 are not easily comparable), out of 376,184 resident Molisans and 185,319 active ones, 148,374, or 80.1%, were employed in agriculture. Even in the regional capital about half of the population were employed in agriculture. *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹² In 1938 and 1939, official unemployment oscillated between a maximum of ca. 14,000 and a minimum of ca. 5,000. In 1948 the still rather approximate figure ranges from 6,000 to 9,000 units. Only in the following year, when town employment officials became operative, is a peak of 12,300 units finally reached, balanced by a minimum of 6,000 units. From 1950 onward, maximum unemployment grew from 14,000 to over 16,000, and minimum unemployment from 10,000 to 12,000. *Ibidem*, p. 11.

where there seemed to be few practicable alternatives. In the postwar period, however, that model of work and life became less and less sustainable, due both to the backwardness of working conditions and the low wages, and to the rapid rise of more open and demanding cultural orientations. The Molisan peasant world, like that of southern Italy as a whole, began to open up. The exodus that followed was one of the most evident and widespread manifestations of this phenomenon.

At a time by which massive abandonment had already left a deep scar in Molisan society, Corrado Barberis lucidly summarized the contradiction between the needs of the population and the organization of resources:

In 1951, the active population recorded in the census numbered 202,000 units. In 1970, employed labor has gone down to 121,000. Even allowing for quibbles about the different nature of these two assessments, it nevertheless remains significant that in Molise occupation has gone down by about 40%. It is true that this decline is exclusively imputable to the agricultural exodus, since the industry and services have increased their employees from 49,000 to 62,000. But this increase is too slight to be regarded as satisfactory. This slightness highlights the plight of the people of Molise, who, to change trades, have also been forced to find a home outside of the boundaries of their region.¹³

Here Barberis posits an explicit connection between the backwardness of the countryside and emigration, and possibly an exclusive one, since he makes no mention of social and cultural factors, which actually had also weighed heavily on this outcome. His description of the consequences that such a torrential exodus was bound to have on the demographic balance and social composition, instead, is accurate:

This explains the great emigration that caused the total of the population of Molise to drop from 407,000 units in 1951 to 331,000 in 1970. The balance would be even more worrying if we were to include in our assessment the temporary emigration of individuals who retain official residence in Campobasso or Isernia, the aging of the population, etc. If Molise loses more employed people than residents, it is clear that the ratio between working and non-working people in the region will be deeply altered.¹⁴

The local ruling class did not display a clear awareness of this disruption that was beginning to take place in Molisan society. While they certainly saw the new phase opened by the fall of Fascism and a trend to go beyond

¹³ Corrado Barberis, *Avvio ad un dibattito sul futuro della società molisana* in *Convegno sui problemi dell'agricoltura molisana*, typewritten manuscript, [n. d., probably early Seventies], p. 2.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

traditional forms of organization as a necessary transition to the modernization of the region, they concentrated all their political and institutional energies on reconstruction, the building of a more adequate domestic and transregional road system, and providing the region with infrastructures such as aqueducts, sewers, and schools. These works were certainly urgent, and could also assuage the demand for employment to a certain extent. However, for a few decades they became the almost exclusive horizon of political dialectics and governmental action. The control of public funds thus became the regulating factor in the structure of power and the main concern in the prevalent political culture.

For several decades, social issues—which largely concerned the rural classes, the large majority of the population—were addressed with assistance and income integration measures reflecting a handout-oriented rather than a development-oriented logic. The people's intense drive to migrate was perceived, not as a structural change factor in a backward society, but as a threat, and often became a reason for polemic clashes in the framework of short-sighted political struggles. Emigration, which in the meantime had picked up again, when it was not mentioned in the context of accusations leveled against the ruling class, was used as an *a contrario* argument to request public investments, or was evoked to provide occasions for moral participation following work accidents, whether domestic or foreign.

As in the past, the decision to emigrate was essentially made at the individual or family level, even in cases when the subjects involved turned to the institutional channels that had been set up in the early postwar years to second and guide emigration. This decision was arrived at outside of a common reflection on the changing of provincial society and its possible destiny, and in any case it was shaped by the particular conditions of those times.

2. Exodus and depopulation

The resuming of emigration in Italy took on several different forms, which bear only a partial resemblance to the migratory experiences of Italians in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. For those who decided to look elsewhere for answers to their primary personal and family needs, the range of destinations was now broader than in the past, and there was a different balance between transoceanic and European immigration. This was also true of Molisan emigration.

Apart from the different continental distribution of outflows, there is another important difference compared to the past, namely, that new transoceanic routes are added to the traditional ones. In America, countries like Canada and Venezuela become important destinations for Italians

alongside the traditional ones, as does Australia in Oceania. These important new poles of attraction, however, while they did expand the range of options, did not replace the traditional ones, which continued to exert their force of attraction, although only in certain specific phases and in lesser measure.

An even more significant element of discontinuity was the growing preference of southern Italians for European countries, which in the past had been only barely grazed by migratory routes. This evolution was favored by three factors: the orientation of Italian democratic governments, who regarded emigration as a necessary solution to the serious unemployment plaguing the country in the postwar years, and as a vent for social and political tensions; the high demand for labor in northern European countries to rapidly address the problems of reconstruction and resume production; and the setting in of a system for the regulation of international labor mobility through bilateral agreements between states.¹⁵

The official documents of the time dealing with emigration make very clear that it is regarded as a necessary solution to the problems Italy is struggling with, and that it is crucial to grasp the particular conjuncture the Western world and Europe are going through:

These emigrant contingents should be as large as possible. For their effects to be truly perceivable, their volume should be even superior to what can be foreseen today [...]. The advantages of emigration for Italy cannot be limited exclusively to the economic sector; its social effects should be no less important. A raising of the standard of living and average incomes will gradually tone down social struggles, eliminating the risk of a country with a population of about 50 million being constantly troubled and threatened by unrest and agitations, largely due to the low standard of living and unemployment.¹⁶

At the national scale, the special intensity of migration from Abruzzo and Molise became immediately evident. In the 1947-1956 period, the average percentage of annual expatriations from these two regions was the highest in Italy (9.6‰). In 1957-64 it was still the highest, although much reduced in absolute terms (6.7‰). After Molise separated from Abruzzo, its rate leapt to 23.7‰. In the Seventies, when emigration slowed down and seemed to come to a halt due to the crisis that followed the oil shock, the rate in Molise still

¹⁵ For a more in-depth discussion of these aspects, I refer the readers to the essays by Andreina De Clementi and Michele Colucci in the present issue of this journal.

¹⁶ Ministero degli Affari Esteri – Direzione Generale dell’Emigrazione, *Emigrazione italiana (Situazione - Prospettive - Problemi)* 31 March 1949, quoted in Giuseppe Lucrezio Monticelli, Luigi Favero, *Un quarto di secolo di emigrazione italiana*, «Studi emigrazione», anno IX, 25-26, March-June 1972, p. 39. Also quoted by Francesco Barbagallo, *Lavoro ed esodo nel Sud 1861-1971*, Guida, Napoli 1973, p. 259.

remained the highest among Italian regions (7.7%).¹⁷ Even before Molise became an autonomous region, the emigration rate in the Province of Campobasso was constantly higher than in any other Italian Province.

In absolute terms, in the postwar decade about 78,000 Molisans left the country. 60,000 more followed in their wake in the second half of the 1950s. In the 1960s, there were about 90,000 expatriations. These went down to less than 17,000 in the first half of the 1970s, for the above-mentioned reasons. Overall, about 245,000 expatriations were registered, corresponding to about 60% of the resident population in 1951.¹⁸

A more analytical breakdown shows that the flows became significant from 1947 onward, grew to just shy of 10,000 units in 1951 and 1952, and even more in the central years of the 1950s, when they peaked at 13,500 in 1956. From 1960 to 1962 there was a new surge up to almost 13,000 units, then a decline, which was slower in the second half of the Sixties and brisker in the early Seventies. The highest annual average was in the 1956-1965 decade, with 11,478 expatriations, higher by 3,650 units than in the previous decade and by 6,173 than in the following one.¹⁹

1947 is thus the year when the gates of the world opened up for Molisans after fifteen years of forced seclusion within their provincial confines. To summarily single out the geographical preferences orienting outgoing flows within this quantitative upward trend, Belgium and France were added early on to the traditional transoceanic destinations. Around 1950 there was a new surge of departures for Argentina, favored by the expansive phase of the Rio de la Plata area and Juan Domingo Perón's "Europeistic" immigration policy, which contributed to the strong and lasting impression Perón made on the imaginary of Italian migrants. The opening up of routes to Canada, Venezuela and Australia in the same years is also worthy of notice.

The major shift of the second half of the Fifties and the first half of the Sixties mainly depended on the replacing of the earlier European destinations with Switzerland and Germany, which gained prevalence, and, overseas, and on the strong pull exerted by Canada, with which family chains remained taut and active until the early Seventies.

¹⁷ Vincenzo Rivera, *Profilo essenziale dell'emigrazione abruzzese dall'Unità ad oggi*, in *Studi monografici sulla popolazione abruzzese*, Centro regionale di studi e ricerche economico sociali (CRESA), L'Aquila 2001, www.cresa.it/publicazioni/popolazione/cap_3.pdf.

¹⁸ Gian Fausto Rosoli, *Un secolo di emigrazione italiana*, CSER, Roma 1978, p. 360. The number of expatriations is of course higher than that of the people who were actually abandoning the region, since it includes future returning immigrants and does not allow for repeated crossings of the border by the same individuals. These figures, however, do not reflect the phenomenon of clandestine expatriation, as common in Molise as in other areas.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

An overview of the mobility of Molisans in the second half of the twentieth century must necessarily take into account migrations within Molise itself, as I will be arguing later on, and the no less significant migration towards other areas in Italy, especially Rome, the neighboring provinces of Abruzzo, and the industrialized areas of the Northwest and Lombardy, and later those of Emilia as well, a favorite destination for the inhabitants of Lower Molise.

Of the 9283 residence deregistrations recorded in 1973, about 40% relate to individuals who moved to the few Molisan towns that had witnessed an urban expansion, the rest to individuals who relocated to other areas within Italy—with all due allowance for errors and delays in registration.²⁰ More precisely, about 4.5% moved to Piemonte, about 10% to Lombardy, about 10.7% to Lazio, a little less than that to Abruzzo, about 6.8% to Campania, and about 7.7% to Puglia. In sum, Molisan migration within Italy headed in almost equal shares towards towns in the same province and towards the North-Center (about 37%), while a less significant share moved to Abruzzo (23%) and other southern regions.²¹

The move from rural villages to expanding urban centers—initially only Campobasso and Isernia, then also the towns along the coast and in the Venafro area when industrialization began there as well—was due first and foremost to the expulsive force of agricultural unemployment and underemployment, on the one hand, and on the attractive force of building expansion and the gradual ramification of the administration. An equally important factor was the availability of better schools for one's children and the lure of an urban life model, albeit at a provincial scale. In spite of the linearity of these processes, they display complexities that should not be overlooked. First of all, the movement was not only an unidirectional one from the countryside to the urban centers; the farmers migrating from more fertile hilly areas were often replaced by other farmers from harsher mountain areas. Even the move to the city was often a prelude to a mixed form of work in agriculture and the building industry. In other cases, it was only the first of several migratory stages. Whole low-income neighborhoods, such as the historical center of Campobasso, for decades were drained of their people, who moved abroad or to other Italian regions, and filled with people who had left their villages, but still retained small real estate or farm property there.

²⁰ There are several reasons why the data on internal migration is only partially significant: delays in reporting to the authorities by the subjects involved; the lack of ISTAT statistics on this phenomenon until 1955; the prolongation until 1961 of the law on internal migration of 1939, which strove to curb urbanization by allowing transfers of residence only subject to proving that the applicant had a work contract, and, at the same time, did not allow employment offices to grant authorizations to work to non-residents.

²¹ Based on ISTAT data published in SVIMEZ, *Un quarto di secolo delle statistiche Nord-Sud (1951-1976)*, cit., pp. 122-23.

Unlike what happened with the first migratory wave, this combination of internal, national and international mobility had devastating effects in terms of depopulation and the disruption of traditional productive activities. During the twenty-five years that followed World War II, of the 136 towns constituting the Region of Molise, 126 witnessed a decline in population. In the decade between the 1951 and 1961 censuses alone, the higher hilly zone and the mountains lost about 13% of their population.²² The abandonment of agriculture only partially translated into a move into the industry or the crafts, as these were in their turn undermined by strong emigration. There was, instead, an expansion of commerce and jobs in the bureaucracy.

Even returning emigrants—mainly elderly ones who had reached retirement age and had received their lump sum—did not always go back to their villages of origin, preferring to move to the larger urban centers or the coast.

3. *Old transoceanic routes*

What reemerged among Molisans was first and foremost the old kinship webs, and transoceanic attractions that had been slumbering through the passing of generations, and had sometimes been cut off from their object due to the difficult relations of Italy with some of the historical destinations of Molisan migration, with which the colonial and war adventures of Fascism had caused deep rifts. The largest Molisan communities outside of Europe, as is known, were in the United States and Argentina, but sizable ones had also formed in Canada, Brazil and Uruguay.²³

The United States government continued to put strong restrictions on immigration, but not so strong as to prevent over 200,000 Italians, thanks to possession of American nationality or inclusion into categories eligible for admission, to enter the country, augmenting and revitalizing the already extant large traditional communities. Looser restrictions were applied to immigrants from the towns most damaged by the war, and several families from towns in upper Molise in areas where the German defensive lines were

²² More specifically, Alto Molise lost 12%; Medio Trigno and Biferno 16.1%; Alto Volturmo 12.8%; Alto Trigno and Sannio Settentrionale 19.3%; the Campobasso area 5.2%, but without counting the capital itself, which lost 18.7%; northern Matese 22.4%: Camera di Commercio, Industria e Agricoltura di Campobasso, *Lineamenti economici della provincia di Campobasso*, Giuffrè, 1964, p. 14. This monograph includes even more analytic data about the population of each town and trends in the number of people employed in different economic sectors in the ten years between the two censuses.

²³ On this subject, see N. Lombardi, “*Il Molise fuori dal Molise*”, cit., pp. 535-582; Idem, “*L'emigrazione dei molisani. Forme ed esiti di una radicata cultura della partenza*” in Fondazione Migrantes, *Rapporto Italiani nel mondo 2010*, Idos, Roma 2010, pp. 37-50.

took advantage of this to join their relatives and fellow townspeople in the USA. For the first years after the end of the conflict, there are no reliable statistics about the number of Molisians who migrated to the United States. The statistics available from the Sixties onward, in their turn, are rather divergent, depending on whether they rely on residence registrations and deregistrations, which are notoriously incomplete and belated, or the number of recorded expatriations, which do not distinguish between repeated ones by the same person and do not allow for repatriations. An inductive estimate,²⁴ which would deserve a closer examination, indicates that during the fifteen years after the war the number of Molisians who migrated to the USA must have exceeded 10,000 units by a few thousands, and that they were joined by at least another 5000 during the subsequent decades. Traces of this outflow can be found in AIRE registration data,²⁵ which are only relative to expatriates who kept their Italian citizenship. For the first few years of the present century, the AIRE records the presence of 4465 Molisians in the US. These have increased to 5101 at the beginning of the current year.²⁶

The distribution of the new arrivals largely reflects the traditional community-based map, but some established themselves elsewhere, to places offering better opportunities for them to practice their trades or professional activities, which are now more diverse and qualified.²⁷

²⁴ Cf. N. Lombardi, *Il Molise fuori dal Molise*, cit., pp. 600-01, who puts forward some quantitative hypotheses based on registry office cancellation statistics from 1960 to 1964 provided by R. Simoncelli, *Il Molise. Le condizioni geografiche di un'economia regionale*, cit., p. 123, and data on expatriation cited by F. Citarella, *Emigrazione e presenza italiana in Argentina*, cit., p. 339. We should allow for the fact that the restrictive admission criteria prescribed by the McCarran Act of 1952 were modified in 1965 by the Immigration and Nationality Act, which overrules national quotas to favor family reunions and the entry of workers with specific qualifications.

²⁵ This acronym designates the Registry Office of Italians Residing Abroad (Anagrafe degli italiani residenti all'estero), instituted in 1990 in application of Act no. 470 of 27 October 1988. Italian citizens residing abroad for more than twelve months are required to register with this office, including those who have maintained or regained Italian citizenship in spite of residing permanently abroad. At the beginning of 2011, 4,208,977 individuals were registered with AIRE. 78,967 of these were Molisians, or 24.7% of the resident population of the region, by far the highest percentage among Italian regions. AIRE lists are not very accurate, being compiled on the basis of data provided by the towns of origin of the migrants. Consular lists are more up-to-date, but have no legal value.

²⁶ Cf., respectively, MAE, Direzione generale per gli italiani all'estero e le politiche migratorie, *La rilevazione degli italiani all'estero al 31 marzo 2003: caratteristiche demografiche*, Rubettino, Catanzaro 2005, p. 155 e Fondazione Migrantes, *Rapporto italiani nel mondo 2012*, Idos, Roma 2012, p. 490.

²⁷ Other individual stories of integration in US society can be found in Sante Matteo, *Radici sporadiche: letteratura, viaggi, migrazioni*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2007, and in the brief life stories of emigrants collected by Norberto Lombardi in the series "Molisani nel mondo", published in "Nuovo Molise Oggi": *Il viaggio nella vita di Tony Vaccaro* (19 novembre 1998, p. 19 e 26 novembre 1998, p. 18); *Joseph D'Andrea: da Roccamandolfi a Pittsburg* (3 dicembre 1998, p. 18); *Pietro Corsi, cittadino di un mondo plurale* (18 aprile 1999, p. 17);

The Argentinean route was more open and fluid. This depended not only on the different attitude of the local authorities—who were once again setting their stakes on the already tried and tested migratory flow from Europe as a driver of internal growth—but also on more recent and fresh kinship and friendship ties with immigrants who had headed there after the shutting down of the gates of North America.²⁸ Indeed, on the morrow of the Second World War, Italian migration to Argentina, by then stagnant, had resumed with special intensity, although for a relatively short period. Between 1947 and 1951, 330,000 Italians reached the Plata, a considerable share of total expatriations, although still less than the half million the Argentineans were expecting on the basis of signed agreements. The country was the destination of one out of four expatriating Italians, and even three out of four of all who were headed for the Americas. During the following five years, however, their numbers declined to less than half, one out of eight in percentage terms, and was down at about 40,000 in the first five years of the 1960s, with a number of homecomings exceeding that of expatriations.²⁹ In a context where Italian migration to Argentina was becoming increasingly “southernized,” the Abruzzesi-Molisani were the third regional component of this new immigration, after the Calabrian and Campanian one. Of the over 90,000 Abruzzans and Molisans who emigrated during the five years after the war, about half went to Argentina. The Molisans who migrated were a third of the total, about 30,000, and about a third of them headed for the Plata.³⁰

The Molisans in Argentina have maintained a high degree of cohesiveness up until recent times, partly thanks to a prevalently town-based associative fabric which was revitalized from the early Fifties onward, replacing the almost vanished original fabric. The first assessment of the size of the community by the consular authorities at the beginning of the Seventies estimates it at about 20,000, only slightly less than the Canadian community,

Giovanni Cancellieri, tra l'Argentina e Filadelfia (9 dicembre 1999, p. 20); *Michele Vena, le radici mai dimenticate* (29 dicembre 1999, p. 19); *Michele Di Stefano: l'emigrazione da scoprire* (9 marzo 2000, p. 17); *Nancy Fatica, cardiologa al Cornell Medical Center* (22 giugno 2000, p. 19 e 29 giugno 2000, p. 19); *Luigi Bonaffini: il dialetto come cultura* (3 agosto 2000, p. 19). The same series also includes several article on the American "exile" by Giose Rimaneli.

²⁸ On the shifting towards Argentina of the flows of Italian emigrants after the closing of the gates of North America, cf. Fernando J. Devoto, *Storia degli italiani in Argentina*, Donzelli, Roma 2006, pp. 334 ff.; as regards the Molisans in particular, see N. Lombardi, *L'asino di Zi' 'Ntonie. Come finì la Mereca per gli emigranti molisani, Almanacco del Molise 2011*, Habacus Edithore, Campobasso 2010, pp. 111-153, esp. 114-115.

²⁹ F. J. Devoto, *Storia degli italiani in Argentina*, cit., pp. 595 ff.

³⁰ Combined data from Gianfausto Rosoli (ed.), *Un secolo di emigrazione italiana 1876-1976*, Studi Emigrazione, Roma 1978, p. 361, and F. Citarella, *Emigrazione e presenza italiana in Argentina*, cit., p. 342.

and growing. A probably more complete assessment, and one that is less dependent on formal and administrative aspects, indicates twice this figure by the end of the decade, bringing it up to over 40,000.³¹ At the beginning of the present century, after further decades of social and civil integration into Argentinean society, the number of Molisans who had kept their citizenship was about 20,000. By 2012 it was down to about 18,500.³²

The most widely settled areas were: Greater Buenos Aires, where Molisans found employment especially in the construction industry, in road and railway works, and in detail commerce; di Rosario, where the bakeries established by immigrants from Ripalimosani are still expanding; and Mar del Plata, where some communities from towns in the middle Molise, such as Duronia and Frosolone, and lower Molise, such as Mafalda, were augmented and reinvigorated.³³

The Molisan community in Brazil, and especially in the State of Sao Paulo, had lost its original character. This was due both to the long time that had gone by since their arrival and to anti-Italian policies adopted by local governments before and after the Second World War. Around 1950, however, departures picked up again, almost all of them towards Sao Paulo,³⁴ and mostly from towns in the Boiano area, such as

³¹ See, respectively, SVIMEZ, *Un quarto di secolo nelle statistiche Nord-Sud. 1951-1976*, Giuffrè, Milano 1978, p. 133 and MAE, Direzione generale emigrazione e affari sociali, *Aspetti e problemi dell'emigrazione italiana all'estero nel 1979*, Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, Roma 1980, p. 164.

³² Cf. MAE, Direzione generale per gli italiani all'estero e le politiche migratorie, *La rilevazione degli italiani all'estero al 31 marzo 2003: caratteristiche demografiche*, cit., p. 155 e Fondazione Migrantes, *Rapporto italiani nel mondo 2012*, cit., p. 490.

³³ For a qualitative illustration of the integration of Molisans in Argentina, see Torcuato S. Di Tella, *Torcuato Di Tella: industria e politica*, in *In nome del padre*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 1999, pp. 23-131, and the many short life stories recorded on location by N. Lombardi and published in the series *Molisani nel mondo* in "Nuovo Molise Oggi": *Il Monforte a Buenos Aires* (19 nov. 1998), *Fernando Barbato, Il pane amaro* (8 luglio 1999), *Michelangelo Lanese: la catena del pane* (18 marzo 1999), *Josè Valiante: la pietà* (29 aprile 1999), *Torcuato S. Di Tella: un padre importante* (16 marzo e 23 marzo), *Mario Santillo: emigrazione e risveglio culturale* (29 luglio 1999), *Lita de Lazzari, la profetessa delle casalinghe argentine* (4 marzo 1999), *Claudia e Romina, alla ricerca delle radici* (31 di. 1998), *Andrea Berardo: l'emigrazione infinita* (28 dic. 2000). Stories of the persecution of Molisans during the military dictatorship include that of *Padre José Tedeschi* (7 gennaio 1999) and *Ada Miozzi Borzi: mio marito un desaparecido* (30 dic. 1999). These materials are available at the Biblioteca P. Albino in Campobasso.

³⁴ The largest Molisan settlement was formed in the last decade of the nineteenth century in the outskirts of San Paolo, where some immigrants from Boiano played a very active role in the constitution of the colony of São Gaetano. In the second postwar period, a sizable group of new Molisan immigrants headed for the same destination, more specifically, the area known as ABC Paulista (Santo André, São Bernardo and São Caetano): cf. Marlene Suano, *Italiani del Molise – Italiani del Brasile*, Catalogo a cura dell'Archivio di Stato di Campobasso, Campobasso 1999, p. 52.

Macchiagodena,³⁵ from where a significant chain migration issued in the 1920s. Migration remained intense until the mid-1950s, when it started to decline. By the end of the Sixties it had come to an end. In this case, too, no reliable statistics are available. It is impossible to say how many Molisans were there among the 99,554 Italians who migrated to Brazil between 1946 and 1957, nor how many among the 26,000 who returned to Italy in the same period.³⁶ On the basis of these incomplete data, we can estimate that their number was something around 10,000 units, including family members, many of whom benefited from facilitations granted by the CIME.³⁷

Allowing for repatriations and naturalizations, consular authorities estimate that between the late Seventies and early Eighties Molisan communities in Brazil included some 4,500 people. Those who still retain citizenship to this day are about 2,600.³⁸ The Molisan community in Brazil, while small, stands out for two reasons: its high degree of integration, sometimes also in the form of successful economic and entrepreneurial ventures, and its propensity to exchanges with its region of origin.³⁹

A smaller but not insignificant community of Molisans established itself in Uruguay. These include several dozen families from the town strip going from Cercemaggiore to Colledara. Most are from Sepino. Like other Molisan immigrants, they, too, were drawn here by kinsmen and fellow townsmen.⁴⁰

³⁵ Archivio di Stato di Campobasso – Soprintendenza Archivistica per il Molise, *I “viaggi della speranza”*. *Aspetti e momenti dell’emigrazione molisana in Brasile* (edited by Renata De Benedittis and Daniela Di Tommaso), Centro stampa Archivio di Stato, Campobasso 1998, p. 11 ff.; Renato Cavallaro, *Emigrazione, comunità e cultura in due comuni molisani*, «Rivista storica del Sannio», 2-1994, pp. 153-158.

³⁶ Cf. U. Ascoli, *Movimenti migratori in Italia*, cit., p. 43. In the first fifteen years of the Republic, emigration to Brazil rose to 111,000. Angelo Trento, *In Brasile*, in Piero Bevilacqua, Andeina De Clementi, Emilio Franzina (eds), *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana. Arrivi*, Donzelli, Roma 2002, p. 5.

³⁷ Molisans’ transoceanic vocation was rekindled, as I mentioned above, thanks to the network of relatives and acquaintances who were already in the Americas, who soon revived the chain migration system and provided the guarantees required by local laws. Differently than at the beginning of the century, however, this time emigration was regulated and controlled by bilateral agreements with the host countries, which followed one another uninterruptedly for at least a decade. Some organizations were created to monitor and support emigration, providing, among other things, traveling assistance to emigrants. The CIME (Comitato Intergovernativo per le Migrazioni Europee), instituted in 1952, was one of the most active in this field.

³⁸ For sources, see notes 30 and 31 above.

³⁹ On this subjects, see the life stories of Felice Carmine Perrella, Giovanni Valente, and Antonio Midea in the serie *Molisani nel mondo* by Norberto Lombardi in “Nuovo Molise Oggi” (respectively, 11 and 18 February 1999, 1 April 1999, and 20 May 1999).

⁴⁰ Further information and considerations about Molisan presence in Uruguay can be found in a research commissioned to the researcher Carolina Bueno by the Centro Studi sui molisani nel mondo, attached to Biblioteca Provinciale di Campobasso. Cf. also in *Molisani nel*

4. New transoceanic destinations

The transoceanic scenario that confronted Molisans and southern Italians in general was greatly changed by the inclusion of new countries, notably Canada, Venezuela and Australia, among the range of possible destinations.

When the Canadian and Italian governments signed an agreement allowing about half a million Italians to move to the North American country, the contradictory feelings about Canada engendered by the war events still lingered on. When Canada had entered the war, several thousand Italians had had the same fate as the Japanese and the Germans: they had been confined in two concentration camps for “enemy aliens.”⁴¹ At the same time, the passage on Italian soil of the Canadian army, well equipped with essential provisions and generous towards the populations impoverished by the war, had sparked a strong interest in Canada, which was increasingly seen as a possible alternative to the USA, which by then had become difficult to enter. In Molise, significant signs of this unexpected symbiosis included some Canadian soldiers’ habit of going back there during their leave, and the election of Campobasso to “Canada Town,” a sort of “Little Canada” abroad.⁴² As to the Molisans, a migratory flow towards Canada began as early as 1950. It intensified at the end of the decade and became very intense during the Sixties. Canada thus became,

in the twenty-five years that followed the Second World War, what the United States had been during the Great Emigration. In the Fifties, Canada reincarnated the myth of “Mereca buona,” which had had such a lure not only on smallholders and craftsmen—who had tumultuously and irreversibly abandoned the rural towns of the region—but also by many who, after having already experienced migrations to other European countries or Latin America, opted for the North American destination.⁴³

mondo, Filomena Narducci, *emigrante alla rovescia*, “Nuovo Molise Oggi”, 21 gennaio 1999.

⁴¹ See also the extraordinary testimony, also published in Italy, of one of the of the protagonists of this experience, written immediately after his liberation from a prison camp: Duliani, *Città senza donne*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia, 2003. Today Duliani’s book is considered to be one of the foundational texts of Italo-Canadian literature.

⁴² On the passage of the First Canadian Division on Molisan soil, cf. Farley Mowat, *Il reggimento*, Longanesi, Milano 1976; on how Campobasso became *Canada Town*, see: Nicola Felice, *Quando Campobasso divenne Canada Town*, Arti Grafiche La Regione, Ripalimosani 2003; Roberto Colella, *Canada Town: i rapporti tra la società civile e i «liberatori*, in Giovanni Cerchia (ed.), *Il Molise e la guerra totale*, cit., pp. 291-305.

⁴³ N. Lombardi, *Il Molise fuori dal Molise*, cit., p. 615.

This further confirms a circularity of migratory movements, which, while not unusual, was especially accentuated in the second postwar period, partly thanks to a broader web of connections and facilitated mobility.

Italian ministerial sources estimate (certainly by defect) that there were over 21,000 Molisans in Canada in 1973, and 24,000 a few years later, which shows that the country still remained a favorite destination even after the global economic crisis.⁴⁴ The recent character of this emigration and the persistence of ties with its milieu of origin is also reflected in the significant number of those who still retained their Italian citizenship: about 12,000, in spite of the fluidity of integration processes and the drive towards naturalization.⁴⁵

As regards their geographical distribution in Canada, the Molisans did not follow the main trends of Italian migratory flows, which prevalently headed for Ontario, and especially the Toronto area. Most established themselves, instead, in Quebec, especially at Montreal, which was the destination of a chain migration from towns in Middle and Lower Molise.⁴⁶ Toronto, instead, was the main destination of immigrants from towns in the Matese and Isernino, while Vancouver, on the Pacific coast, hosted a cohesive community from Bagnolo di Trigno.

In spite of the preference accorded to Canada as the new transoceanic destination, and the social dynamism displayed by our community, we cannot overlook the fact that this migratory experience, too, was fraught with difficulties and hardship. The initial selection was especially concerned with the moral, religious and especially political profile of aspiring emigrants, and was generally left to the discretion of parish priests. The impact with the local climate was harsh, and the procedure to get a job was not immune from authoritarian and exploitative practices. The testimony of a Molisan, Frank Colantonio, who was a union man in the construction industry in Toronto in the early Sixties,⁴⁷ paints a surprising picture of widespread wage exploitation and work performed under conditions of scarce security and protection. The integration of children into the local school system was not always easy, especially in the francophone schools of Quebec.

However, Molisan immigrants quite swiftly began to turn towards forms of artisanal and entrepreneurial work. This produced a significant social

⁴⁴ Sources: see note 30.

⁴⁵ Source: see note 31.

⁴⁶ On the system to encourage departures for Canada, read the special case of Montorio nei Frentani recounted in R. Cavallaro, *Emigrazione, comunità e cultura in due comuni molisani*, cit., pp. 149-156.

⁴⁷ Frank Colantonio, *Nei cantieri di Toronto*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2000.

advancement, borne out, a few decades from their arrival, by many examples of success in business, culture, and the administration.⁴⁸

The relative closeness in time of the exodus and the intercultural atmosphere of Canadian society allowed a close-knit web of contacts to form between immigrants from the same town, both in Montreal and in Toronto. Although this web has gradually slacked as the first generations grew older, it remains an important example of aggregative cohesion and cultural connection with people's region of origin. All the more because for over two decades the several dozens of associations present in the two main urban areas have been organized into federative structures which promote and represent these associations with the regional and provincial administrations of Molise.⁴⁹

Venezuela, unlike other countries that had already experienced Molisan immigration, was a totally new destination. Here Italian immigration, estimated at about 200,000,⁵⁰ essentially occurred and came to an end within the fifteen years from the end of the war to the end of the 1950s. The intense, although brief, attraction exerted by the Caribbean country was fueled by two factors: on the one hand, the decline of the pull of traditional destinations such as Argentina and Brazil, on the other, Venezuela's tumultuous process of internal development and modernization, which began with the exploitation of its conspicuous oil resources. Ever since the time of Romulo Gallego's reformist government, and even more with Marco Pérez Jiménez's subsequent dictatorship, the gates of the country opened up to European immigrants from Mediterranean countries, who were regarded as better suited than others for rapid integration into the social and productive fabric. Ample opportunities for work and entrepreneurial initiatives were

⁴⁸ Significant examples of Molisians who followed interesting paths to social recognition in several fields can be found, again, in the interviews and short life stories published weekly by N. Lombardi on the daily newspaper "Nuovo Molise Oggi" from autumn 1998 to summer 2000. See especially the articles on the entrepreneurs Nick Di Tempora, Joe Panzera, Joe Paventi, Filippo Romano, Mario Romano, Giovanni D'Amato, Ben Lombardi, Tony Vespa, the critic and university professor John Picchione, the journalist Angelo Persichilli, the politicians John Ciaccia, Guglielmo Cusano and Frank Zampino, the professionals Anna Maria Castrilli, Dario Giannandrea and Michele Vena, and others. These materials are available at the Biblioteca P. Albino in Campobasso. Generational dynamics and the problems of integration are also to the fore in the works, also published in Italy, of Molisan writers, or writers of Molisan origin, Antonio D'Alfonso, Carole Fioramore David, Mary Melfi, Marco Micone, Pietro Corsi, Filippo Salvatore, Isabella Colalillo Katz, as well as the better known Giose Rimanelli and Nino Ricci. See the section specifically devoted to this subject below.

⁴⁹ Since the first half of the 1980s, a Federazione delle Associazioni Molisane del Québec (FAMQ) has existed and been operative in Québec, along with the Federazione delle associazioni molisane dell'Ontario (FAMO) in Ontario in the same period, recently supplemented by the Federazione Canadese delle Associazioni Molisane in Ontario.

⁵⁰ Vittorio Cappelli, *Nelle altre Americhe*, in P. Bevilacqua, A. De Clementi, E. Franzina, *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana. Arrivi*, cit., p. 108.

opening up for immigrants in the nascent industry, in the tertiary sector, and, above all, in the civil and public construction industry, as well as in oil extraction. These opportunities for work and gain were traumatically curtailed following the popular rebellion against Jiménez, when Italians were accused of having provided interested support to the dictator. The unrest that ensued caused many to return to Italy or move on to other North American or European destinations. Those who stayed did so because they planned to take definitive residence in the country and integrate rapidly.

The Molisans largely arrived between the end of the Forties and the end of the Fifties. They settled especially in the district of Caracas and in the areas of Maracay, Valencia and Barquisimeto. Most came from towns in the province of Campobasso, especially those in the valley of Fortore and the central area that goes from Sant'Elia to Casacalenda. However, there were also some from the Boianese, the Molise Altissimo, and the Volturno valley.⁵¹ It is not easy to assess their numbers. In the mid 1970s, Ministry sources mention slightly more than 7,000 Molisans. At the beginning of the 1990s, 6,150⁵² are recorded. In the latest AIRE lists, their numbers have gone further down to less than 5000. These records only regard individuals who kept their Italian citizenship. The same sources estimate that, if one includes naturalized immigrants, the regional communities are at least four times as large. The over 20,000 people of Molisan origin thus estimated are the descendants of the 5,000-6,000 who came over during the first fifteen years after the war. In the lack of official data, these are calculated empirically on the basis of the recorded number of expatriates in the same period.

Initially they mainly engaged in the crafts, partly because the Venezuelan government insistently requested our diplomatic authorities to prevent the incoming of generic workers and of individuals seeking employment in private and public building works.⁵³ A couple of generations later, one sees

⁵¹ More detailed indications on their towns of origin can be found in N. Lombardi, *Il Molise fuori dal Molise*, cit., p. 608.

⁵² For the 1976 statistics, see MAE, Dir. gen. per l'emigrazione e gli affari sociali, *Aspetti e problemi dell'emigrazione italiana all'estero*, Ist. Poligrafico dello Stato, Roma 1978, p. 131. The more recent of these statistics are from Mariza Bafile, *Los Hijos de los inmigrantes y el model económico venezolano*, Ediciones de la Academia Nacional de Ciencias Económicas, Caracas 1990, p. 432, and are confirmed by Michele Castelli in a soon-to-be-published research commissioned by the Centro Studi sui Molisani nel Mondo della Provincia di Campobasso, *La presenza dei molisani in Venezuela dal 1945 ai nostri giorni*.

⁵³ The following life stories of Molisan immigrants to Venezuela are significant examples of paths to integration and social advancement: Michele Castelli, *Erase una vez... Giuseppe*, Edición del Vicerrectorado Académico de la UCV, Caracas 1998, published in Italy in Michele Castelli, Torcuato S. Di Tella, Giose Rimanelli, *In nome del padre*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 1999, pp. 133-207; Giuseppe Molino, *Per il mondo in cerca di fortuna*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2001. See also the interviews with Michele Castelli, Michele Di Stasi,

evident signs of progress. The young people had all completed their schooling, and some Molisians had created small or middle-sized companies, or begun professional careers. In more recent times, their social and working conditions have been impacted first by a devastating financial crisis, which weighed especially on the middle classes, then by the pressure of the populist policies of the Bolivarian regime. In spite of these difficulties, thanks to its well-established social status and its cultural and civil evolution, the Molisan community in Venezuela remains prominent among Molisians abroad.

Among transoceanic destinations, Australia, like Venezuela, was new to Molisians. Actually, there had been some earlier migrations from Molise to this country, notably from some Lower Molise towns, especially Acquaviva Collecroci and Castelmauro. These, however, had been an essentially sporadic phenomenon, which had probably followed in the wake of a migratory flow that had developed in the nearby Adriatic zones of Marche and Abruzzo and whose destination had been the western Australian areas of Fremantle and Perth.⁵⁴ The new and much more significant migratory phase occurred in the framework of a regulated and assisted flow from Italy to Australia, whose organization and jurisdiction was defined by a bilateral agreement signed in 1952. Actually, when this agreement came into force, some groups of Molisians had already begun to establish themselves in that remote country. On the morrow of the war the chain migration from the Serbo-Croatian towns of Molise was resumed, from which pioneering parties had left for Australia before the conflict. Furthermore, a number of veterans from towns in the Boianese, including Spinete and Colledanchise, had been prisoners in Australia for some years, where they had been mainly set to farm work. Several of these went back to Australia, where they soon activated a family and villaged migratory chain.⁵⁵ This time, the areas where they settled were in eastern Australia. More precisely, the first arrivals established themselves in the Gippsiland, the subsequent ones in the Melbourne area, with smaller groups in Sidney and Tasmania.

Quantifying these flows is as difficult for Australia as for the other countries I have discussed above. In the first semester of 1955, applications for emigration to that country filed with the Labor Office of Campobasso

Andrea Iosue, and Maria Di Iorio collected by N. Lombardi and published in “Nuovo Molise Oggi” in the weekly column *Molisani nel mondo*.

⁵⁴ Useful information on this first Australian outpost can be found in N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel mondo, John Clissa, con i Croati nel West Australia*, “Nuovo Molise Oggi”, 2 marzo 2000, p. 19.

⁵⁵ On the intense outgoing flow from Spinete ever since the early postwar years, see N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel mondo: Frank Dompietro, Spinete in Australia*, “Nuovo Molise Oggi”, 30 novembre 2000, p. 23.

were 2,730, a fifth of the total.⁵⁶ This is a considerable number, although it probably includes backlogged applications and reflects the effect of the travel facilitations provided for by the recent bilateral agreement. From 1960 to 1964, there were about 700 residence deregistrations of immigrants to Australia, about 8% of total deregistrations. Allowing for a discrepancy between these deletions and actual departures, and applying some of these percentages to the total number of expatriates, hypothetically we may estimate the initial migratory flow towards Australia at about 5,000 units. The consular representatives' periodic assessment for 1973, by which date the great majority of immigrants had arrived, estimates resident Molisans at over 9,000. This figure oscillates over the subsequent years, probably due to inaccuracies in the surveys. In the mid-Eighties it still reached 8,000 units.⁵⁷ In more recent times, 2,894⁵⁸ Molisans still retaining Italian citizenship were recorded. This figure is consistent with the previous ones, since until not long ago the acquisition of Australian citizenship entailed the loss of the previous one.

The integration path of the Molisans in Australia, once the initial difficulties had been overcome, can be regarded as having been successful throughout the country, which is actually true of the Italian community as a whole. The open character of local migratory policies and the long absence of the immigrants from their places of origin due to distance and travel costs have made the decision to settle in the country irreversible, and favored rapid social and cultural rooting.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the closeness in time of this migration and the intercultural atmosphere of the country have recently led to a revival of immigrant associations. This bodes well for the development of cultural relations and exchanges with Molise. What we should be more concerned about is whether the current initiatives of Molisan administration are continuous and effective enough to respond to the interest of this and other groups of associations across the world.

5. *The discovery of Europe*

Already in the phase of reconstruction and economic and social recovery (1946-57), more Italians were leaving for European destinations (1,745,089) than for extra-European ones (1,412,180). If, however, we subtract

⁵⁶ Cf. Federico Orlando, *Esodo dal Molise*, «Nord e Sud», III, 1956, 14, p. 98.

⁵⁷ These data are from the reports on aspects and problems of emigration periodically published by the MAE, cited in the previous notes.

⁵⁸ Source: See note 31.

⁵⁹ For example, Giovanni Castrilli, who emigrated from Roccamandolfi in 1954, was elected mayor of Bunbury (South West) in the early years of the new century, gathering votes both among the "ethnic" component of the population and the local one.

repatriations, the ratio is inverse: 840,254 vs. 1,100,812, respectively.⁶⁰ If we break down these flows according to the three main geographical subdivisions of Italy, we will notice that in the early Fifties the North yielded over its earlier primacy to the South. From 1954 onward, southern immigration was even higher than that from Center and North taken together.⁶¹ This trend remained constant until the mid-Seventies, although it was partially compensated by the higher number of repatriations recorded in the South compared to the Center and North.⁶² Andreina De Clementi has drawn a parallel between this trend and that of the post-unification period:

Although external mobility in this thirty-year period more than interacted with internal mobility, which was equally imposing, this trend closely matched the post-unification regional map and migratory chronology: first the North, then the South, until they exchanged roles as one grew and the other declined.⁶³

The European route is the main innovation of Molisan emigration in the second postwar period. We need to go back several decades, especially to the years around 1900, to find traces of the presence of Molisans in France, practically the only destination of Molisan immigrants in the whole continent.⁶⁴ Even more than their neighbors from what used to be the same region, the Abruzzans, they had traditionally preferred transoceanic destinations, and this is also reflected in the postwar trend. But when announcements of job offers from French firms and Belgian mining companies began to appear at the street corners of towns, crowded with unemployed and underemployed people, announcing guaranteed and regular wages and insurance and pension benefits, which in those times were

⁶⁰ Cf. Ugo Ascoli, *Movimenti migratori in Italia*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1979, p. 43 and p. 47.

⁶¹ In 1952, 116,176 emigrants, or 41.8% of the total, were from the North, 31,883 (11.5%) from the Center, and 129,476 (46.7%) from the South. In 1954, 105,268 (42%) were from the North and Center, 145,657 (58%) from the South. Cf. SVIMEZ, *Un quarto di secolo delle statistiche Nord-Sud (1951-1976)*, Giuffrè, Milano 1978, pp.124-25.

⁶² While in the first five years of the Fifties returns of immigrants to the regions of the North and Center amounted to 65.2% of the total, from the second half of the decade onward the South gained preeminence, exceeding 60% in the early Seventies. Ibidem, pp. 130-31.

⁶³ Andreina De Clementi, *Il prezzo della ricostruzione. L'emigrazione italiana nel secondo dopoguerra*. Laterza, Bari 2010, p. 4.

⁶⁴ In the last decades of the nineteenth century, minors had been rounded up in the towns of the upper Volturno and the Matese and taken to France to be used for begging, or as *chiens* in the glass factories of the South and the Parisian area. At the beginning of the century, it was mainly emigrants from some Upper Molisan towns who headed for France.

systematically denied,⁶⁵ they stirred up an irrepressible ferment, which drew increasing numbers of people to line up outside local employment offices.

The reality the immigrants were confronted with upon arrival was, of course, very different from the one portrayed by the announcements. At work places, and especially in the mines, there was a very high exposure to work-related diseases, which were only recognized as such in the second half of the Fifties. The workers were lodged in shacks. And then there was the usual xenophobia, compounded with contempt for Italians for the still open wounds inflicted by Fascism and the war.

A significant aspect of emigration towards Europe was that it was, at least officially,⁶⁶ a largely regulated and assisted emigration. It usually occurred in three stages: first, applications were filed through the employment officers of provincial labor offices; the workers were then selected, recruited, and moved to centers established for the purpose; finally, the company that had requested the workers took them in charge. The offices of the Ministry of Labor and Welfare contributed to this procedure by gathering applications and carrying out the selection, while those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs oversaw expatriation and relations with the authorities in the destination countries. Percentages of assisted immigrants in the total of expatriates towards European countries oscillated from 28% in 1946 to 42% in 1949, to drop below 20% in 1953-54 and go up again to about a third in the following years.⁶⁷

European migration flared up significantly in the three years after the war compared to extra-European migration, declined briskly in 1949-1950 due to the strong increase of transoceanic options, accounted for about half of total

⁶⁵ The job advertisement of 1950 of the Belgian Coal Federation, for example, offered: a daily salary between 2,530 and 4,000 lire, depending on qualifications; a daily 48-lira bonus for the first six months; the same benefits as Belgian workers (family allowances, paid leave for family reasons, paid holidays, etc.); 4,200 kg of coal for self-consumption; some domestic railway tickets; the opportunity to lodge at the *cantine* of the mine at controlled prices; some facilitations for family reunions.

⁶⁶ Actually, the percentage of illegal expatriations, although hard to quantify, appears to have been rather high, especially towards France. This way of crossing the border was a means both to dodge the rigidity of controls by medical commissions of the host countries and as a reaction to the slowness of bureaucracy, which often lagged far behind the demands of companies. Pietro Germi's 1950 film *Il cammino della speranza* provides an intense account of this phenomenon. We owe the most in-depth study of illegal emigration to Sandro Rinauro, *Il cammino della speranza. L'emigrazione clandestina degli italiani nel secondo dopoguerra*, Einaudi, Torino 2009.

⁶⁷ Cf. Michele Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento. L'emigrazione italiana in Europa (1945-1967)*, Donzelli, Roma 2008, p. 7.

migration in the following years, and finally gained a clear lead after the labor agreement with Germany.⁶⁸

Unfortunately, the data on emigration broken down by regions of origin do not distinguish between continental and extra-European flows.

In Europe, the first destinations of the Molisans were Belgium and France, as part of a significant flow of migrants headed for these countries, which were seeking workers for raw material production and reconstruction.

During the first postwar decade, under the impulse of the bilateral agreement of 20 June 1946, renewed in the following years, a little more than 190,000 Italian workers left for Belgium, partly compensated by about 56,000 repatriations, with a net negative balance of 140,000 units.⁶⁹ The importance of Belgium in paving the way for Italian emigration to Europe is reflected in the fact that the most intense surge of departures for this country occurred in the three first postwar years, with a relative recovery only in 1951-52. After the tragedy of Marcinelle in August 1956, an irreversible decline began, although even in the immediately preceding years the frequency of mining accidents had already led to the placing of restrictions on immigration.

In the same period, assisted emigration brought about 150,000 Italians to Belgium, 87,000 of whom in the first three years.⁷⁰ Belgium was thus one of the countries where one finds the least divergence between total immigration and assisted immigration.

The jobs offered by the mining companies not only afforded comparative occupational stability, but also wage levels and pension benefits that most southern workers, especially in the countryside, had so far only dreamed of. Benefits included the extension to the new arrivals of the norms applying to local workers, family allowances, paid holidays, coal rations for family consumption, and the availability of accommodation. However, the impact with the local reality, as I said, was very harsh, especially as regards the very rudimentary security measures at the work place, the lack of insurance for occupational diseases, and precarious accommodation.

The tragedy of Marcinelle on 8 August 1956 concluded the first phase of our emigration to Belgium. It was the watershed between an experience closely revolving around work in the mines and the beginning of a path to

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 4. See also U. Ascoli, *Movimenti migratori in Italia*, cit., p. 37 ff. Michele Colucci, Matteo Sanfilippo *L'emigrazione italiana dal dopoguerra al 1959*, in *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo 2007*, Ed. Idos, Roma 2007, p. 95; these two authors insist on the "disorderly pace" and the "interruptions, contradictions and problems of a process that developed in one of the most complex periods of European history."

⁶⁹ Data from MAE, Dgeas, *Problemi del lavoro italiano all'estero. Relazione per il 1966*, quoted in M. Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento*, cit., p. 5.

⁷⁰ ACS, Ministero del Lavoro e della Previdenza Sociale, Dir. gen. collocamento manodopera, Div. IX – OECE, b. 425.

integration within a broader geographical context than that of the first migration to the country, and more complex social dynamics. The fire in the Bois du Cazier mine—which directly involved a Boiano miner⁷¹ put to work without adequate training—killed seven Molisans,⁷² as well as other workers. These victims following in the wake of a long list of immigrants killed in mines, the largest group being that of Monongah (West Virginia) in December 1907.

In 1973, by which time the miners had gone back home, the size of the Molisan community in Belgium was still estimated at about 11,000 units.⁷³ Ten years later, after the employment crisis of the mid Seventies, there were still about 7,000 Molisans.⁷⁴ The same figure is recorded by the AIRE census of 2003, and decreases slightly to 6,626 in that of 2012.⁷⁵

To give an order of magnitude for the ratio between Molisan immigration in Belgium and repatriations, one could cite the example of Roccamandolfi, a town in the Matese area from which about 170 people, including workers and accompanying family members, left for Belgium in the space of about two decades. Of these, about half came back home after they had acquired the right to their pension, while the other half stayed behind, partly because they did not want to leave their family members, who were now Belgian residents and often born there.⁷⁶

The integration of the Molisans in Belgian society was significant both for its speed and for its social irradiation. The most beaten paths were the passage from the mine to the factory—especially in the area of Liège, at least until the 1970s crisis—and small commercial activities. In the space of a generation, Molisans had achieved a considerable integration into the

⁷¹ Antonio Iannetta, who had arrived in Belgium in 1952. Iannetta was working as a cager on the morning of the explosion in the shaft where the fire broke out. After the tragedy, Iannetta migrated to Canada.

⁷² The following Molisans died at Marcinelle: Felice Casciato di San Angelo del Pesco, Francesco Cicoria di San Giuliano di Puglia, Francesco Granata di Ferrazzano, Michele Granata di Ferrazzano, Michele Moliterno di Ferrazzano, Pasquale Nardacchione di San Giuliano del Sannio, Liberato Palmieri di Busso. Cf. Giuseppe Ruffo, *Il tempo della Memoria. Marcinelle 45 anni dopo*, Edizioni Enne, Ferrazzano 2001; N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel mondo, Compari di miniera*, «Nuovo Molise Oggi», 28 January 1999 and 4 February 1999. In his *La catastrofe*, Paolo Di Stefano reconstructs the event combining the quoting of documentary sources with creative writing. *Marcinelle 8 agosto 1956*, Sellerio, 2011. The book opens with an intense testimony by the daughter of a Molisan who died at Bois du Cazier.

⁷³ SVIMEZ, *Un quarto di secolo nelle statistiche Nord-Sud*, cit., p. 133.

⁷⁴ MAE, Dir. gen. emigrazione e affari sociali, *Aspetti e problemi...*, cit., p. 229.

⁷⁵ See, again, note 31.

⁷⁶ Cf. Antonio Pinelli, *Flussi migratori da Roccamandolfi dalla fine del XIX secolo agli anni Settanta del XX secolo*, in Idem (ed.), *L'emigrazione molisana. Il caso di Roccamandolfi*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2004, pp. 21-26; ibidem, N. Lombardi, *Roccamandolfi, una comunità mondiale*, p. 82.

training and professional fabric. The largest groups are those who have lived on in the old *Pays noir*, where an association, the Comitato Molisano Emigrati e Famiglie (COMEF), has formed in the area of Charleroi. At Herstal, near Liège, a fairly large group of immigrants from Castelmauro and neighboring towns have formed another association, which over time has changed its object from mutual assistance to a cultural engagement in the search for immigrant roots. The Bruxelles area, in its turn, has attracted Molisans employed in the bureaucracy and others who have found opportunities for employment in the services or commerce.⁷⁷

In conclusion, the Molisans' working experience in Belgium has been one of the most significant in terms of integration into a host country, and—in the light of the institutional and cultural changes come about since the Rome Treaty—in terms of the “Europeization” of our migrant workers.

France was not an absolute novelty for Molisans looking for employment, as it had already been one of their favorite destinations around 1900, but it was certainly an important opportunity, especially in the takeoff phase of emigration in the second postwar period, or at least for its first ten years. The Transalpine country became a choice destination for southern Italians after the war, both because of the high number of job contracts available in the mining and construction sectors through assisted emigration and because of the practice of illegal immigration, which fueled a flourishing labor black market. The Molisans were not left out of all this.

From 1946 to 1956, migration to France was significant, although it failed to meet the expectations of the French and the thresholds auspicated in the agreements signed by the two governments.⁷⁸ From 1946 to 1949, 145,821 people, comprising workers and accompanying family members, crossed the border. There was a surge in 1956 (87,552), and a further increase in the following year (115,000). In the same period, 146,854 returning immigrants from France were recorded. The net negative balance was of over 300,000 expatriations.⁷⁹

As to assisted emigration, in the first three years after the war it relocated 56,000 Italians, of whom 40,000 just in 1947, the actual year of the resurgence of Italian emigration. A further hike occurred in 1949. The

⁷⁷ To gain an idea of the work and life experiences of Molisans in Belgium, see N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel mondo, Saverio Iacobucci: un Sannita il primo emigrante*, “Nuovo Molise Oggi”, 11 marzo 1999, p. 17; Id., *Herstal, crocevia di solidarietà*, “Nuovo Molise Oggi”, 6 aprile 2000, p. 19; Id., *Federico Lanni, gelataio a Bruxelles*, “Nuovo Molise Oggi”, 27 maggio 1999, p. 19; Id., *Vincenzo Bifulchi, l'europo dal cuore antico*, “Nuovo Molise Oggi”, p. 17.

⁷⁸ On the scarce success of immigration policies in France, programmed by a public agency (ONI) instituted for the purpose, including those regarding Italians, see Federico Romero, *Emigrazione e integrazione europea 1945-1973*, Ed. Lavoro, Roma 1991, p. 36 ff.

⁷⁹ Statistics from MAE, Dgeas, *Problemi del lavoro italiano all'estero. Relazione per il 1966*, citati in M. Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento*, cit., p. 5.

French option continued to function, at less significant rates, through the first half of the 1950s. After a peak of 45,000 legal entries of immigrants from Italy in 1956, it declined considerably in the face of the expansion of migration to Germany and Switzerland. Assisted emigration to France during this period surpassed by over 30,000 units assisted emigration to Belgium,⁸⁰ without taking illegal expatriations into account.⁸¹

We lack reliable data about the emigration of the Molisans towards France. All we have got is some significant clues. Over 420 people moved to France from the town of Agnone—a trailbreaker in transnational mobility—or ca. 60% of the total migrants from the town who departed for European destinations. Over a hundred people from Roccamandolfi, another community with very sensitive migratory antennas, established themselves in the northern mining area of Pas de Calais. In the upper Rhine, also in a mining area, a community of a few hundred people formed. They came from Bonefro, Santa Croce, and other towns of the Fortore. The association AMICI *Bun'frane* sprang up among them, which strove to keep up immigrants' ties with their places of origin.⁸² Further south, in the area of Grenoble, there is some evidence for families from Forlì del Sannio and the Upper Volturno, drawn especially by job opportunities in the construction industry.⁸³ In all of Molise, to give an order of magnitude,

in the mid-1950s 1460 applications for expatriation to France, or 10.6% of the total, were waiting to be examined at the Provincial Labor Office. As to deletions from civil registries in the 1959-64 period, the ones we are concerned with here are over a third of the total. From 1971 to 1983, there were 1779 expatriations to France, or 7.79% of the total.⁸⁴

Although it has not been studied much, Molisan presence in France is significant. At the conclusion of the postwar migratory cycle in 1973, it was

⁸⁰ ACS, Ministero del Lavoro e della Previdenza Sociale, Dir. gen. collocamento manodopera, Div. IX – OECE, b. 425.

⁸¹ On the magnitude of illegal emigration in France, I refer the reader, again, to Sandro Rinauro, *Il cammino della speranza. L'emigrazione clandestina degli italiani nel secondo dopoguerra*, Einaudi, 2009.

⁸² Cf. Michele Colabella, *Bonefro gente foretana*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 1999, pp. 129 ff.

⁸³ See N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel mondo, Mario Massucci: dal tratturo "vers le future"*, "Nuovo Molise Oggi", 25 febbraio 1999, p. 17.

⁸⁴ Cf. N. Lombardi, *Il Molise fuori dal Molise*, cit., p. 632, on statistics drawn, respectively, from Federico Orlando, *Esodo dal Molise*, «Nord e Sud», III, gennaio 1956, 14, p. 98; R. Simoncelli, *Il Molise. Le condizioni geografiche di un'economia regionale*, cit., p. 123; *Dossier Europa Emigrazione*, X, luglio-agosto 1985, 7-8, p. 26.

estimated at just below 9,000 units. Interestingly, it grew even further after the crisis years, bearing witness to a higher flexibility in granting entry compared to other European countries. By the end of the Seventies, the number of Molisans in France approached 10,000. This number remained fairly stable until the mid-Eighties.⁸⁵ In 2003, AIRE data indicate that there were still 4,872 Molisans retaining Italian citizenship in France, confirming that by then integration was well under way. The figure for 2012 does not vary significantly.⁸⁶

In general, it appears that in this period the hub of Molisan migration to France moved much further north than in the early twentieth century, when its main destinations were the Rhone valley and the Parisian area.

Initially, Molisans found employment in the mines, on farms, and in the building sector, and this determined their social situation. In France, as in Belgium, integration and social mobility processes were rather fluid. Already with the transition from the first to the second generation there is an evident progress in schooling, professional quality, and social standing.

Studies of Italian emigration to Europe have often neglected to give emigration to Great Britain a consideration adequate, if not to its magnitude, at least to its peculiar aspects. Italian immigration to that country actually had trouble taking off, mainly due to the protectionist attitude adopted by British unions in the postwar years to protect the local labor force, an attitude which directly influenced the government's immigration policies.⁸⁷ Only towards the middle of the Fifties, a combination of domestic and international factors and the intensification of relations between the future signers of the EC agreements, did significant immigration of Italians into Great Britain begin. Until 1954, somewhat less than 40,000 Italians moved to Britain to work there. Their immigration was discontinuous, with surges and ebbs largely dependent on the conjuncture and occasional decisions by the British Government. In the following decade, more than 86,000 people, twice as many, migrated there. Another aspect to be considered is that, unlike France, Germany and Switzerland, the percentage of returns home was always low, never exceeding 25%. The flow began to ebb in the following years, stabilizing itself at around 40,000 entries a year until about 1975. At the same time, the number of returns home increased markedly,

⁸⁵ These statistics are from the annual reports of the MAE, Direzione per l'emigrazione e gli affari sociali, cited above.

⁸⁶ The sources for the AIRE statistics are cited in note 31.

⁸⁷ On this subject, see the section significantly entitled *La fortezza britannica* in Andreina De Clementi, *Il prezzo della ricostruzione. L'emigrazione italiana nel secondo dopoguerra*, cit., p. 53 ff.

especially in the difficult Seventies.⁸⁸ The most recent AIRE data indicate that 200,000 Italian citizens live in Great Britain, or almost 5% of the Italian community abroad.

Certainly less Molisans emigrated to Britain than to other European countries. However, even though it took more time to build up, the Molisan community that had formed in the United Kingdom by the end of this migratory cycle was no less significant than other from a qualitative standpoint, due to certain peculiar peculiarities of this immigration and the formation of certain cohesive cores.

As early as the early Fifties, some Molisans managed to take advantage of one of the few occasions when the English government granted Italy a request for new labor—at fairly harsh wage and logistic conditions.⁸⁹ The departures were assisted and regulated by bilateral agreements. The main destinations were mines, brick factories, agriculture, and the textile sector. The unprecedented aspect of Molisan emigration to England was that it included single young women. This was a break with the long tradition of women only expatriating when accompanying male family members, or when called over by family members or future husbands. The women went over to Sheffield and Coventry—to the latter town often through the agency of some parish priests of *Snia Viscosa*, controlled by the British Courtaulds.⁹⁰ Another destination of the Molisans was Bedford, where workers converged from Busso and other Molisan towns, especially in the Middle Molise. All were hired by brick companies in the early Fifties.⁹¹ A sizable group of people from the Valle del Volturno established themselves in Scotland. They came especially from Filignano, and specialized in ice-cream making.

All in all, from the early Fifties to the late Seventies Molisans showed a significant propensity to migrate to England. By the early months of 1955, about one thousand applications for migration to the United Kingdom—7% of total applications—had piled up at the Labor Office of Campobasso. In

⁸⁸ Collation of data from several sources: U. Ascoli, *Movimenti emigratori in Italia*, cit., p. 47 ff.; M. Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento*, cit., p. 5; Id. (ed.), *La risorsa emigrazione*, cit., p. 12 and p. 26.

⁸⁹ Cf. M. Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento*, cit., pp. 183-197.

⁹⁰ For information on, and direct testimonies by, women who migrated to Great Britain on their own, cf. Giuliana Bagnoli, *Correnti migratorie di San Biase*, in Giuliana Bagnoli, Michele Tanno, *Di terra in terra. Correnti migratorie di San Biase*, Comune di San Biase, Grafica Isernina, 2011, pp. 189-205. On the shift towards free-lance work, see N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel Mondo*, Nicola Di Silvio, *Le giubbe delle guardie a cavallo*, “Nuovo Molise Oggi”, 23 novembre 2000, p. 21.

⁹¹ Cf. N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel Mondo*, *Sabato Manocchio: nelle periferie dell'emigrazione*, “Nuovo Molise Oggi”, 10 giugno 1999, p. 19; Id., *Molisani nel Mondo*, *I quattro fratelli Valerio, da Ferrazzano a Londra*, “Nuovo Molise Oggi”, giovedì 22 luglio 1999, p. 19.

the 1960-1964 period, there were 719 deregistrations of emigrants to the United Kingdom, a full third of the total of deletions for emigrants to Europe as a whole, and only slightly less than those of emigrants to France,⁹² a clear sign of a trend to taking stable residence among emigrants to Britain. Indeed, in 1973 the consular authorities estimated the Molisan community in the United Kingdom at 11,000 units, which would have made it the second in Europe, right after the one in Switzerland. For a few years, these numbers remained stable.⁹³ The economic crisis of the early seventies also impacted the Molisan community, dividing it between those who held out, intending to establish themselves permanently in the country, and a significant number who were forced to go back home or migrate to other destinations. The ranks of Molisans in the United Kingdom thinned out, as far as one can tell from surveys, which were done following different methods at different times. Between the late Seventies and early Eighties, they were estimated at 6000 units and declining. There was still a core of early immigrants who had weathered the crisis and had not naturalized. The thousand Molisans who migrated to the United Kingdom during the Seventies⁹⁴ were already beginning to take on a different social and cultural physiognomy than in the past.

The AIRE statistics, although not easily comparable with those I have been citing so far, for about ten years now have been showing a rather interesting datum: of the ca. 4,700 registered Molisans, less than half (2,172) were born in Molise.⁹⁵ So this was a community now in its third generation, where integration clearly overweighed ties of origin. This is a result not only of the natural alternation of generations, but also of a social progress of which significant examples exist. For example, the second generation, having had ample access to education, rarely worked in the same jobs as the first. However, examples of economic and social improvement and success can already be found in the first generation. A notable example is that of the brothers Valerio from Ferrazzano, who, after working for some time at London Brick in London, started a company of their own, first in the borough of Islington in London, then in Bedford. For many years, this

⁹² Cf. Ricciarda Simoncelli, *Il Molise. Le condizioni geografiche di un'economia regionale*, cit., p. 123. It is a well-known fact that registry office deletions are usually less than the actual number of emigrants, both because not all bother to set their official record straight, or many do so belatedly.

⁹³ Cf. SVIMEZ, *Un quarto di secolo nelle statistiche Nord-Sud 1951-1976*, cit., p. 133. I dati sono tratti da MAE, *Problemi del lavoro italiano all'estero. Relazione per il 1973*. For 1976, see MAE, *Aspetti e problemi dell'emigrazione italiana all'estero nel 1976*, Roma, n.d., p. 107.

⁹⁴ CSER, *Dossier Europa Emigrazione*, cit., p. 26.

⁹⁵ MAE, Direzione generale per gli italiani all'estero, *La rilevazione degli italiani all'estero al 21 marzo 2003: caratteristiche demografiche*, Rubettino, Cosenza 2005, p. 133.

company accounted for a significant quota of British national food import-export.⁹⁶ Another case is that of the Carnevale brothers from Capracotta, who managed a flourishing dairy production in London, partly drawing on persistent memories of certain production methods and typical products of their area of origin.

6. *The European turning point*

In the history of the international mobility of Molisans, migration to Switzerland and Germany was a turning point, for several reasons: they were essentially new destinations in the region's well-established migratory horizon, except for sporadic cases recorded in the past;⁹⁷ from the mid Fifties to the mid Seventies, these countries drew the largest flows of migrants; these new outlets significantly reduced the traditional transoceanic routes, with the exception of Canada and Australia; the importance of other European countries became inversely proportional terms to that of the new destinations. Apart from recent cases of "new mobility," discussed elsewhere in this issue, this switch to Switzerland and Germany marked the most incisive modernization in the history of Molisan emigration.

The distinctiveness of these migratory experiences compared to earlier ones lies both in the relative nearness of the new destinations and in the rotatory system adopted by local governments in their immigration policies. In other terms, there is an essential ubiquity of the migratory project. Most migrants retained their family ties and interests in their towns of origin, regarding their work permanence abroad, however protracted, as a mere opportunity for training, saving money, and acquiring social security benefits to be enjoyed after their return home. While land had been the principal and most symbolically charged aspiration of Molisan farmers in the Great Migration, for those going over to Switzerland or Germany to work it was a house in town. A renovated or newly built home with all modern comforts, even if lived in only a few weeks a year.⁹⁸ The ubiquitous plans of most emigrants changed over time, both because the new generations wished to

⁹⁶ N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel Mondo, I quattro fratelli Valerio, da Ferrazzano a Londra*, "Nuovo Molise Oggi", 22 luglio 1999, p. 19.

⁹⁷ Under the terms of the 1937 agreement between the Italian government and the government of the Third Reich for the transfer of workers, some Molisans were included in the contingents destined for the industries and agriculture in Germany. Among them was the Isernian Fernando Barbato, who later migrated to Argentina. His story was collected by N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel Mondo, Fernando Barbato. Il pane amaro*, "Nuovo Molise Oggi", 8 luglio 1999, p. 19.

⁹⁸ On the importance of a house in their home town for emigrants to Switzerland and Germany, cf. N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel mondo, Moebel Tamburro*, "Nuovo Molise Oggi", 25 marzo 1999, p. 17.

stay in the towns where their parents had established themselves, and as a result of a shift of perspective born of long-lasting comparisons of the reality the migrants had left (and planned to possibly go back to) and the one where they had arrived and where they were currently living. Above all,

children are the essential factor in the changing of our emigrants' life plans. Many of them have returned or will return, but every day the number grows of those who have decided to stay or put off the difficult decision. In the meantime, the renovated house remains there, in town, as the symbol of an unresolved decision.⁹⁹

Actually, Switzerland had already been the destination of choice for a large number of Italian migrants in the early postwar years. All of 256,161 Italians had crossed the Swiss border between 1946 and 1948, following the well-established practice of going abroad to look for work and freedom in difficult moments for our country. Between 1946 and 1957, this figures swelled to 780,920, the highest flow into a single European country ever recorded. These expatriations were compensated, however, by an equally significant number of returns home, 588,639,¹⁰⁰ largely due to the efforts of the Helvetic authorities to prevent immigrants from taking permanent residence in the country.¹⁰¹ Southerners, instead, and Molisans among them, only "discovered" Switzerland from the mid-Fifties onward. When this interest first arose, there were already 160,000 Italians in Switzerland, only a fifth of whom were Southerners. The number of Italians rose to 570,000 in the mid Seventies and declined to 320,000 by the end of the century, both

⁹⁹ Id., *Molisani nel mondo, Tra i molisani di Zurigo*, "Nuovo Molise Oggi", 5 novembre 1998, p. 17.

¹⁰⁰ Both the outgoing and incoming statistics are from MAE, Dges, *Problemi del lavoro italiano all'estero. Relazione per il 1966*, cit., p. 5.

¹⁰¹ As is well known, ever since the Seventies entry and permanence in Switzerland has been regulated by a seasonal permit system whereby work contracts expire every year after nine months, workers are forbidden from changing job or canton, and their families are not allowed to join them. Only after five years can workers obtain an annual permit, subject to renewal on expiration, granting them freedom of movement within the Confederation and allowing them to be joined by their families. To start a free-lance activity, recognition of resident status is required. In spite of all this, the anti-immigration movement is still rampant, partly due to the high percentage of foreigners on the national soil. The movement tried, unsuccessfully, with four successive referendums to bar entry into the country and expel part of the immigrants. This climate endured until the 1980s, when the consequences of the economic crisis were overcome, especially its effect on employment, and factors such as the commitment of networks of democratic associations and a better integration of the first wave of immigrants of Mediterranean origin toned down hostility towards foreigners. For several years now, Italian first immigration into the lower echelons of society has been replaced with immigration from Slavic countries. Helvetic political leaders, not wishing to stray too far from the European hospitality model, have been generally adopted a more elastic naturalization policy.

due to another economic crisis and because many had returned home. By this time, however, more than two thirds were Southerners.¹⁰²

Like other Italian immigrants, Molisans found employment in the construction industry, on farms, and in the more advanced industrial sectors. They concentrated especially in the Zurich area and, to a lesser degree, in that of Basel, but there were also quite a few in the areas of Geneva, San Gallo and Locarno.

As to the Molisan component, in 1973 there were about 11,000 in Switzerland, the highest number ever reached in the short history of Molisan migration to the country. In the following years, occupational problems made themselves felt, and their numbers soon dwindled to about 8000.¹⁰³ This figure tends to remain stable over time, as there was scarce inclination to naturalization, partly because of the strictness of local legislation in this regard. This is confirmed by AIRE statistics, which in 2003 record 7,975 Molisans with Italian citizenship, and 7,890 in 2012, or 10% of Molisans registered with AIRE worldwide.¹⁰⁴

These statistics reflect a deep-rooted and long-lasting settling in of the earlier generations and especially of the newer ones, which, although straightjacketed by the country's rigid education system, over time managed to successfully integrate within the social fabric of the country. The most evident signs of this integration are the slow rise of a middle class, some successful entrepreneurial experiences, and some cases of civil and political career, like that of Franco Narducci, an Italian union man and Italian member of the European parliament.

The immigrants kept up their relations with their areas of origin through regular returns home and the fluidity of contacts, as well as the activities of certain town associations and a regional one—the Associazione Regionale Emigrati Molisani (AREM)—founded in 1977, which incidentally has taken a leading role in the European Federation of Molisan Associations, having become the main interlocutor of the Molise regional government in Europe.

With the labor agreement of 1955 between the Italian and German governments, and the signing of the Rome Treaty in 1957, Italian emigration in Europe developed along different lines than in the previous decade and took paths it had rarely trod up to then. An intense flow to and from Germany began, which, along with the Swiss route, now accounted for most of the mobility of Italians in Europe, and even contributed to depleting

¹⁰² Cf. Giovanna Meyer Sabino, *In Svizzera*, in P. Bevilacqua, A. De Clementi, E. Franzina, *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana. Arrivi*, cit., pp. 147-155.

¹⁰³ Ministero Affari Esteri, Direzione generale emigrazione e affari sociali, *Aspetti e problemi dell'emigrazione italiana all'estero*, cit., per gli anni considerati.

¹⁰⁴ MAE, *La rilevazione degli italiani all'estero...*, cit., p. 155 e Fondazione Migrantes, *Rapporto italiani nel mondo 2012*, cit., p. 490.

transoceanic migration. There were also some equally important qualitative changes.

As early as the last years of the Fifties, departures towards Germany, which had previously numbered in the hundreds, began to take off, involving all of 50,000 workers, more than twice as many as those recorded in the whole decade before the signing of the agreement.¹⁰⁵ Migrations to Germany peaked to over 100,000 in 1960 and remained high until the early Seventies, only behind Switzerland worldwide. From 1960 to 1970, there were 846,112 expatriations, a significant figure, although compensated by an equally significant number of returns home (610,036), which still yields a negative balance of 236,116 migrants.¹⁰⁶

Departures, except for slumps in the 1967, 1973-74 and 1980 crises, remained constant. By the end of the century, the statistics record a truly extraordinary number of arrivals, just short of 4 million, versus 3.5 million departures.¹⁰⁷ With its 639,283 residents registered with the AIRE, Germany is thus the country that has the second largest Italian community in the world, coming up close behind Argentina.

There were qualitative changes that contributed to marking the transition to a different type of migration after the mid Fifties. Emigration to Germany displayed the newer features of Italian mobility within the European milieu, namely, the importance of the rotatory system, a consequent very high mobility and flexibility, and a quick move away from the assisted hiring system. In the German Federal Republic,

workers recruited abroad were intended as a conjunctural and transitory contribution to growth. They were hired with temporary contracts, at the end of which they would return to their countries of origin, to be replaced, if necessary, by other immigrants, in a constant turnover of entries and exits that was meant to prevent the stabilization of large permanent communities of foreigners.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Fonti varie: M. Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento*, cit., p. 5; F. Romero, *Emigrazione e integrazione europea*, cit., p. 162; U. Ascoli, *Movimenti migratori in Italia*, cit., p. 47 and p. 53.

¹⁰⁶ Ministero Affari Esteri, Direzione generale emigrazione e affari sociali, *Problemi del lavoro italiano all'estero: relazione per il 1973*, Roma 1974, citato in Michele Colucci (ed.), *La risorsa emigrazione. Gli italiani all'estero tra percorsi sociali e flussi economici, 1945-2012*, «Osservatorio di politica internazionale. Approfondimenti», 2012, 60, p. 12.

¹⁰⁷ Statistics from Sonja Haug, *Bleiben oder Zuruckkerhen? Zur Messung, Erklarung und Prognose der Ruckkehr von Immigranten in Deutschland*, *Zeitschrift für Bevölkerungswissenschaft*. 2. 2001, p. 236, cited by Enrico Pugliese, *In Germania*, in P. Bevilacqua, E. Franzina, A. De Clementi (ed.), *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana. Arrivi*, cit., p. 124.

¹⁰⁸ F. Romero, *Emigrazione e integrazione europea 1945-1973*, cit., p. 212.

Undoubtedly, these differences developed within the framework of the new community legislation, which, although gradually—in three-year laps, in 1962, 1965, and 1968—liberalized circulation among member countries. This is the most evident difference with emigration to Switzerland, where temporariness is a constitutive element of the immigration and residence permit. However, we should not underestimate the influence of other factors, such as the large numbers of Italians in sectors where work is by nature seasonal, like the construction industry, and the possible alternative, after a short permanence abroad, of a move to the northern regions of Italy, where the industry offered quite a few employment opportunities. The homeward drive was partly determined by the process whereby, during the Sixties, Italian workers were replaced by non-EC ones. The latter's wages and social security benefits were less monitored than those of workers from EC countries, and these workers were less likely to move on to other jobs because they could not circulate as freely as EC workers.

Then there were aspects of a cultural nature, relating both to the migratory project of each worker and family and the social environment where they had had their migratory experience. In most cases, at least initially, a work period in Germany was seen as an opportunity for saving that was limited in time and sometimes, paradoxically, as an opportunity to accumulate enough money to avoid a long permanence abroad.¹⁰⁹ In the South, this kind of resolve was to prove ephemeral, as neither the savings nor the (scarce) professional skills acquired turned out to be sufficient to start solid business activities at home, especially in underdeveloped areas.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, at the end of the Sixties some critical movements sprang up, protesting both against the backwardness of southern society and against the exploitation of southern workers migrating to northern Italy and Europe. Thus, in the common perception emigration began to lose its appeal as an opportunity for social promotion.

In the following decade—the Seventies—this change of perspective became complete, partly due to the concomitance of several different factors. Germany was one of the hotbeds of this evolution. As the Italian production system modernized and became integrated into the European one, the fact that there were areas in Italy where migration was still the main way to cope with unemployment and underemployment came to be seen as a jarring contradiction. Furthermore, Italy—which at the beginning of the decade had

¹⁰⁹ Wages in Italy are between 35% and 50% lower than in the principal European countries.

¹¹⁰ On the experiences of some returning immigrants in Molise, cf. Renato Cavallaro, *Fenomeni di emigrazione di ritorno a Mirabello Sannitico*, «Proposte Molisane», 1973, 3, pp. 99-103; Antonio Mucciaccio, *L'emigrazione in un paese del Sud*, Carabba, Lanciano 2009, p. 81 ff.

explicitly denounced the practice of its European partners that were more receptive of immigrants to largely rely on non-EC workers, on the one hand, and the scarce efficacy of community work policies, on the other—was soon forced to acknowledge that national governments did not intend to give up their prerogatives regarding immigration, and that, especially in this sector, a supernational vision still essentially remained a utopia. As things stood, at the beginning of the decade Italians accounted for a mere 17% of mobile labor within the EC, and a few years earlier for no more than 21% of those entering the great German market.

The situation became dramatic with the economic recession of the first half of the Seventies, which induced the German government to impose a general stop to entries into the country. The drive to leave the country during employment crises and the readiness of many, if not all, to return when the situation improved contributed to accentuate the character of strong temporariness of Italian presence in Germany. In Germany at first, but later in all of Europe, Italian emigration had become atomized and lost its character as an organized flow. This allowed Italian workers, through kinship relations and direct searches, to move from more marginal occupations to jobs in factories and the services, although hampered by persistent training and specialization deficits.

In the transition from industrial to service-based society, Italians increasingly distance themselves from the traditional image of the employed worker. [...] Starting an independent activity offers a prospect of economic independence, so that many Italians have turned from employees into employers. Today the neologism *Gastarbeiter* has disappeared from everyday language.¹¹¹

The atomization of Italian presence in Germany, however, did not hinder an increasing trend to stabilization. Indeed, “of the over 600,000 Italians in the country, 166,000 have lived in Germany for over 30 years, and 87,000 for between 15 and 30 years.”¹¹² Furthermore, mixed marriages were very frequent: “About a third of Italian men living in Germany is married with a German woman. The children of these binational marriages are German.”¹¹³ Among the male offspring of mixed marriages, three quarters have German partners, among females, over half. This gradual stabilization, however, has

¹¹¹ Maximiliane Rieder, *Migrazione ed economia. L'immigrazione italiana verso la Germania occidentale dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*, «Studi Emigrazione», 2004, 155, pp. 633-654.

¹¹² Edith Pichler, *La comunità italiana in Germania*, «Rivista delle politiche sociali», 2004, 3. This quote of Rieder and the previous one are from Enrico Pugliese, *L'emigrazione italiana in Germania: Mercato del lavoro e politiche migratorie*, in F. Carchedi, E. Pugliese (ed.), *Andare, restare, tornare*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2006, p. 39.

¹¹³ Sonja Haug, *Storia d'immigrazione e tendenze all'integrazione di emigrati italiani in Germania*, in F. Carchedi, E. Pugliese (ed.), *Andare, restare, tornare*, cit., p. 51.

been slow in turning into naturalization. Since 2000, in spite of the reform of norms on citizenship and immigration, a mere 12,000 Italians have sought full integration.¹¹⁴ The decision to stay, especially for the older generations, was determined by a wish to keep the family together, but also by criticism of their country of origin, especially as regards the lack of efficiency of its social and health services compared to those of Germany. Finally, the trend to stabilization raised a complex ethnic identity question in the country of residence, in spite of the lack of forms of aggregation at the national or local level.¹¹⁵

The atomization that characterizes Italian immigration to Germany as a whole has also been a feature of Molisan migration to that country. This actually worked both ways: there was hardly a town in Molise that someone did not leave from to look for a job in Germany, for more or less prolonged periods, sometimes broken off to migrate across the ocean or make a permanent move to northern Italy. In Germany, Molisans spread out over the whole large territory of the country, choosing their destinations on the basis of work opportunities or on the advice of acquaintances. Only rarely did they concentrate in significant numbers in any specific town or area, with some exceptions, such as Baden Wuttemberg.¹¹⁶

From the late Fifties onward, Germany, along with Switzerland, was the most flexible solution for Molisans as well as other Italians, the one that was most adaptable to a variety of income and work situations, such as long-lasting unemployment or widespread underemployment, or the wish to accumulate resources to be reinvested in small farming businesses or workshops. At the same time, precisely due to this flexibility, migration to Germany ebbed and flowed depending on conjuncture, with impacts at the European scale and beyond. For example, when in the second half of the Sixties the German economy went through a difficult phase, with repercussions on employment, Molisans intensified emigration to Canada, which by then had become their main transoceanic pole of attraction. When in the early Seventies the European and worldwide recession began, the

¹¹⁴ Edith Pichler, *Europa: da stranieri a cittadini*, in Marcella Marcelli (ed.), *Una grande Italia oltre l'Italia. L'emigrazione nella storia unitaria*, Forum Centro Studi Pd, Roma 2012, p. 140.

¹¹⁵ Roberto Sala, *Immigrati nella Germania federale e appartenenza nazionale all'Italia*, «Studi Emigrazione», 2005, 160, pp. 951-965.

¹¹⁶ Notably, there is a large community of Guglionesi at Markgroeningen, in the Stuttgart area, and groups from Montenero di Bisaccia at Asperg, and from Montecilfone, Castelmauro, Acquaviva Collecroci and Portocannone at Ditzingen: cf. N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel mondo*, Giancarlo Cingolani: *gli emigrati invisibili*, "Nuovo Molise Oggi", 6 luglio 2000, p. 19.

domestic migratory trend of Molise, which was usually low, as Molisans preferred expatriation, suddenly went up.¹¹⁷

The rotational character of Molisan migration to Germany does not allow accurate quantitative assessment. The number of Molisans who moved to Germany from the signing of the labor agreement of 1955 to the end of the 1960s can be estimated, with a reasonable degree of approximation, at over 10,000. In 1973, when this first migratory cycle was interrupted by the negative conjuncture, the Molisan community in Germany was estimated at 10,535, so was roughly as large as those in Switzerland and Great Britain.¹¹⁸ Considering that stays were short and the turnover accordingly high, the number of Molisans who had worked in the Federal Republic must have been significantly higher. The crisis, however, took a heavy toll on Molisan occupation on German soil. Insofar as we can trust the data collected by consulate terminals, in 1976 the regional community declined to about 8,000. The reliability of these data, however, is undermined by their being lumped together with those for Abruzzo, which seem to be overestimated.¹¹⁹ Indeed, three years later their number goes back up to about 15,000,¹²⁰ and remains essentially stable until the early Eighties, when it is estimated at 12,271.¹²¹

Since consulates meet immigrants' constant demand for services, their statistics are more reliable than the registry of the AIRE (Anagrafe degli Italiani Residenti all'Estero, the registry of Italians residing abroad), whose main purpose is to provide lists of voters in view of the introduction of the vote for residents abroad, and which hence is not regularly updated nor directly comparable with other statistics. According to this source, Molisans residing in Germany who retained their Italian citizenship were 9,207 in 2003 and were down to 8,000 in 2012,¹²² after AIRE registries were cleaned up through cross-checks with Italian town population registries.¹²³ In substance, Molisans were scarcely inclined to regularize their administrative situation when they moved elsewhere, as residence deregistrations bear out. The

¹¹⁷ ISTAT, *Rilevazione del movimento e calcolo della popolazione residente*, Serie storiche, Tavola 2.12, *Tasso migratorio interno per regione e ripartizione geografica. Anni 1952-2005*, www.istat.it.

¹¹⁸ SVIMEZ, *Un quarto di secolo nelle statistiche Nord-Sud 1951-1976*, cit., p. 133. I dati sono tratti da MAE, *Problemi del lavoro italiano all'estero. Relazione per il 1973*.

¹¹⁹ MAE, *Aspetti e problemi dell'emigrazione italiana all'estero nel 1976*, Roma, n.d., p. 107.

¹²⁰ MAE, *Aspetti e problemi dell'emigrazione italiana all'estero nel 1979*, cit., p. 146.

¹²¹ MAE, *Aspetti e problemi dell'emigrazione italiana all'estero nel 1984*, cit., p. 230.

¹²² MAE, Direzione generale per gli italiani all'estero, *La rilevazione degli italiani all'estero al 21 marzo 2003: caratteristiche demografiche*, cit., p. 155. Gianmario Maffioletti and Alberto Colaiacomo, *Gli italiani nel mondo. Dinamiche migratorie e composizione delle collettività*, «Studi Emigrazione», 2004, 153, p. 180) report that 6,623 Molisans residing in Germany are registered with the AIRE.

¹²³ Fondazione Migrantes, *Rapporto Italiani nel mondo 2012*, cit., p. 490.

temporariness of their stays in Germany often did not leave them enough time to make their immigrant status official. Their interest in that job market, however, did not die out, on the contrary, it tended to stabilize, although at lower levels.

Interestingly, however, of the over 9,000 Molisans registered with the AIRE in 2003, only 4,679,¹²⁴ just slightly more than half, were actually born in Molise. However approximate these figures may be, they seem to show a trend to the stabilization of families, in which second generations born abroad appear to be increasingly prominent.

Initially, Molisans mainly found subordinate jobs in the construction, mechanical and chemical industry. Actually there was a broad range of opportunities for them, depending on their contacts and information, and on what they could find out on their own. Molisan immigrants were disseminated all over the German territory, although with some concentrations in the areas of Munich, Stuttgart and Cologne. In the process of their integration within German society, the Molisans were confronted with the same contradictions that other Italian immigrants had to face. A union leader of Molisan origin describes the situation in these terms:

On the one hand, there is a social improvement. Workers are now stabilized and no longer feel the sting of need or of having to rely on welfare, or at a certain point in their journey they leave their job as employees and start an activity of their own.

On the other hand, one is concerned to observe that strong social exclusion still endures, and a consequent fallback into zones of indistinct marginality, where it is hard to regain active access to one's rights.¹²⁵

In an environment such as this, the drive to aggregation and the trend to associate are weak. Kinship and town networks retain a certain solidity, even among second generations, but meeting occasions have a recreational, post-work character, and are usually confined to weekends. Germany thus lacks official associations of Molisan immigrants as are found overseas, as well as, to a lesser degree, in some other European countries. The focus of these associations, at any rate, is becoming increasingly cultural, with an emphasis on local and regional origins.

7. Molisans around the world

¹²⁴ MAE, Direzione generale per gli italiani all'estero, *La rilevazione degli italiani all'estero...*, cit., p. 133.

¹²⁵ N. Lombardi, *Molisani nel mondo, Giovanni Pollice, da Capracotta alla Germania*, "Nuovo Molise Oggi", 14 gennaio 1999, p. 17.

The second major migratory wave of Molisans, as I said, broke on the economic crisis caused by the oil shock. After over a quarter of a century of uninterrupted expatriation, the region's negative migratory balance, which in percentage terms had been one of the highest in Italy, became negative, albeit only slightly. The same period witnessed a social modernization of the region, which gave the impression that its century-long migratory history was finally coming to a close and new prospects for a more balanced use of resources, especially human ones, were opening up. This was actually an attempt at self-legitimization by the ruling class and an act of political and cultural myopia, which were already exposed in the following decade, when the region's development was undermined by the cutting of the exceptional financial resources that had fueled this great illusion.

With the granting of regional autonomy and the constitution of the province of Isernia, and, above all, when in about a decade the regional government became fully operational, institutional dynamics prevailed over the social ones that had characterized the previous two decades. With the delegating of the State's function to the new institutions, the regional governments also took over jurisdiction on emigration. This was a rather paradoxical and not always perceivable transition for most Molisan emigrants, who, at the time of their departure, only identified with their native towns in the province of Campobasso. If they felt any regional allegiance, it was to Abruzzo, within which the single Molisan province of Campobasso had belonged at the time of their migration.

When this new phase began, the local institutions of Molise found themselves confronted with a rather complex web of Molisan communities. These had mostly formed as the results of long sedimentation, but the arrival of new immigrants in significant numbers had revitalized them and changed their social character and cultural orientations. According to the estimate of diplomatic and consular authorities, in 1973—that is, on the eve of the world crisis—Molisans abroad numbered more than 105,000, of whom slightly less than half (53,332 = 49.5%) were in Europe, the rest in America (43,654 = 41.2%) and Australia (9,100 = 8.6%). We should allow, however, for the absence of statistics for the United States and Venezuela.

More in detail, in Europe Molisans were mainly concentrated in Switzerland, Germany, Great Britain and Belgium, with between 10,000 and 11,000 in each, and France, with an estimated 8,750 individuals. In North America, 21,000 were reported in Canada, a little more than in Argentina, which gathered the great majority of Molisans in South America. As a curiosity, 635 Molisans went to Africa to look for work, a third of whom to South Africa, and slightly less than a hundred to Asia.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Elaborazioni da SVIMEZ, *Un quarto di secolo nelle statistiche Nord-Sud. 1951-1956*, cit., p. 133.

These statistics only give us an order of magnitude, and not just because they are approximate. Actually, Molisan presence in historical migratory destinations is much higher, especially in the United States and Argentina itself. Integration processes have buried the traces of the people and families who headed to those countries from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, and in the present state of our knowledge nothing can be said of generational multiplication or the extent of naturalization in each individual reality. Many Molisans who left during the second postwar period became citizens of the host country, especially in North America and Australia, but also in Argentina and Brazil. This entailed the automatic loss of Italian citizenship, and hence the ceasing of habitual contact with the local Italian consulate.

Furthermore, there is an essential methodological consideration that should inform any approach to a phenomenon that is as dispersed geographically as it is variegated in historical terms. We can speak of a Molisan presence in the world only in abstract and approximate quantitative terms. In a qualitative perspective, which has now become indispensable, each situation needs to be analyzed on its own terms and against the backdrop of the peculiarity of its environmental context. We should take into consideration economic processes, the character of the social evolution that has actually taken place, the specific immigration policies of local governments, the cultural changes the emigrants went through, especially after the first generation, and the still surviving networks of relations.

8. *Associations*

For about a century, one of the main factors in the cohesiveness and conservation of the identity of our communities who moved to foreign countries, mainly through family and town chain migrations, have been immigrants' associations. These started out as mutual assistance organizations, to subsequently evolve into recreational and cultural associations.¹²⁷ In spite of some erosion with the passing of generations, and the growing integration of migrants into the host societies, these associations still retain considerable importance for the development of relations with the immigrants' place of origin. Their changes reflect the evolution Molisan immigrants went through in the places where they constructed their work and life experiences. In the first years after their arrival they kept a low profile, devoting themselves almost exclusively to the task of looking for a

¹²⁷ For a historical overview of mutual assistance societies in Molise and abroad, see Edilio Petrocelli, *I luoghi e i valori universali delle Società operaie molisane*, Volturria ed., Isernia 2012; for a current overview of the situation of Molisan associations, see the regional register of Molisan associations and federations abroad in the appendix to the present article.

satisfactory job, to logistics, to making sense of their new social contexts, and to acquiring the essential linguistic knowledge, raising a family, and sending their children to school. Their relations with their relatives and fellow townspeople, although frequent, remained limited to the Sunday dinner rite, the conservation of social and gastronomical customs on major year festivals, the perpetuation of traditional religious practice, and occasional meetings at births, weddings, and deaths.

After the ten years or so needed to organize their new lives on foreign soil, confronted with the delicate identity issues that are usually involved in processes of integration into foreign societies, the relations between fellow townspeople became more assiduous and systematic. In many cases, they even became institutionalized through the formation of associations, named either after the town of origin or its patron saint. In the anthropological context of the peasant milieus most Molisan immigrants came from, religion played a significant role in the restating of community ties and the search for protection against the unknowns of a social journey to somewhat indistinct destinations or, in any case, such as to generate uncertainty and anxiety. Significantly, the main pursuit of these associations was to celebrate the festival of their town saint and collecting funds to be sent back home for the same purpose, in exchange for public acknowledgement of this contribution, almost as if to signify a bond that had never been broken. In this case, too, however, the peculiar chemistries of different adaptations to local realities placed their stamp on the approaches and, above all, the character of these associations. While the traditional approach I have just described is more to the fore in Latin America, in other more socially advanced contexts inspired by multicultural orientations, such as Canada and Australia, such associations tend to be more “lay” in character.

At any rate, from the mid Seventies onward, the attaining of a higher standard of living and the overcoming of the more traumatic aspects of being torn away from one’s home town and loved ones, favored by higher ease of communication and more frequent trips home, albeit only for temporary stays, encouraged a shift of immigrants’ associations to cultural and recreational pursuits. However, in the last decades of the last century these associations’ enduring traditional *paesano* orientation held less and less appeal for the new generations, who were exposed to very different stimuli and languages. Among younger people, the preservation of traditional behavior codes was seen rather as an impediment to full modernization and something that would separate them from contemporary reality.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ As reflected in narrative works by some authors of Molisan origin who doubled back on their own social and cultural itineraries and on those of their families. See especially Nino Ricci, *Vite dei santi*, Fazi, Roma 2000; Antonio D’Alfonso, *La passione di Fabrizio*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2000; Mary Melfi, *Riti d’infertilità*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia e, soprattutto,

The regional government of Molise's new involvement in the field of emigration and the proposals it has put forward and adopted have opened the gates for a less local perception of migrants' reality of origin and an unprecedented, region-wide cultural perspective for Molisans abroad, which for some decades has been going hand in hand with the local perspective. The regional government's involvement offers this galaxy of immigrants' associations a new operative connection—albeit one that has not always been constant in time or trustworthy in honoring its engagements—and support, financial as well as otherwise. Furthermore, from the early Eighties onward, the regional government have provided the impulse for the first attempts to federate the galaxy of associations by country or large regions. This led to the establishment of the Federazione delle Associazioni Molisane del Québec (FAMQ, initially including 41 associations), the Federazione delle Associazioni Molisane Canadesi dell'Ontario (FAMCO, 14 associations), the Associazione Culturale Italiani del Molise nel Brasile, national in character, based in Sao Paulo, the Federazione Europea delle Associazioni Molisane (FEAM, 7 associations), the Unione Regionale delle Associazioni Molisane di Argentina (URAMA, 16 associations), and the Federazione delle Associazioni Civili Abruzzesi e Molisane del Venezuela (3 associations). Others eventually sprang up, sometimes as a result of competition between representatives of associations, namely, the Federazione Canadese delle Associazioni Molisane in Ontario (with a reported 29 associations) and the Federazione Unione dei Molisani in Argentina (FEUMA, 5 associations). The last few years have seen the constitution of the Federazione delle Associazioni Molisane d'Australia (7 associations in the areas of Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Sidney, and in Tasmania).

While federations allow more stable relations with Molisan institutions and make it easier to set up projects, they also limit the autonomy and vitality of associations, which are the true connection hub with immigrants and attractors for new members. Aside from these issues regarding organizational models, the trend is for the Molisan associative network, like those of other regions engaged on the same turf, to unravel and shrink with the fading away of the first generations, who were the most committed and ready to volunteer to organize recreational activities. We are thus witnessing a gradual shrinking of the numbers of actually active associations, which just twenty years ago numbered about 150.¹²⁹ As I will be arguing, this

Ritorno in Italia, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2012; Carole Fioramore David, *Impala*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2003; Marco Micone, *Il fico magico*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2005.

¹²⁹ The associations that are officially registered—through a complicated bureaucratic procedure—in the Regional Registry are just over 50, but there are dozens of unregistered associations that are still capable of expressing a positive dynamism, especially in Canada,

regressive phase puts on the table the problem of redefining relations with original Molisans, especially those of the new generations.

9. Laws and regional conferences

When the Region gained jurisdiction in matters related to emigration, it began to develop a system of norms and rules in this domain. This system has gone through several stages over a period of more than thirty years.

The first Act came into force at the end of the first legislation, under the pressure, even polemical at times, of some European immigrant associations. Its formulation reflected the cultural horizon of the time, which regarded emigration simply as a depopulation factor and a social and family trauma. The Act's political inspiration was handout-oriented. Its intent was to help emigrants to return, especially European ones, who during those years of economic crisis had been losing their jobs. At any rate, this period saw the institution of a Regional Consultancy on Emigration, whose task was to study the phenomenon and advise legislators, and a Regional Fund to finance actions in this domain. To favor reintegration into regional society, immigrants were given priority in the application of existing laws.¹³⁰ A few years later, this first Act gave way to a new one, which, however, merely extended membership of the Consultancy to representatives of associations and inevitably introduced an attendance fee. The new Act also confirmed that the Fund was to be managed by the regional councilor for immigration. The regional council as a whole was only involved insofar as it was brought up to date in the relevant council committee, and contributed 25% of the Fund in the form of a quota for reinsertion in productive life and for home building.¹³¹

Twelve years went by before this essentially handout-oriented approach was significantly modified in the light of new cultural orientations on the theme of migration, and of the intensifications of relations with Molisan communities abroad, now overseas as well as in Europe. Thus, the new act of 1989¹³² was clearly influenced by the contacts established in the course of

Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Switzerland, Belgium and Australia. For some years now there has also been a trend to forming associations among Molisans who left their regions to move to other locations in Italy, such as Rome, Friuli, Lombardy, Veneto and Piemonte. Their names and locations are listed in the appendix to the present essay.

¹³⁰ Regional Act 17 March 1975, n. 25, *Istituzione della Consulta e del Fondo regionale dell'emigrazione*, Bollettino ufficiale della Regione Molise n. 12 del 22/03/75.

¹³¹ L. R. 12 aprile 1977, n. 10, *Disciplina degli interventi regionali per l'emigrazione*, Bollettino ufficiale della Regione Molise n. 7 del 16/04/77.

¹³² L. R. 25 agosto 1989, n. 12, *Interventi della Regione per l'emigrazione*, Bollettino ufficiale della Regione Molise n. 16 del 01/09/89.

the 1980s with the main associations of Molisans abroad, as well as the by now firm realization that emigration is not a state of need, but an irreversible experience of integration into new social and cultural realities, with all the attendant identity-related implications. For the first time, this act combined support and reintegration action with the possibility of “social and cultural initiatives and activities aimed at conserving and reinforcing the value of the identity of their land of origin among Molisan communities abroad” in the context of “effective action to preserve regional traditions as well as the cultural and affectionate ties that bind Molisans residing abroad to their land of origin.” Thus, the beneficiaries of the actions provided for by the act were now characterized as citizens “of Molisan *origin*.”

A second significant point was that of the management system. Three-year programming was introduced, along with an annual plan, including funding, produced in collaboration with the Consultancy. Both were made subject to approval by the Regional Council, thus increasing the involvement of political subjects. The space for federations and associations—which were also subsidized—within the Consultancy was more than doubled. The functions of the Consultancy were more accurately defined, although this organism was still limited to a merely advisory capacity. Returning emigrants were still granted priority access to subsidies to start productive activities, to which the regional government added a contribution to finance interests on mortgages raised to build homes. This contribution was explicitly linked with actions for professional qualification and requalification. Subsidies for returning immigrants and their families were fully devolved to town administrations, on the basis on the national legislation on devolution. Town administrations, however, needed to wait for the transfer of funds from the Region. The Act includes a commendable passage on visits and exchanges, especially for young people. It also establishes that regional conferences on emigration should be held every three years.

This is certainly a more modern and complex system. To work, however, it requires two essential conditions. a keen political capacity to promote synergies between public structures, starting from the Region’s council offices, and high efficiency of the administrative machine. It is thus hardly surprising that the laudable intents of this Act, the most consistent the Molise regional government ever issued on the theme of emigration, were soon thwarted by the slowness and delays of the administration, the rigid separation between councilor offices, the frequent passing from hand to hand of political responsibilities, and the compromises and delays of councilors. This caused significant disconcertment among the representatives of emigrants’ associations, who were often citizens of other countries where

relations with the public administration and institutions were completely different.

Thus, the subsequent act¹³³ strove to simplify and, in some regards, take a step back with respect to the previous one. The management system was placed increasingly under the control of the councilors. Now the Regional Council's role was limited to approving vague and generic guidelines for the Triennial Plan, while the council was essentially given a free rein. For reasons of urgency, the council now was even authorized to take decisions outside of the provisions of the plans, having "heard" the relevant council committee. The Consultancy no longer gave formal advice, but was itself "heard" by the council before the adopting of measures, which in any case remained an exclusive prerogative of the executive branch. Furthermore, the space for representatives of associations in the Consultancy was restricted. Their formal legitimation was made subject to their inscription in the regional register of associations and federations.

There was a further change of cultural climate at the turn of the new century, when the Foreign Affairs electoral district was constitutionalized and representatives of citizens abroad made their entry into Parliament. This and a new emphasis on the role communities of origin might play in the internationalization of the national economy induced legislators to revise the inadequate existing law, an expression of another politics and another culture. The new Act issued by the regional government,¹³⁴ however, followed rather contradictory guidelines. On the one hand, a certain phraseology and mentions of "Molisans in the world" strove to express the new line of "emigration as a resource," which by then had become a politico-cultural totem that few dared not to bow to. On the other, policy actions remained firmly in the hands of the councilor and the council. The regional council remained confined to an essentially choreographic role, and the Consultancy to an essentially corporative one, although its name was changed to the more important one of "Consiglio dei molisani nel mondo," council of Molisans in the world. Support to returning immigrants now took a back seat to the preservation of regional identity among emigrant communities abroad and the intent to enter into "economic relations" with them. There is no questioning the validity of the intent of using the widespread Molisan diaspora as a lever for the promotion of a small and marginal region in the global context, as long as the sectorial and corporative barriers that have so far characterized the emigration policies of Molisan institutions are removed, and these policies become the core of an inter-

¹³³ L. R. 24 marzo 1993, *Modifiche alla legge regionale 25 agosto 1989, n. 12 recante «Interventi della Regione per l'emigrazione»*, Bollettino ufficiale della Regione Molise n. 8 del 01/04/1993.

¹³⁴ L. R. 2 ottobre 2006, n. 31, *Interventi della Regione a favore dei "Molisani nel mondo"*, Bollettino ufficiale della Regione Molise n. 28 del 05/10/2006.

sectorial internationalization program. Instead, the programmatic challenge immediately fell back into line. The legislators limited themselves to outlining a triennial sector program incorporating the previous annual program. The enactment of the triennial program was entrusted to the council. The executive branch thus became the exclusive driver of policy action.

On the positive side, the Act established more accurate criteria for drawing up the Operative Plan. Actions suggested included giving priority to information and communication—indispensable to bridge the gap with migrant communities that are increasingly composed of subjects born abroad—and training and education, especially of the younger generations. The attempt to appeal to young people is possibly the most positive aspect of this last phase, especially if it is done respecting their cultural and decisional autonomy. Along with the Council of Molisans in the World—where the councilor is assisted by two vice-presidents, one of whom from abroad—a Council of Young Molisans in the World, made up of 15 members from different parts of the world, was established. This Council was entitled to elect a president and two vice-presidents. The Act indicated that the Conferences should be held every two years (there is a bit of irony in this, since only four had been held in the last thirty-five years) and renamed the old award of merit of the previous Acts “Grande Molise Award.”

The following year, however, the regional council more than regained its prerogatives, which, as we have seen, had been practically canceled. The council approved an act¹³⁵ making the Triennial Operative Plan subject to approval by the council itself and, above all, reserving 40% of available funds for the council for autonomous actions regarding emigrant communities abroad. It is hard to understand where a laudable intent to improve the institutional balance of powers in a sector that has increased its social and political resonance ends and a power struggle for the control of prospective funding begins; and I am not going to try.

The most recent normative act in this field was granting recognition and support to sodalities of Molisans that are by now firmly established in other Italian regions. The plan is to create a regional register of these sodalities patterned after the already existing register of associations of Molisans abroad.¹³⁶

At any rate, legislation is only a tool in the relationship with “visible” Molisans, those who have been, so to speak, institutionalized, whom the

¹³⁵ L. R. 10 aprile 2007, n. 12, *Modifiche ed integrazioni alla legge regionale 2 ottobre 2006, n. 31, recante «Interventi della Regione a favore dei “Molisani nel mondo”»*, Bollettino ufficiale della Regione Molise n. 9 del 16/4/2007.

¹³⁶ L. R. 10 febbraio 2009, n. 4, *Interventi in favore delle associazioni dei molisani operanti in Italia al di fuori del territorio regionale*, Bollettino ufficiale della Regione Molise n. 3 del 16/02/2009.

regional government has addressed with actions that have not always been integrated into a coherent plan. Probably the most effective practice has been that of direct contact with communities in the places they have settled in, promoted by institutional representatives, and recently extended to universities and chambers of commerce. These contacts have provided occasions for a revitalization of these communities, which are usually sensitive to acts promoting recognition and the recovery of cultural bonds and ties of affection, as well as occasions for the promotion of Molise in important countries in the world. Some especially positive initiatives included visits of mayors and parish priests to overseas emigrant communities with a strong local stamp. These communities retain strong emotional and memory ties to their towns of origin, and their members, including younger ones born abroad, often travel back to visit.

A more critical judgment should be given on what should have been the highest expression of the promotion of Molisians around the world in the regional context, viz., the Regional Conferences on Emigration. As I said, only four were held in thirty-five years, in spite of commitments to regularity: in Agnone in 1986, in Campobasso in November 1999, in Vinchiaturò and Isernia in June 2005, and in Vinchiaturò, Isernia and Termoli in 2011. All in all, these conferences were all missed opportunities to further investigate specific themes and draw up adequate guidelines for regional policies. One has only to think, for example, of the persistent inadequacy of the sector of tourism for returning immigrants, which would be of great interest for the region's society. Overall, these conferences were more about celebrating, declarations of intents, and emotional communication than listening to what participants from abroad had to say, analyzing the problems of emigrant communities abroad, and trying to come up with effective and long-lasting actions. Under other respects, the balance is less disappointing. Interest in a reality that had been quickly forgotten has flared up in the regional public opinion, and, above all, foreign delegates have met, exchanged experiences, and tried to find common positions. These conferences provide the opportunity to bring back together, albeit symbolically and only for a few days, the Molisan diaspora disseminated over the world, and we should take more care to make the most of these opportunities. Hopefully public institutions will prepare more carefully for the next upcoming conferences and outline operative solutions to be discussed and defined with the representatives of emigrants' associations.

10. Studies and representations of Molisan emigration

Studies and critical reflections on Molisan emigration have been few, considering how vast and far-ranging it was, and most date far back in time.¹³⁷ For the period under examination, I will not dwell on the significant number of pages that Francesco Jovine devoted to this theme, or the works of Giose Rimanelli,¹³⁸ or how the pictorial oeuvre of Antonio Pettinicchi reflects the feeling of laceration of regional society during the years of the second migratory wave. These authors and works deserve a less hasty consideration than what I could provide here. I will thus limit myself to more recent cultural expressions, to some trends which, to facilitate their illustration, I will group as follows: the institutionalization of the memory of emigration, narrative and memorial literature, and critical reflection.

As regards the first aspect, its most significant stepping stones were the institution of the Arturo Giovannitti Museum of Molisan Emigration¹³⁹ and of the Centro studi sui molisani nel mondo (annexed to the P. Albino provincial library), respectively by the regional government and by the provincial government of Campobasso.¹⁴⁰ The decision to create a museum was influenced by growing interest in Italians abroad, also at the regional and local level, in the decade straddling the beginning of the new century. It can be regarded as the Molisan version of a series of attempts and projects, most of which unfortunately remained such. The Act that constituted the museum assigned it the task of preserving and transmitting historical and ethnographic memory of Molisan emigration through the collection and exhibition of documents, and through researches and actions, partly aimed at intensifying cultural and commercial exchanges with communities abroad. The museum, which was to be operatively and financially self-managed, although this is contradicted by the presence of regional councilors on its advisory board, has not been actually established so far. If it were, sooner or later, certainly there would need to be discussion not only about its cultural programs, but also on its displaying approach, to avoid the static and overly “scenic” approaches adopted in the past on the occasion of meetings with representatives from abroad.

The Centro studi sui molisani nel mondo, recently renamed Centro studi sulle migrazioni to include migration within the region, has organized about

¹³⁷ I am thinking especially of the work of Igino Petrone, Guglielmo Josa, Enrico Presutti, and Giambattista Masciotta in *Bilancio morale di un secolo*, Eugenio Cirese’s compositions, some songs of the 1920s, and Lina Pietravalle’s narratives.

¹³⁸ On the “American” Rimanelli, see Sebastiano Martelli’s essay in the present issue.

¹³⁹ L. R. 26 aprile 2004, n. 10, *Istituzione del museo regionale dell’emigrazione “Arturo Giovannitti”*, Bollettino ufficiale della Regione Molise n. 9 del 30/4/2004. At the national level, during our thirteenth legislature, Member of Parliament Federico Orlando, elected in Molise in October 2000, proposed the institution of a national museum on emigration in Campobasso.

¹⁴⁰ Decision of the Council of the Province of Campobasso no. 314 of 7 August 2000.

fifteen meetings with intellectuals of Molisan origin in various parts of the world, as well as photographic and didactic exhibitions, including a very good one on Frank Monaco, meetings with educational institutions to improve knowledge of emigration in schools, and an international meeting on the figure of Arturo Giovannitti, whose offshoot was a collective book of studies and investigations of some of the main communities of Molisan origin in the world, such as those in Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Germany.¹⁴¹

Finally, at the institutional level, an important international meeting is worth remembering: *Il Sud e l'America: Molise ed emigrazione*, held in Campobasso in 1987 by initiative of the regional government in collaboration with the State University of New York at Albany.¹⁴² Introduced by an intriguing paper by Alberto Mario Cirese on Molise and its identity, the meeting ranged from evocations of the flows of Molisans towards “la Mereco” to the formation of their communities, from the issues of integration into the new realities to the most significant personalities among them, from expatriate literature and reflections of emigration in Molisan literature to communication problems. The importance of the event lies in the fact that it was the first time that scholars framed the Molisan migratory phenomenon within the southern context and addressed it in a transnational perspective. However, this effort of cultural investigation has had little influence on institutional and policy actions and on the educational institutions of the region. Even the research work begun at the meeting, which was stimulated by authoritative contributions, has not had a significant follow-up, with the exception of works by scholars who had already long been involved in studies on Molisan culture, such as Cirese, Rimanelli, Lalli, Martelli, Cavallaro, Faralli, and Salvatore.

Without any public support, a replica of this event, at a smaller scale in terms of organizational complexity and participation, was organized a few years later, in November 1992 at Toronto by initiative of the Federazione delle associazioni molisane dell'Ontario, and especially of its leading force, Vincenzo Del Riccio. Some Molisan intellectuals with various backgrounds

¹⁴¹ Norberto Lombardi (ed.), *Il bardo della libertà. Arturo Giovannitti (1881-1959)*, Quaderni del Centro studi, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2011, including essays by Gino Massullo, Rudolph J. Vecoli, Emilio Franzina, Marcella Bencivenni, Antonio D'Ambrosio, Fraser M. Ottanelli, Luigi Bonaffini, Renato Lalli, Martino Marazzi, Luigi Fontanella, Bénédicte Déschamps, Giuliana Muscio, Cosma Siani, Goffredo Fofi, Sebastiano Martelli, Joseph Tusiani, Vincenzo Lombardi.

¹⁴² The meeting was held from 26 to 28 June 1987. It focused on relations with North America and was attended by a number of prominent academics and scholars from both sides of the Atlantic, including A. M. Cirese, A. Placanica, E. Franzina, P. Bevilacqua, R. Cavallaro, B. Ramirez, R. N. Juliani, D. Candeloro, F. X. Femminella, S. La Gumina, G. Rosoli, G. Rimanelli, R. Lalli, J. Tusiani, S. L. Postman, F. L. Gardaphé, L. Reina, F. Salvatore, O. Tanelli, P. Di Donato, R. Raspa, C. Bianco, S. Martelli, R. Harney, G. Faralli, P. Corsi.

and origins,¹⁴³ along with many Molisan immigrants who had achieved the peak of their integration and social ascent, reflected on how culture, in its various forms, can support the quest for one's roots and allow a modern Molisan identity to be acquired in the North American context.

Finally, in Molisan publications of the last thirty years, the theme of emigration has been coming up increasingly frequently and in increasing detail. Monographs on individual towns, which are always numerous and vary in their degree of historiographical depth and accuracy, usually do not overlook emigration. There is also an increasing trend to publishing immigrants' memoirs. Gino Massullo¹⁴⁴ and Sebastiano Martelli¹⁴⁵ have published valuable historiographical and critical studies, respectively on the interconnections between the economic and social modernization of Molise and emigration, and on the reflections of emigration on Molisan literature and how it is presented in the works of authors of Italian origin. These authors have moved forward the scholarly confines previously reached by the above-cited works by Ricciarda Simoncelli and Francesco Citarella, and made their approach to the migratory question in Molise consistent with the critical orientation that has prevailed in the most recent phase in studies on migrations.

Furthermore, special significance can be ascribed to the attention that Molisan immigration has attracted among some of the most important students of international migrations, such as S. L. Baily, W. A. Douglas, and R. Gandolfo. These scholars have conducted researches on migration from Agnone that are well known in the scholarly world. Equally important is a detailed research, published in the authoritative journal *Altretaliaie*, on emigrants who went to New York from Naples from 1880 to 1891, among whom those from Molise were the second largest group after those from Campania.¹⁴⁶

All this goes hand in hand with the felicitous cultural "return home" of some Molisan intellectuals abroad, such as Giose Rimanelli, Luigi Bonaffini,

¹⁴³ Giose Rimanelli, Sante Matteo, and Sheril Postman from the United States; Luigi Biscardi, Sebastiano Martelli, Giovanni Di Stasi, Pasquale Di Lena, Gabriella Iacobucci, Norberto Lombardi, from Italy; John Picchione, Frank Colantonio, Angelo Persichilli from Toronto.

¹⁴⁴ Most notably, *Grande emigrazione e mobilità territoriale del Molise*, «Trimestre», 1994, 3/4, pp. 497-522 and many passages on emigration and its effects on Molisan society in his edited books *Storia del Molise*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2000 and *Storia del Molise in età contemporanea*, Donzelli, Roma 2006.

¹⁴⁵ Sebastiano Martelli is one of the principal Italian historians of emigration literature. He has published essays in all the main anthologies and journals relative to Italian emigration. In these essays he refers frequently to Molisan authors and the social and cultural reality of the region.

¹⁴⁶ Alberto Monteverdi, *Aspetti demografici e socio-professionali dell'emigrazione italiana negli Stati Uniti (1880-1991): un'indagine esplorativa basata sui registri di bordo*, «Altretaliaie», luglio-dicembre 2004, pp. 53-111.

Sante Matteo, and Filippo Salvatore.¹⁴⁷ In some of their works, these authors elaborate on their migratory experience as a testimony of the contradictions of the modern world and a gate to an intercultural horizon. Among books published in Italy, I would point out those by the Molisan-Canadian Nino Ricci, and Joe Fiorito's novel¹⁴⁸ for its references to Molise as a strongly characterized anthropological hinterland, capable of making as deep a mark on the lives of those who leave it as on those of its residents.

The publisher Cosmo Iannone¹⁴⁹ has made an organic and systematic effort to understand Molisan emigration. This effort, along with those of the previously mentioned authors, confirms the impression that there has been a cultural transition in the understanding of this theme. In just over four years, Iannone has inaugurated four thematic series, publishing a total of about sixty books. The *Quaderni sulle migrazioni* series alternates studies on general aspects of Italian migration and contemporary mobility with specific investigations on Molise. These studies have shed further light on the dynamics of emigration at the community level, and recovered important materials, such as letters of emigrants and archive documents. The Reti series has been regularly publishing narrative works mostly by authors of Molisan origin who explore the specific generational dynamics of emigration and the identity issues that develop within it. Thus, Molise has witnessed a “return”—along with the poetic corpus of the departed Arturo Giovannitti, and Rimanelli's more recent work in Italian—of a new generation of authors of Molisan origin, such as Mary Melfi, Antonio D'Alfonso, Carole Fioramore David, and Marco Micone. This special web of cultural (and publishing) ties with the homeland of their families has helped these authors to formulate a critique of a mindless integration, devoid of values, and to strive to recompose the plurality of immigrant identity.

The memorial series includes works of historical significance, such as Duliani's *Città senza donne*, a foundational text of Italo-Canadian literature, along with documents of migratory experiences that are dense with

¹⁴⁷ I would cite especially, by Giose Rimaneli (who in his “Italian” period had already published *Peccato originale*, Mondadori, Milano 1954, *Biglietto di terza* (Mondadori, Milano 1958, and *Una posizione sociale*, Vallecchi, Firenze 1959), *Molise Molise*, Marinelli, Isernia 1979, *Moliseide*, Brroklyn, Legas 1991, later Edizioni Enne, Campobasso 1998, and *Familia. Memoria dell'emigrazione*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2000; by Bonaffini, besides his English translations of Eugenio Cirese and Giuseppe Jovine, the trilingual anthology *Poeti dialettali del Molise*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 1993, coedited with Faralli and Martelli; by Sante Matteo, *Radici sporadiche: letteratura, viaggi, migrazioni*, Cosmo Iannone, Isernia 2007; by Salvatore, especially *Tra Molise e Canada*, Lions Club, Larino 1994.

¹⁴⁸ The trilogy of the author of Upper Molisan origin Nino Ricci, *La terra del ritorno*, was published by Fazi, Roma 2004; Joe Fiorito's novel *Le voci di mio padre* was published by Garzanti, Milano 1999.

¹⁴⁹ For more detailed information about the series and books published by this Isernia publisher, see their general catalog at www.cosmoiannone.it.

information and narrative pathos. Finally, the Kumacreola series, directed by the world-renowned expert Armando Gnisci, continues to plough the fertile soil of emigrant literature, helping to promote writers from different parts of the world who have decided to use the Italian language as the medium for their multicultural imagination.

11. Conclusions: almost a beginning

Molise is small and afflicted by persistent economic problems. It has therefore been crossed by migratory flows and exposed to external forces of attraction throughout the course of its history, and the question of migration from the region is far from being a thing of the past. If, as I said above, we can regard the massive and devastating exodus of the thirty years after the War to be over, the situations that have arisen as a result of a more than a century long process of sedimentation, on the one hand, and the latest trends in migration, on the other, call for vision and an ability to build relational networks. This is something that requires commitment and can no longer be postponed. Furthermore, as some of the essays in the present journal show, the emigration that has resumed in the last few decades, although it has different characteristics than in the past, exceeds the limits of a "physiological" mobility of people looking for job or training opportunities. As in the rest of the Italian South, it is a true "new emigration" we are looking at. Furthermore, Molise has become itself a destination for immigrants, and this trend is destined to increase as soon as the current economic and employment crisis is mitigated.

The question of migration is thus still on the table. It calls for governance and a cultural commitment to analyze and process information, an effort to single out the innovative dynamics of the phenomenon and its remarkably complex features.

It is worth stressing that these are objectively difficult tasks. First of all because regional institutions and society now need to act as a hub for an extensive and variegated diaspora at a time when the risk of losing one's autonomy and individuality has become high and very real. It is true that the identity that whole generations of emigrant origin are looking for is mainly made up of tradition, culture and values. However, it would be naïve to underestimate the effect that the decline of an institutional and administrative framework that has molded a whole ruling class and governmental practice would have on the Region as a whole, and on the larger Molise disseminated over the world. Without counting, on a lighter note, that it would be hard to explain to those people in remote countries who have had to learn to "feel" Molisan, as they lacked a regional awareness in their initial education, that the frame of reference has changed again and

that this fledgling “Molisaness” needs to find a new nest. We are thus confronted with real and far-reaching processes that words or the expression of fears for the worst will not stop. These considerations should thus be placed within the broader context of a reorganization of Italy’s political and institutional system to make it more capable of coping with a crisis of unexpected seriousness. In the meantime, we need to clearly single out still pending issues and measure ourselves with them, using the tools and ideas available today.

The historical lode of Molisan presence abroad, whose size, as the representatives of Molisan immigrants tell us, is growing weekly, possibly as the result of an unconscious quest for security in the face of current troubles, is largely made up of people who were born outside of the region and, for natural reasons, this will be even more so in the future. While we need to treasure our relations with the more mature generations, who still keep up the associative network and maintain tenacious relations with their places of origin, we should ask these generations to help us in the difficult task of motivating their own descendants to preserve their cultural roots. Progress on the path of integration, wherever this is ongoing because of more recent immigration, is certainly a good thing, not something to complain about. Molisans should interact with people who are organically integrated in the societies they live in and who exercise active citizenship, rather than with marginal individuals lacking social clout. However, integration, at least for most of those who pursue it, erodes memory and makes identity fade away. The evident crisis of a globalization experienced in an uncritically homologizing fashion, however, opens up new possibilities. The ongoing rediscovery of the local and what is nearby, along with a growing awareness of landscapes as cultural and ethical realities as well as geographical and productive ones, are helping to recreate bonds that seemed to have been severed and roots that seemed lost. Intercultural practices, which are penetrating even societies that historically have been strongholds of exclusivity and assimilation, are a factor of social cohesion as well as civilized forms of action. They are the only possible option in an ineluctably migrant and multicultural world.

Along these paths, which also run through the realities where the descendants of Molisan immigrants have become rooted, many young people can make their way back to their homeland to find answers to questions about their identity and their cultural and ethical profile. The easiest way to do this are family memories, the emotions of new contacts with the places and people of their family and town circle. But is this enough? Of course not. The spread of new communication systems and the rise of new forms of web-based socialization multiply opportunities for everyday remote relationships. This raises a first major question regarding Molisans abroad, one that still begs an answer: what cultural proposal can

Molisan society and institutions make to foreign-born Molisans to answer their need to recover their roots and identity, with no prejudice to their social and cultural rooting in other countries? And further: what forms of communication and what languages should we use to bring together disseminated and occasional contacts into a new network and "systematize" them?

An equally open question is how the constellation of Molisan presences in the world can support the effort to internationalize Molisan economy and society. Their commitment is all the more urgent considering the increasingly evident signs of a regression determined by the ongoing crisis. I have already spoken of the need to go beyond the sectorial perspective that has so far marked the approach to the Molisan community abroad, and to adopt an inter-sector action policy. This policy should be implemented through effective and tried and tested projects, which should be compatible with the present situation of local finances. It is astonishing that our institutions have been unable to take even small steps in this direction, for example, in the sector of tourism for returning immigrants, which could be so beneficial to Molise. All that this would require is a set of actions to coordinate and promote a phenomenon that is destined to grow further.

The diaspora, at any rate, is going on, although in less visible and "dramatic" forms. Its protagonists are new emigrants, more or less temporary, and a number of young high school and university graduates, sometimes highly specialized, who make up the Molisan branch of a large-scale phenomenon, especially in southern Italy. Considering the seriousness of the current unemployment situation, this phenomenon is on its way to becoming endemic. In this case, too, it would be useless to limit ourselves to outcries or recommendations. Highly educated young people, as well as less educated ones, are leaving their homelands driven by objective conditions and incoercible needs. This phenomenon is thus destined to last. It can be contained, of course, by outlining and adopting a new development model centered on a different use of regional resources. In this case, too, delays are having a high social cost. But this should be preceded by an effort to understand the phenomenon: how many are they, where do they head for, how many permanently take residence elsewhere, what relations to they maintain with regional society, do they intend to come back, what possibilities and conditions are there for a long-distance collaboration, etc. While it would be illusory to believe we can stop them, it might make sense to study ways to keep their education and energies from being wholly lost to us, depriving the region of such important human resources. All the more because in several countries young Molisans, or Molisans who emigrated in their youth, have risen to positions of great responsibility in research, the professions, or the corporate world.

A further subject for reflection is the incommunicability between these new protagonists of regional mobility and emigrants and their descendants:

a rather clear-cut gap is observable between the cultural substratum of Molisan communities in various countries in the world, especially if they are still gathered in associations, and the culture of these new migrants lacking the traditional immigrant imaginary, who often take residence in historical areas of Molisan presence, but do not cross paths with other Molisans, and do not even look for them.¹⁵⁰

Another prospective engagement could be finding ways to reduce this gap and open communication channels between young people of Molisan origin and new young immigrants.

Finally, the regional migratory question is at a historical turning point, marked by the arrival in Molise of thousands of immigrants, especially from East Europe, North Africa and Asia. This puts the region definitively in the same situation as other Italian areas receiving constant flows of immigration. This immigration answers specific demands whose nature is demographic—especially in areas that have seen persistent abandonment—, and productive, due to the enduring importance of traditional activities in Molise, especially in the agricultural sector, or in the sector of domestic assistance and support to services. To gain a sense of the innovativeness of these dynamics that have set in in society and in cultural orientations, we only need to think of the implications of the inclusion of these new subjects in the traditionally sacred sphere of family care, or the expansion of religious pluralism. In this case, too, a reflection on how to positively metabolize the fruit of contemporary migrations seems to be a necessary passage for the future of Molise, if the region wants to keep abreast of changing times.

¹⁵⁰ Norberto Lombardi, *Identità migranti*, «Glocale», 2010, 1, *Identità locali*, p. 254.