Escaping the Crisis, Seeking a Better Future, Living Global Lives: Recent Italians Migrants in Athens, Madrid and Bogota

Current literature on international migration has focused mostly on the flows from the South to the North of the global system. Recently, however, flows from more developed countries have also gained scholarly attention. In this context, the resurgence of migratory movements from Italy may be of particular interest for several reasons. Research already conducted on these issues has in fact highlighted that the recent growth in Italian emigration is not simply a sign of the growing integration of Italian society into the global system. It is also one of the consequences of a series of important social and cultural transformations, ranging from the change in Italy’s position in the international division of labor to the individual search for a better quality of life. In this paper, I will draw on the results of some research we conducted on Italian emigrants in three major urban centers – Athens, Madrid, Bogota – in order to identify the factors and the mechanisms triggering these new migration paths. Although each of the research works has been conducted autonomously, with the use of qualitative techniques of social analysis – especially through semi-structured interviews –, I think that an exercise of comparison between the results achieved in these three research experiences may be useful to clarify the rapidly changing picture of the new Italian emigration.

Keywords: Italy, Crisis, Globalization, Migration, Qualitative research

Introduction

Given its economic and political significance, international migration can be viewed as one of the most relevant research topics in social sciences. This is particularly the case for the South-North flows. However, scholars in the field of migration studies are well aware that, in these times of globalization, there are mobility flows between all the countries of the world. Almost all of them are both origin and destination areas of international mobility flows.

This is also the case in Italy. Starting in the 1970s, Italy became a destination area for migratory flows from less developed countries, especially Eastern Europe, the Maghreb, and Sub-Saharan Africa. But starting in the 1990s, and especially following the economic crisis of 2008, Italy has also become a source of migratory flows once again.

The aim of this paper is to discuss some of the findings we obtained from three research projects carried out in the past few years on recently emigrated Italians. This research concerned Italians who emigrated to Athens, Madrid, and Bogota, three major cities that are also capitals of their countries – the first two in Southern Europe, the last one in Latin America. This research was conducted mainly using qualitative survey techniques, which imposes several constraints on our ability to obtain knowledge generalizable to the whole field.
of migration studies, or even only to southern European migration. Nonetheless, a comparison of these research findings may suggest new hypotheses for an adequate understanding of this recent wave of migration from Italy.

Therefore, in the next section of this paper I will describe the object and purpose of the study, which proposes a comparative insight on some recent emigration flows from Italy and produces an inventory of the factors and mechanisms at work in these migration paths. The third section will be devoted to the methodology employed in the research pathways I mentioned above, which are mainly based on qualitative techniques. Some of the main features of the survey respondents will also be presented in these pages. In the fourth section I will discuss the main results obtained in each research, with special reference as regards the reasons for migration. Finally, in the conclusions I will try to outline some implications of this study for further research on migration from Italy as well as from other developed countries.

The New Migration from Italy

Recent reviews of Italian emigration (Audenino, Tirabassi, 2008; Fondazione Migrantes, 2011; Bonifazi, 2013; Pugliese, 2018) point out that Italy produced at least three waves of migration in the Contemporary era. The first, which reached its maximum intensity in the period preceding World War I, was directed mainly towards the Americas. Young men left the countryside of an overpopulated, poor, and backward country in search of work and life opportunities in sparsely populated, hard-living but resource-rich countries. They moved from a country that didn't give them hope to others that did, no matter how far away they were. Sometimes migrants returned home – some of them defeated, some other victorious. At other times, they would call upon their wives, girlfriends, relatives, or even just fellow villagers to share their good fortune.

The second wave of emigration began with the reconstruction following World War II and ended with the crisis in the mid-1970s. Even in this case, the main role in the migration was played by young men, who left the countryside of the poorest and most backward regions of a country that was nevertheless experiencing an era of tremendous growth and modernization. Likewise, alongside many emigrants who returned to their villages at the end of their careers, there were many others who – once again – called upon their wives, girlfriends, relatives, and friends, thus creating strong migratory chains. The main difference with the first wave of emigration concerned the areas of destination, which this time were mainly the countries of Western Europe. Another difference concerns the social climate in which the migration processes took place. Italy in the ’50s and ’60s was a country that conquered records of growth and development in the world. In this context, it was not so much the lack of prospects as the growth in expectations that urged people to migrate to other countries. Rather than escaping a fate of poverty, the migrants
of the second wave were trying to shorten the path that would lead them to wealth, or at least to a moderate but respectable well-being.

While the first and second waves of migration had some common features, the third seems very different. First, it includes new Italians, or foreigners who had taken up residence or even citizenship in Italy and then decided to change country. Second, it includes many women who have taken an active role in the migration process (Moffa, 2014). Third, it includes individuals from all regions, including metropolitan and more developed areas of the country. Fourth, it affects people at every stage of the life cycle, including the elderly (Cristaldi, Leonardi, 2018). Finally, many new migrants from Italy are highly qualified individuals seeking professional gratification abroad (Beltrame, 2007; Gjergji, 2015; Minneci, 2015; Tomei, a cura di, 2017).

Alongside changes in the demographic features of Italian migration, there are also changes in conditions and constraints, channels and mediators of migration – changes common to many other migration flows. For example, the process of economic and political integration of the European Union has generated a space in which the experience of international migration is much closer to that of internal mobility within the country of origin (Recchi, 2015). The availability of low-cost flights and super-fast trains has radically changed the perception of the distance between the place of origin and destination of migration (Grieco, Urry, eds., 2011). Social media make possible an early socialization to the migration experience, allowing the accumulation of information and personal contacts outside the usual network of relatives, neighbors, and childhood friends (Dekker, Engbersen, 2014). Moreover, the new means of transport and communication make the experience of transnationality (Vertovec, 2009) accessible to recent Italian migrants. Like other mobile people from more developed countries, new migrants from Italy can choose to preserve their ties with their society of origin and with their networks of relationships.

The new Italian emigration differs from the older ones also as regards the areas of destination. In accordance with the more general trends prevailing in the “era of migration” (Castles, de Haas, Miller, 2013), Italians are moving towards all the countries of the world. The traditional destinations of Italian emigration still attract many people. This applies as much to the main countries of Western Europe as to the United States, Canada, Australia, Argentina, and Brazil. Alongside these mobility flows, however, there are others that are directed towards many other countries, some of which seem to be less developed than Italy (Fondazione Migrantes, 2020). For this reason, we have oriented our research work towards flows that are still little known, such as those directed towards Greece, Spain or Colombia, countries where the Italian migration was very narrow, until the most recent years.

Finally, recent Italian emigration shows features that differ from those of the past as regards the structural factors and individual motives that lead to the definition and realization of migratory projects. Among the structural factors, an important role is certainly played by Italy's economic stagnation and the increasingly evident crisis of the development model that the country followed
after World War II (Maddaloni, 2016). Alongside this, the modernization of Italian society and its growing permeability to globalization has allowed many Italians, especially young people, to become part of international work and leisure networks. This produces chances for mobility that were unthinkable in the recent past, both in numbers and in variety. Therefore, many Italians, especially young workers and professionals, view their choice of migration as dictated essentially by a lack of career opportunities in the home country. Many others, on the other hand, tend to experience it more in terms of a lifestyle choice (Benson, O’Reilly, eds., 2009; Torkington, 2010; Benson, Osbaldiston, eds. 2014; Benson, O’Reilly, 2016), suggested by their interest in the world outside Italy. This has led to a debate between those who maintain that the new Italian emigration is essentially an escape from a country in crisis, and those who instead see Italians primarily as globalized individuals, capable of seizing opportunities to improve their living conditions wherever they are created (Pugliese, 2018). As is obvious, both positions capture a peculiar aspect of an emerging, complex social reality, one that can never be explained by reference to a single theoretical principle (King, 2012). But how representative are they of new migratory flows such as those from Italy to Athens, Madrid, or Bogota? The lines of research we will discuss in this paper try to answer this question.

**Italians in Madrid, Athens, and Bogota: Research Metodology**

In order to increase the knowledge available on these features of the new emigration from Italy, we worked mainly on people between 20 and 39 years of age\(^1\). People in this stage of the life cycle are perhaps the most interesting ones from the point of view of migration studies. As shown by the sociology of the life cycle (Clausen, 1986), individual projects concerning job insertion, career opportunities and household patterns are mostly defined and mainly realized in this phase of individual life. Therefore, deciding to answer these questions through a migration project seems of great importance because of the sociological implications of this choice, as regards both its causes and its consequences.

The choice of destination areas on which to investigate was mainly induced by reasons of professional opportunity (research mobility programs that involved someone in the research group). This made empirical research in the urban areas of Athens (2017-2018), Madrid (2018-2019), and Bogota (2020) relatively inexpensive\(^2\). Alongside this, it is worth noting that none of the previously mentioned cities have been home to significant migration flows from Italy before the 1990s or the first decade of the new century. Therefore,

\(^1\)However, the research conducted in Athens and Bogota also includes interviews with people over the age of 39, as well as some participant observation exercises, both online and in-person.

\(^2\)Due to the spread of the covid-19 epidemic during 2020, the research conducted on Italians in Bogota was completed through video interviews.
most Italians we met and interviewed in these cities are first-generation migrants - people who decided not long ago to (1) leave Italy and (2) settle in Athens, Madrid, or Bogota.

As regards the sampling process, in all cases we decided to have a first approach to Italian migrants through the social media (more specifically, through blogs, Facebook pages, WhatsApp groups etc.) (De Rosa, Maddaloni, 2020; Maddaloni, Moffa, 2021). Starting from these contacts, we used the technique of snowball sampling and carried out several semi-structured interviews with Italians living in the destination areas. We tried to balance the group of respondents by gender, age, and regional origin, in order to have a broader view of these recent migrant communities and to ensure some degree of saturation of internal variability within the survey population. We preferred to carry out a qualitative rather than a quantitative survey, not only because of the technical difficulties arising from the absence of an adequate sample list, but also because qualitative research is better suited to grasp the novelties inherent in emerging social phenomena (Zapata-Barrero, Yalaz, eds., 2018), such as migration in the era of neo-liberal globalization, the creation of a common European space and the economic and social crisis that has particularly affected the countries of Southern Europe (Maddaloni, 2021).

Therefore, we choose to use the technique of the semi-structured interview, based on the principles of the hermeneutical approach, which gives the interviewer the task of conducting the interview in a flexible way, conforming to the interviewee's verbal and non-verbal language (Montesperelli, 1998). This approach to research therefore implies a specific recording, transcription and encoding process (Diana, Montesperelli, 2005; see also Silverman, 2010, 2015). The procedure allows to analyze respondents' behaviors, attitudes, and opinions around some semantic areas, which are seen as relevant by the research group. In our case, these dimensions include: the respondents’ educational path and work experiences in Italy or abroad, prior to their arrival in the destination area; the current position in the labor market and the local society; opinions on the economic and social situation in both the source and the destination areas; projects for the future; and, finally, their social identity.

There was a total of 43 respondents aged 20-39, of which 12 were in Madrid, 17 in Athens, and 14 in Bogota. We interviewed a total of 23 women (6 in Madrid, 9 in Athens, 8 in Bogota) and 18 men (6 in Madrid, 8 in Athens, 6 in Bogota). However, it is worth noting that the average age of respondents was 31 in Madrid, 32 in Athens and 36 in Bogota. This probably reflects the greater difficulties associated with emigration to a country as distant and different from Italy as Colombia. Such a project perhaps requires more experience and resources than mobility to a major city in Southern Europe.

Regarding the geographic origin of our respondents, 18 were from northern regions (4 in Madrid, 7 in Athens, 7 in Bogota), 9 were from central regions (4 in Madrid, 3 in Athens, 2 in Bogota), and 16 were from southern

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3 At the time of writing, the results of the research on Italians in Bogota have not yet been published.
regions (4 in Madrid, 7 in Athens, 5 in Bogota). Since we controlled for the selection of respondents as regards these variables, such an outcome was expected.

All of them came in the destination areas in the last decade, so they can be seen as part of the so-called new Italian migration. All of them had an education level equal to, or greater than, the high school diploma. More specifically, 11 respondents in Madrid (out of 12), 8 in Athens (out of 17), and 10 in Bogota (out of 14) had a master's degree or even higher degrees. However, only part of this emigration may be intended as a genuine "brain drain". Indeed, most of the Italian population in this age group attended university (Bonifazi, Livi Bacci, 2014). Moreover, the high level of education is a factor that favors emigration (Pugliese, 2018). Highly qualified people, indeed, are more open to work and life experiences in contexts other than that of origin.

In addition, many of them (though not all) participated in the Erasmus program or similar abroad experiences, which drove them to an early positive attitude towards international mobility. The role played by these events in creating both a fund of personal confidence (in one's ability to get by abroad) and a capital of knowledge and social contacts that operate in the transition from one phase to another of the life cycle by reinforcing the propensity to emigrate, is now well recognized in the literature (see for instance King, Lulle, Morosanu, Williams, 2016). Finally, regarding the job status of the respondents, we can see that the greatest differences among the three groups of interviewees relate to this variable. Indeed, Italians in Bogota are employed as entrepreneurs, managers, academics, professionals, also teachers in Italian schools. On the other hand, the professional profile of Italians who emigrated to Madrid and Athens is more heterogeneous (Maddaloni, 2019; De Rosa, Maddaloni, 2020; Maddaloni, Moffa, 2021). It includes not only the professional roles mentioned above, but also cooks, pizza makers, people coming from Italy for an international internship and (in Athens) employees of transnational service companies and people currently looking for a job opportunity.

These differences seem to reflect the economic and social specificities of the cities that provide the setting for our research. Madrid and Athens are both in countries whose economic and social conditions appear, at least *prima facie*, like the Italian ones. Bogota is a city in Latin America, an area still lagging in development if compared to Europe and with considerable problems of poverty and deviance. However, even between Madrid and Athens there are some diversities, which produce some consequences in the migratory flows directed towards these cities.
Italians in Madrid, Athens, and Bogota: Research Findings

An exercise of comparison between the results obtained by our research group on young Italians who recently emigrated to Madrid, Athens, and Bogota, can show many aspects of these migration flows that can be of great value for a better understanding of both some recent dynamics of international migration and the changes underway in Italian society. In these notes, therefore, I will only discuss the results that appear perhaps most significant. I will focus, therefore, on two main issues, the first concerning the reasons for choosing to leave Italy, the second concerning the motives behind the choice of Athens, Madrid, or Bogota as a destination.

As to the first issue, two fundamental attitudes towards migration emerge among the respondents, with no significant differences in terms of gender or regional origin. For some interviewees, migration is a highly relevant episode in a proactive, self-centered strategy of individual fulfillment. For other respondents, on the other hand, it is an aspect of a reactive strategy imposed by the current conditions of the Italian labor market and, more generally, of Italian society. Some live their career and mobility path in terms of a sequence of challenges to be overcome, which can have the whole world as a scenario. On the other hand, others live the experience of migration as a somewhat bitter but necessary remedy, allowing them to escape from a stagnant life in their homeland.

Some new migrants from Italy, therefore, have been thinking about living abroad since their student years.

I always say that in a year I have known all the phases of Erasmus and that it has given me the desire to experience outside for the two sides, on the one hand the exaltation of the pleasure you have in doing new things, the sensitivity you acquire, but also the melancholy, the hard part, also I consider it fundamental, the certainty that even if now is a difficult phase then the time will come when I will meet someone and I will have a lot of fun. If you stay in Italy, in your place, you don't have the sensitivity (F, 33, Madrid)

From what I have understood of my life, the priority is to choose the place in which to live. Work comes later (M, 33, Athens)

I would have liked to carry out, to realize a first experience abroad and for a series of coincidences … I could say thanks to Facebook in a very indirect way. This could be an interesting idea […] a family friend of one of my current partners, who is very well positioned here in Bogotá, had found her best friend from university, the mother of my friend, through Facebook. She realized that the mom had a son and invited him to vacation in Bogotá, he was convinced that the

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*I reproduce here some of the quotes we have already used in other works related to Italian migration to Madrid or Athens (Maddaloni, ed., 2019; De Rosa, Maddaloni, 2020; Maddaloni, Moffa, 2020; Delli Paoli, Maddaloni, 2021).*
country had great potential. He managed to convince me and another friend to
follow him in this adventure and that's why I'm here basically (M, 37, Bogota)

Others have come to define a project of emigration as a difficult
compromise between aspirations and opportunities, chosen when there is no
viable alternative.

After [my graduation] I tried to get back on my own by opening a publishing
house, a website, trying to make use of my academic skills. I started to work and
I loved that job, but when I began to see that a huge amount of my income was to
be spent on taxes and services that were not worth paying for, I was discouraged
and I felt that I was making a sacrifice that I did not have to make and was not
worth making. So instead of investing time and spending on something I didn't
believe in I preferred to experience abroad (M, 32, Madrid).

Ehhhh, I completed my education full of high hopes [laughs] I had a good final
grade, top marks, so anyway I hoped to find a job, to enter the labour market
even with an internship, at least to get a reimbursement of expenses to be less
dependent on my parents. But I didn't find anything. So, I started looking for jobs
that weren't inherent to my education and training. You get to a certain point and
say, "I want to work at any cost!" (F, 33, Athens)

[...] I graduated in March, from March to August I had a period of searching for
a job where absolutely nothing arrived. In August I reached the peak of my
endurance, in the sense that "I don't want to live a life at home with my parents, I
don't want to depend on them", plus I started to have some problems, now I think
it's a bit exaggerated to use this term, but I think it was a beginning of
depression, in the sense that I didn't feel ...

You were feeling sad.
That's right, the fact that I didn't have a job. More than sad and discouraged I
felt tied down. It's a feeling that I had ... More than pulling outward, more than
having my wrists tied to a wall, I felt tied inward, in the sense as if I had a chain
around my body and this chain with two huge weights. [And so] in ten days I
took the decision, I made the passport, made the ticket, and arrived here in
Bogota, fourteen hours from home (M, 27, Bogota)

We find this divergence also in relation to the hypothesis of returning to
Italy. Those who have developed an active approach to life abroad have no
intention of returning to their country of origin, unless they find favorable
working and/or life conditions.

I'm not going back to Italy, it's like taking a step back. I have a sense of guilt
because I would like other people to have this advancement that I have had, but
you understand well that to make people understand ideas like those of feminism
and integration would be a losing battle. I even see it with just Facebook posts,
who makes me do it? I'm sorry, but it's a losing battle (F, 34, Madrid)
I would like to return to Italy, and I would like to return to [the Italian city] where I studied, but with [an adequate] salary. In Italy, it is clear that you must have at least above 1000 euros to live. [...] This same job can also be done in Rome, with 1000 euros in Rome, but just one bedroom ... costs 3-400 euro [there] (M, 37, Athens)

Well, it also depends on what kind of return, in the sense that we would have some difficulties. First, I would return to Italy only and exclusively if they would offer me a job equal or superior to the one I am doing here, so they should let me return to an Italian university with a permanent role (M, 33, Bogota)

On the other hand, there are some Italian migrants who do not stop dreaming or even actively planning their return to their homeland. Those who have felt forced to emigrate often experience this attitude.

I would come back very gladly, because with all the flaws in the world you have our country, it's my home, I was in a way kicked out. I can't come back for the moment, but if I wanted to come back, even if I was kicked out of this country in quotes, I would come back. I live in a small town of 40000 inhabitants [in Italy], but when I come back and I see myself looking out of the window I embrace the mountain, the hill and the sea, for me I am in the most beautiful place in the world and I say "I don't have this in Madrid" (M, 34, Madrid)

Sure, absolutely yes [I'd come back to Italy]. I liked to live in Italy even before, I like to live in Italy. I miss Rome very much, even Milan where I studied for a few years, even if the costs are much higher, not to compare rents, cost of living, all different things (M, 29, Athens)

Overall are you satisfied with the experience? If you went back would you do it again as is?

Honestly no. [...] I wouldn't do it again [...] I wouldn't do it again ... immigrating to a country, in this case Colombia, to settle down and work okay? For all the experiences I had [here] it's very positive. But if I had to decide again whether to move to Colombia, I wouldn't do it. Would you prefer Italy then? I would prefer Italy (M, 37, Bogota)

Moving on to look at the motives for choosing to emigrate to a specific place in the world, these usually refer to two dimensions that are at the heart of most individual life projects. The first dimension is economic achievement, which, however, can be seen by Italian migrants in three distinct ways.

The first is the search for suitable opportunities to start a business – for example in the field of made-in-Italy catering.
we are opening a ... initially the idea was a pasteria, we wanted to open a classic
Italian pasteria that would work purely as a delivery, take away. Then
unfortunately we had some problems with the venue, and all these things, and a
space that we had found here near [district of Athens], we did not get permission
because it was an archaeological zone and so on, and now we are opening a
space in [district of Athens] that will always be a pasteria, but it will be a bit
more restaurant, so we will also have Italian chopping boards, Italian wines. I
would ... I would like to bring here the classical Italian aperitivo, that doesn’t
exist in Greece (M, 33, Athens)

The second is the attempt to gain a specific job role in a particular sector
of economic life – for example in school or university.

[...] in the third year of primary education science ... no, sorry in the fourth year,
they gave me the opportunity to go and do the internship in Madrid [...]. [This
was in] 2015. I brought a project to the elementary school, a project to the
preschool. After that I continued this project the following year, so in my fifth
year, because it was already new order, and there I did all the thesis work at the
school in Madrid, which is a bilingual public school, so Spanish and English [...]
I did a project on new technologies, on augmented reality at kindergarten and
elementary school. [...] After that I wanted to make an experience outside
Europe, and so, almost for fun at the beginning, I sent four CVs ... for the world,
practically [...] because I sent one to Argentina, one to Beijing, one to Australia
and the last to Colombia [...] and they answered me from Colombia and Beijing.
[...] I had to do the whole process, they had taken me both here and there. Let’s
say that on the basis of economic balance... today I would be in Beijing [...] but
one also has to live. [...] Let’s say that Colombians have a culture more similar to
ours. [...] I left, giving up everything: a permanent job, my house, my family,
everything... and I’ve been here for four years now (F, 34, Bogota)

The third is the search for a decent and relatively stable job – for example
in transnational consumer services.

The duration [of the contract] can vary, from a minimum of three [months] to a
maximum of one year, even two years in special cases, when you go up grade so
there is a small promotion - but mainly they do it on purpose because here they
follow an organizational model that [...] it is also a job, yes, not very productive.
It is nothing that you do for the whole life, at least those who [...] had a previous
job and want to resume, it works because it gives help, it gives a certain stability,
it allows you to be a little covered, then if you can [...], unless one is so good that
even becomes a manager. That takes years, though. It requires a minimum of six,
seven years to climb so much (M, 29, Athens)

The second dimension is personal fulfilment. The latter can be pursued
first and foremost through a couple's life project, in which the partner is a
national of the country or even of the city chosen as the destination.

5The name pasteria usually refers to a workshop selling home-made pasta.
At some point you met this Colombian guy ...

Yes, in [Italian city].

What did he do?

*He was drawing animation, animated drawing, at the Art Institute* [in this city], *he was doing animated drawing and in the meantime he was working as a photographer and also as a goldsmith. Then he took part in a project through the Region [...], they took him on, he was chosen from among a number of designers, and he took part in a theatre show with animations [...].

But at a certain point he decided to come back ... or did you decide together?

*He no longer had a visa. The Art Institute had helped him a lot for several years, but then after six years, he already had duties here in Colombia* (F, 36, Bogota)

Sometimes the couple bond arises as a result of work migration, and may also involve non-natives of the country. This is particularly true for those who work for international organizations or transnational companies, regardless of their position in the internal hierarchy.

Do you and your brother live together? Or do you have two houses?

*We lived together at the beginning and then he met a girl and went to live with her and there is my boyfriend here, because actually we were three at the beginning, then it was just me and my boyfriend who is French and came here with me* (F, 33, Athens)

As far as personal fulfillment is concerned, another possibility – often practiced by those who have not yet passed the age of thirty – is that the city was chosen because it offered an opportunity to stay abroad and therefore live an experience that many young Italians (and not only Italians) value very highly. In our opinion, in this case it is possible to speak of nomadic migration (Delli Paoli, Maddaloni, 2021), in the sense that Madrid, Athens or Bogota can be seen as stages in a process of enrichment of one's life experiences.

*I can't stand staying in one place. When I start to feel ok, I have my house, I have my friends, I have my things I get anxious, I feel sick. Then I need to move again. I need [...] not to have these things* (F, 24, Athens)

Finally, below the motivations linked to economic opportunities or life projects, one often finds the search for a quality of life that Italy no longer seems to offer. The cost of living is lower in these cities than in Italy and makes it possible to accept relatively low wages.

*Eh no, in reality it is the cost of living that attracted me* [to Greece], *because doing two calculations, being a translator, it is clear that I would also like to return to [northern European country] because I found myself very well but life is very expensive and therefore [...] so Greece is one of those destinations that is very ideal, where you spend little and you can manage* (M, 37, Athens)

The ability to freely choose a lifestyle that might be objectionable in Italy is also considered an important reason to continue living in the destination city.


Why wouldn’t I go back to Italy? Here in Madrid do you see a gay couple on the street, do you see someone make a comment or look at them badly? No. Now, that’s a difference that would never make me go back. Feminist camp, también. Here you can even go naked on the street, no one will tell you “A” and if something happens to you, no one will say it’s your fault. It’s a different mentality, I can’t go back to Italy. You gonna tell me why these things don’t exist in Madrid? Yes, perhaps, but common public opinion is different. Italy – the more time passes and the less I want to come back (F, 34, Madrid).

Other reasons supporting the main ones are more related to circumstances. For example, Madrid and Athens are valued for the closeness between the Italian way of life and the local one. In another paper, we talked about Mediterranean migration to capture this widespread attitude (Delli Paoli, Maddaloni, 2021). In contrast, life in Bogota is more criticized because of urban congestion, huge inequalities, and the risks associated with petty crime.

[Bogotá is] a very big city okay? A very big city and it has many possibilities okay? Despite the fact that many times it is difficult, isn’t it, to breathe, but really to breathe, not only from the biological point of view but also from the human point of view ... it is a city that gives many possibilities, isn’t it? [...] From this point of view I find it a positive aspect. The aspect that I find most negative in this city, apart from what you just said, as you well know, is the traffic, the congestion, the chaos. It's not easy to get used to; for goodness sake, many times one says "we have traffic too", for sure (M, 37, Bogota)

Concluding Remarks

I cannot begin these concluding remarks without mentioning that in this paper I have presented only some of the research results we have obtained by working on recent Italian emigration to Madrid, Athens and Bogota. This comparative exercise has, nevertheless, made it possible to highlight that the two opposing theories on the new Italian emigration (see above, section 2). both capture some features of this phenomenon.

Many young Italians leave Italy mainly because they are eager to escape the crisis that the country has been going through for many years (Maddaloni, 2016). For them, therefore, expatriation can be seen as an exit solution (Maddaloni, 2017) to the persistent problems of economic stagnation and cultural backwardness of Italian society, problems that now can be found as much in the South as in the North of the country.

In this search for a better future for themselves, they meet other Italians, motivated to expatriate mainly for reasons of self-realization, both economic and personal. They constitute the other pole of this recent migratory flow: individuals who see themselves as active agents in a path of labor and personal mobility that is conceived from the beginning as a path of international migration. Some of these go on to live authentic global lives – an attitude we can find both among younger people, oriented above all to accumulating life and work experience abroad (Delli Paoli, Maddaloni, 2021), and among 30-
year-olds who choose a career as managers in an international organization or transnational company, or who set out to find even relatively de-skilled employment in the transnational segment of the labor market (Maddaloni, Moffa, 2020). We leave it to future research to ascertain the extent to which ongoing disruptions in the international order – in particular, the persistence of the COVID epidemic and the war events in Eastern Europe – are producing changes in this composite migration pattern.

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