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## ***The Migratory Phenomenon From Social Trauma To A Global Resource***

Just a few weeks ago, the President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano inaugurated the new Museum of Italian emigration at the Vittoriano in Rome. The President reminded everyone of this essential chapter in the history of Italy, emphasizing the fact that “at this very moment we are preparing to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of unification, we cannot forget the fact that even if Italy is united, many Italians were unable to find work and a means to earn a living, and were forced to leave”. It must be said however, that Napolitano, in remembering this sore wound in our history, wanted to acknowledge the effort made by our emigrants giving birth to opportunity and renewal out of a dramatic situation. “We have sown traces of our Italian presence all over the world and what today is a legacy of attraction and friendship towards Italy in every country that I have visited, is a reminder of what our compatriots achieved when they went out there”<sup>1</sup>.

In one and a half centuries of unity, the Italian emigrant population amounts to 24 million people: between 1876 and 1900 Veneto, Friuli and Piedmont supplied 46% of the migratory flow, but during the first two decades of the XX century it was Calabria, Campania and Sicily<sup>2</sup> which constituted the major percentage, as Giancamillo Trani remembers in “Report on the Italians in the world” 2007.

Still today, 3,853,614 Italians are registered as being resident abroad, of which approximately 57% reside in Europe, 37% in America, 3.5% in Oceania, 1.5% in Africa and about 1.1% in Asia. Of the Italian residents who live in Europe, approximately 15,000 live in the countries which have recently become part of Europe (Romania, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Croatia, Russia and Turkey). The countries

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<sup>1</sup> Napolitano, at the end of his inaugural speech for the new Museum of Italian Emigration, at the Vittoriano, Rome, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Giancamillo Trani, *Campanian Emigrants in the world in Report on Italians in the world*, 2007.

having the greatest number of emigrants in Europe are Germany, Switzerland, France, Belgium and the United Kingdom (approximately 176,000).

According to the Caritas/Migrantes Report of 2008, Campania, with approximately 395,000 migrants, is the second region for its substantial quantity of emigrants who are for the most part settled in Europe (almost 58%), Germany and Switzerland sharing top position<sup>3</sup>.

This means there are 4 million emigrants who have decided to keep in contact with Italy not only with affection, but also legally, frequently holding dual nationality. The millions of people leaving for far-away and unknown lands, meant families were broken up by the need for work, and loved ones being separated by that obligation to leave. The history of a great movement of people who have designed the face of the earth: the fact that now this phenomenon is no longer interesting, even with the same numbers in our regions, does not mean that it is past history.

On the contrary, just what happens daily on the shores of the Mediterranean, in the streets of our towns, in the classrooms of our schools indicates that human beings have not given up leaving and arriving - migrating. It is for this reason that we prefer to talk about processes and projects of 'migration' rather than 'emigration' and 'immigration'.

In fact, the term 'migration' goes beyond both the perspective of those leaving (emigrant) and those arriving (immigrant), and involves necessarily, transforming it also into the prospective of those welcoming them. 'Migration' indicates an open, complex process, fraught with risks, conflicts and problems but full of creativity, innovation and renewal for all those taking part in the 'game'. It is a process which is of interest to individuals and communities, countries of origin and those hosting, economic dynamics, social, cultural and legal institutions: both at a local and global level.

The relatively recent evolution which Italy has undergone, from a country of emigrants to those of immigrants, brings various problems with it, which means that it is still necessary to speak of this problem as 'migratory trauma': the migrations still continue to be a source of individual and collective dramas. In fact, in their departure countries, the migrants still suffer the shock of leaving, made worse by

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Report Caritas/Migrantes 2008- "Campanian emigrants in the world."

political persecution or economic crisis, often facing extremely lengthy and dangerous journeys only to arrive in a country where their burden of misery and confinement to ghettos doubles the problems they encounter in the process of integration.

Yet, we can never stress the fact enough that the migratory processes, as well as being disintegrating phenomena of the social structure of their country of origin, are also a constitutive power of history: as the migrations are not simply the result of poverty but also the fruit of desire, not motivated simply by misery but by the need for freedom.

During this change of perspective from 'emigration/immigration' to 'migration', a fundamental transformation of the imagery takes place: from the national drama- which recalls the images of the wretches of Ellis Island, of the miners' and workers' shanty towns at Marcinelle, or in the German yards- we pass to the phenomena at a global level- which is unfortunately made of lifeboats in the Mediterranean, dusty paths in the Mexican desert or lorries coming from the east, but also of pizza-restaurants in Toronto, or winegrowing businesses in South Africa, of university researchers at the MIT, of qualified students and workers in Europe as in the rest of the world.

In this dimension, and not only in that of mere need, we find '*Merica*'<sup>4</sup>, the dream of the Italian migrant, but also the '*Merica*' dreamt of by Sub-saharian migrants, youths who cross the desert and sea to come to Europe, as the citizens of the ex-Soviet Block do, because now there exists the European dream too, founded on the idea and project of a Europe of populations and cultures.

Alongside the dream of a new life in a new world, the migrants continue to have close ties with their own homeland, a strong link despite the wish to integrate themselves in their new context, which however, often reinforces that same need. Anthropologists and ethnologists, regarding this, speak of a 'double consciousness', a

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<sup>4</sup> '*Merica*' is a documentary film by Federico Ferrone, 2007, which traces a parallel between the great Italian emigration to South America at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the immigration regarding Italy nowadays. The film demonstrates numerous stories of Brazilians of Italian origin who move to Veneto and suffer discrimination.

double awareness<sup>5</sup>, that they experience in the feeling of being 'others', sort of foreigners both in the country of origin and in the adopted one, and in the continuing process of 'disorientation/orientation' which every migration implies.

In the communities of emigrants, the linguistic resistance, adaptation of the cooking to local availability, cultural intermingling, the spread of styles of consumption both material and immaterial, from ways of dressing and music, all these have meant that the migratory dream has come true by means of an adaptation of their own traditions and these have become constitutive powers of new social habits in the communities where they arrive.

It would be timely to give two examples here which refer to the stereotype image that accompanies Italians in the world and in particular, those from Campania: the pizza and creativity-'genius'. Pizza is a typical Neapolitan product which has followed our emigrants, but has had success not because it was eaten by the Italians but because it is in its nature *fast food*, food which can be eaten on the corner of the busy streets of New York.

On the contrary, intellectuals persecuted in their own countries or made unable to pursue their skills, more often than not have been political refugees in other countries, and with them also their ideas have emigrated. Therefore, these ideas have been brilliantly transformed into products in new countries: from the Garibaldian warfare in the continent of Latin America to the atomic institutes of Fermi, to musicians, artists and engineers - single cases, collective events, shared experiences and social relations that all create and recreate with the movement of people.

It is also and above all, with these small events that the transformation of the migration from trauma into a resource is concealed: if we widen the spectrum to include those people of Italian extraction, that is, those citizens from other states who descend from Italian emigrants, the estimation (not statistically reliable) from foreign Italian Embassies abroad reaches 100,000,000. Obtaining an accurate evaluation of this descent is rather difficult due to the impossibility of reconstructing

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<sup>5</sup> This is taken from Cesare Pitto, *Itinerary of urban anthropology: the city as a style of life in the identity of a migrant*, 2004. The term 'double consciousness' was used by Robert F Harney to underline the presence of rural reality which multiplied and was experienced in countries far away from their original ones through their own migratory Diaspora.

the entire evolution of the Italian community abroad, above all that of more ancient emigration.

Nevertheless, the mere presence of 'another Italy' abroad, justifies the huge economic commerce: from typical products to consumer goods, from industrial machinery to cultural products, the development of Italy after the World War II is partially attributable to the Italians abroad. This was due to at least two indirect conditions: the flow of capital in the reserves, which was able to sustain the internal demand of the Italian families and the external demand, through which the Italians abroad motivated and supported exports.

However, there has been a much more powerful resource than economic which the Italians abroad have engendered in their country of destination, and that has been their joint image. Especially where more solid communities of emigrants have settled in the world, a widely-known, recognized and imitated *Italian* style exists from music- above all lyrical and the classic Neapolitan songs, to the artistic and intellectual talent, from fashion to cuisine.

Even without taking the attraction of Italian fashion and design into consideration, just the widespread diffusion of the Italian cuisine abroad, though 'contaminated' by local traditions, it has brought about the worldwide recognition of the Mediterranean diet. A more recent phenomenon is the spread of the Italian breakfast and the culture of wine - the basis of our economic power in the gourmet cuisine sector. It is also in the development of the agricultural industry in the places where emigrants have moved to: the vineyards of California, Chile and South Africa, giving rise to a satisfactory quality even today, their success being thanks to the slow but steady work of those Italians who first took the vines with them and the need to feel at home with a glass of wine on their dining table.

Even for the cinema, and above all for overseas filmography, the emigrants have been a source of inspiration for world famous cinematographers, even if the stories are too often shown of stereotypes: but this does give an idea of how much an impact the Italian emigration has made on the collective image.

In particular, every day, the Campanians in the world are ambassadors of a culture which is strongly described and recognizable, and at the same time constitutively 'mestizo', welcoming and responsible towards others and anything new. Campania is, in fact, a region which is rich in history and humanity, over thousands of years it

has enriched itself with traditions and knowledge from the various populations who have lived there, different traditions which live in the famous gourmet cuisine culture as well as in artistic expression and culture, both refined and folk.

Certainly, emigrants were also, at least initially, a source of destabilization for the countries where they arrived, at the beginning of their migratory projects; one classic example, the spread of organized crime or the deviances induced by maladjustment to the culture and a culture which differs too much from their own. However, once integrated, through employment and education (from which also citizenship substantially follows), the emigrants have offered great opportunities to the countries receiving them: an overqualified labour force, at a low cost, the emigrants have become contributors and then successively part of the middle class of that foreign country; their children have started to occupy important positions in the social, political and cultural life of the country, making it easy for a second type of migration to occur, and one which is most diffused in our country today, intellectual migration. Thanks also to the openings for research in foreign countries, now it is our most highly educated young people who are leaving. Now, the most sought-after resource is, in fact, the human resource.

There is therefore a great network of our fellow-citizens or their descendants all over the world who provide ulterior wealth for our country. The major part of the politics regarding emigration put into action by the regions of Italy in the last few years provides for reinforcing contacts between the local contexts and these Italian enclaves overseas, motivating the stabilization of relations between emigrants and their origins and, above all, stimulating the participation of Italians abroad in the political and social life of our country. This has been made further possible by the voting system for voting abroad, but it is mainly thanks to regional councils who have tightened the strings on this network. It is the individual experiences - the nostalgia, the need for contact with their own culture or personal successes of these immigrants- to become collective assets, global resources.

This means resources which can enter into the so-called 'Italian system' again in the same way as new resources and stimulus supplied by immigration in our country necessarily has to enter. Managing and orienting these resources is perhaps the greatest challenge in this era of economic globalization for two reasons: on the one hand the cultural approval derived from a widely diffused life-style and consumption, on the other hand the constant creativity of the migratory flows in

terms of social relationships, cultural products, economic relations, which tend to make relationships of the migrants with the homeland more and more fluid, especially for the so-called second generations.

The crystallization of the dialects among communities of emigrants or, in the same way, the transformations of the Mediterranean diet in contact with spices and international flavours, similar to recollections or the decline of the language and globalized life-style constitute important ideas for research in order to tie the knot again in relations between Italy and its fellow-citizens abroad.

Occasionally, maintaining the dialect, beliefs and folklore of the past in the communities overseas may contribute, on the one hand, to an image among emigrants which is not always in harmony with relevance to the present in our country, and on the other hand, may offer an interesting cross-section on our not so distant past. A past often 'packed with future', which still has much to teach: if it is possible to recuperate this knowledge and these flavours today, it is also and, above all, due to the exigency and the capability that some communities have had, among which those of our emigrant fellow-citizens, to continue passing them on to successive generations as something considered extremely precious.

Motivating the return of these Italians, but above all aiding the sharing of the instructive experience for residents abroad is a strategy of valorization of this now hundred-year-old history of migration. Another aim is to add infrastructure, through the support of associations of Italian emigrants, a network of knowledge and experience which is able to serve as a driving belt towards the development of the Italian culture.

Among the guidelines for the Campanians in the world, it is possible to make out this strategy where there is a foreseeable measure of support for the reentry of those immigrants, above all, for those of the first generation, who still have close ties to our region; measures for education at Campanian universities for emigrants of second generation, so that there is a spread of knowledge and also measures which aid bonding and contacts between local communities and communities of Campanians abroad.

The implicit aim is to aid contact between that human resource collocated abroad and the Italian cultural capital to heal the wounds of the migratory trauma and

transform them into strong points both for the original community and the adopted one.

In conclusion, I would like to underline the importance of the occasions for study and comparison as in this convention: to deepen and tackle these themes is in fact, strategic, not only for the Campania region represented here, but also for Europe as a continent of migrants. It is the same culture of western rights that in that same way come out placed in a historical context, and citizenship becomes a conscious challenge. Citizenship is a dynamic phenomenon and not a given entity: it is not a gift that we offer migrants who accept our values, but it is the product of a comparison, a rather hard one, one which changes values, yours and mine, and is the content of 'our' citizenship. "The recognition of our rights and respect for those of others" is a meaningless formula unless one recognizes that the right of the 'others' becomes 'our rights'. The requests, cultural needs redefine borders continually, the need to belong, social relations and relationships. Identity, citizenship, these etch into concepts of a population profoundly. Concepts which are now thought to be out-dated if we consider that the enjoyment of particular guarantees is now established by international law, and that belonging in a social context is dictated by multiple belonging. The erosion of such concepts may sanction the breakdown of welfare systems that we have known up to now, or alternatively, may constitute a powerful force for their global reform.

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