

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

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Current literature on international migration has focused mainly on 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 recent wave of migration from Italy may be of particular interest for several reasons. Research already conducted on these issues has shown that the recent upswing in Italian emigration is not solely due to and 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 Italy's changing position in the international division of labor to the individual search for a better quality of life. In this article, we will draw on the results of some research on Italian emigrants in three major urban centers – Athens, Madrid and Bogota – to identify the factors and mechanisms that trigger these new migration paths. Although each of the research works was conducted independently, using qualitative techniques of social analysis, particularly through semi-structured interviews, we believe that a comparison of the results obtained in these three research experiences may be useful in clarifying the rapidly evolving picture of the new Italian emigration.

Keywords: *Italy, crisis, globalization, migration, qualitative research*

Introduction

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

This is also the case of Italy. Since the 1970s, Italy has become a destination area for migration from less developed countries, especially from Eastern Europe, the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. But since the 1990s, and especially after the 2008 economic crisis, Italy has turned to be a source of migration flows.

The purpose of this article is to discuss some of the results obtained from three surveys conducted in the last few years on recently emigrated Italians. This research focused on Italians who emigrated to Athens, Madrid and Bogota, three major cities which are also capitals of their countries – the first two in southern Europe, the last in Latin America. This research was conducted primarily with

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qualitative survey techniques, which imposes several limitations on our ability to obtain knowledge pertinent to the entire field of migration studies, or even just to southern European migration. However, comparing the results of this research may suggest new hypotheses for an adequate understanding of this recent wave of migration from Italy.

Therefore, in the next section we will describe the object and purpose of the paper, which offers a comparative insight into some recent migration flows from Italy, also producing 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 above-mentioned research paths, which are mainly based on qualitative techniques. In addition, some of the main characteristics of the survey participants shall be described. The fourth section will discuss the main results obtained in each research, with particular reference to the reasons for migration. Finally, in the conclusion we will try to outline some implications of this comparison for further research on migration from Italy and other developed countries.

The New Migration from Italy

Recent reviews on Italian emigration (Audenino and Tirabassi 2008, Fondazione Migrantes 2011, Bonifazi 2013, Pugliese 2018) point out that Italy produced at least three waves of migration in contemporary times. The first, which reached its greatest intensity in the years leading up to World War I, was mainly directed toward the Americas. Young men left the countryside of an overpopulated, poor and backward country in search of work and life opportunities in sparsely populated countries which, albeit challenging to live in, offered many options and alternatives. They moved from a country that did not give them hope to other lands that did, regardless of their distance. Sometimes the migrants returned home, someone defeated, someone else victorious. Other times they called their wives, girlfriends, relatives, or even just their 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 of the mid-1970s. Again, the main role in emigration was played by young men, who left the countryside of the poorest and most backward regions of a country which was nevertheless experiencing an era of tremendous growth and modernization. Similarly, alongside many emigrants who returned to their villages at the end of their careers, there were many others who – again – called wives, girlfriends, relatives and friends to themselves, thus creating strong chains of migration. The main difference with the first wave of emigration concerns the destination areas, which this time were mainly Western European countries. Another difference pertains to the social climate in which the migration processes took place. The Italy of the 1950s and 1960s was a country conquering records of growth and modernization in the world. In this context, it was not so much the lack of prospects as the growth of expectations that drove people to migrate to other countries. Rather than escaping a fate of poverty, second-wave migrants sought to shorten the path that would lead them to wealth, or at least to moderate but respectable prosperity.

While the first and second waves of migration had some common features, the third wave seems very different from the previous ones. First, it includes new Italians, that is, foreigners who had taken up residence or even citizenship in Italy and then decided to change countries. 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 and Leonardi 2018). Finally, many new migrants from Italy are highly skilled individuals seeking professional gratification abroad (Beltrame 2007, Gjergji 2015, Minneci 2015, Tomei 2017).

Alongside changes in the demographic features of Italian migration, there are also changes in the 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 superfast trains has radically changed the perception of distance between the places of origin and destination of migration (Grieco and Urry 2011). Social media make early socialization to the migration experience possible, enabling the accumulation of information and personal contacts outside the usual network of relatives, neighbors, and childhood friends (Dekker and Engbersen 2014). In addition, new means of transportation and communication make the experience of transnationality accessible to recent Italian migrants (Vertovec 2009). Like other mobile people from more developed countries, new Italian migrants can choose whether or not (or to what extent) to maintain ties with their home society.

The new Italian emigration also differs from previous ones in terms of destination areas. In accordance with more general trends prevailing in the “age of migration” (Castles et al. 2013), Italians are moving to all countries of the world. The traditional destinations of Italian emigration still attract many people. This is as true for major Western European countries as it is for the United States, Canada, Australia, Argentina and Brazil. Alongside these mobility flows, however, there are others heading to many other countries, some of which seem to be less developed than Italy (Fondazione Migrantes 2020). For this reason, our research work focused on flows that are still little known, such as those heading to Greece, Spain or Colombia, that is, countries where Italian migration was very limited until recent years¹.

Finally, recent Italian emigration presents different features from those of the past in terms of the structural factors and personal motivations behind individual migration choices. Among the structural factors, an important role is certainly played by Italy’s economic stagnation and the increasingly evident crisis of the development model followed by the country after World War II (Maddaloni

¹Specifically, according to the Fondazione Migrantes, Spain was home to 192,036 Italians on consular registers, Colombia 21,038 and Greece 12,260 as of January 1, 2020. This is of particular significance since none of these countries had been affected by previous waves of Italian emigration (Fondazione Migrantes 2020).

2016). Alongside this, the modernization of Italian society and its increasing permeability to globalization has allowed many Italians, especially young people, to become part of international networks of work and leisure. This has generated opportunities for mobility unthinkable in the recent past, both in terms of numbers and variety. Therefore, many Italians, especially young workers and professionals, see their migration choice as dictated essentially by the lack of career opportunities in their home country. Many others, however, tend to experience it more in terms of a lifestyle choice (Benson and O'Reilly 2009, Torkington 2010, Benson and Osbaldiston 2014, Benson and O'Reilly 2016), prompted by interest in the world outside Italy. A debate ensued between those who argue that the new Italian emigration is essentially a flight from a country in crisis and those who 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 and complex social reality, which can never be explained by reference to a single theoretical principle (King 2012). But how representative are they of new migration flows such as those from Italy to Athens, Madrid or Bogota? The lines of research we will discuss in this paper seek to address this issue.

Italians in Madrid, Athens, and Bogota: Research Methodology

All research focused on people between 20 and 39 years of age². 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 placement, career opportunities and household patterns are mostly defined and mainly realized at this stage of personal life. Therefore, deciding to answer these questions through a migration project seems of great relevance because of the sociological implications of this choice, both in terms of causes and consequences.

The choice of destination areas on which to investigate was mainly induced by reasons related to professional opportunities (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 inexpensive³. Alongside this, it is worth noting that none of the previously mentioned cities had been home to significant migration flows from Italy before the 1990s or the first decade of the new century. Therefore, most of the Italians 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 Bogota⁴.

²However, research in Athens and Bogota also included people over the age of 39, as well as some participant observation exercises, both online and in-person.

³Due to the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic during 2020, the research conducted on Italians in Bogota was completed through video interviews.

⁴The interviews were conducted in Italian, either by myself or by another member of the research team (as in the case of Madrid).

Regarding the sampling process, in each research a first approach to Italian migrants was made through social media (more specifically, through blogs, Facebook pages, WhatsApp groups, etc.) (De Rosa and Maddaloni 2020, Maddaloni and Moffa 2021, Maddaloni 2022). Starting from these contacts, we used the snowball sampling technique and carried out several semi-structured interviews with Italians living in the target areas. We tried to balance the group of interviewees by gender, age, and regional origin in order to get a broader view of these recent migrant communities and provide a degree of saturation of the internal variability within the target population. We preferred to conduct a qualitative survey rather than a quantitative one, not only because of the technical difficulties arising from the absence of an adequate sampling list, but also because we think that qualitative research is better suited to capture the novelties inherent in emerging social phenomena (Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz 2018), such as migration in the era of neoliberal globalization, the creation of a common European space, and the economic and social crisis that has affected Southern European countries (Maddaloni 2021).

Therefore, we chose to use the semi-structured interview technique, based on the principles of the hermeneutic approach, which allows the interviewer to be more flexible when conducting the interview, conforming to the interviewee's verbal and nonverbal language (Montesperelli 1998). In addition, this research approach involves a specific recording, transcription, and coding process (Diana and Montesperelli 2005, see also Silverman 2010, 2015). The procedure makes it possible to analyze respondents' behaviors, attitudes, and opinions around certain semantic areas, considered relevant by the research team. In our case, these dimensions include: the respondents' educational background and work experience in Italy or abroad, prior to their arrival in the destination area; their current position in the labor market and local society; opinions on the economic and social situation in both the areas of origin and destination; plans for the future; and, finally, their social identity.

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

As for the geographic origin of our respondents, 18 were from northern regions (4 in Madrid, 7 in Athens, 7 in Bogotá), 9 from central regions (4 in Madrid, 3 in Athens, 2 in Bogotá), and 16 from southern regions (4 in Madrid, 7 in Athens, 5 in Bogotá). This is an expected outcome, as the selection of respondents was controlled with regard to this variable.

All of them arrived in the destination areas in the last decade, so they can be considered part of the so-called new Italian migration. All of them had a level of education equal to, or higher than, a high school diploma. In particular, 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 a portion of this emigration can be understood as a true “brain drain”. In fact, most of the Italian population in this age group attended university (Bonifazi and Livi Bacci 2014). Moreover, high levels of education are a factor that favors emigration (Pugliese 2018). Highly educated people, in fact, are more open to work and life experiences in contexts other than their origin.

In addition, many of them (though not all) participated in the Erasmus program or similar experiences abroad, which led them to an early positive attitude toward international mobility. The role played by these events in creating both a fund of personal confidence (in one’s ability to cope abroad) and a capital of knowledge and social contacts that strengthen the individual propensity to emigrate is now well recognized in the literature (see for instance King et al. 2016).

The biggest differences among the three groups of interviewees concern their employment status. In fact, Italians in Bogota are employed as entrepreneurs, managers, academics, professionals, even teachers in Italian schools. In contrast, the occupational profile of Italians interviewed in Madrid and Athens is more heterogeneous (Maddaloni 2019a, De Rosa and Maddaloni 2020, Maddaloni and Moffa 2021). It includes not only many of 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 areas which ultimately provide the setting for our research. Madrid and Athens are both located in countries whose economic and social conditions appear, at least at first glance, similar to those in Italy. Bogota is a city in Latin America, an area still lagging behind Europe in development and with significant problems of poverty and deviance. However, even between Madrid and Athens there are some differences, which produce some consequences in the migratory flows directed towards these cities.

Italians in Madrid, Athens, and Bogota: Research Findings

A comparison of the results obtained by our research group on young Italians who recently emigrated to Madrid, Athens and Bogota can show many aspects of these migratory flows that can be of great use for a better understanding of both some recent international migration dynamics and the changes taking place in Italian society. In these notes we will limit ourselves to discussing a few findings that appear perhaps most significant. We will focus, therefore, on two main questions, 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 destination⁵.

⁵As is customary in qualitative research, the choice of the quotes to be included in the article was made according to criteria of representativeness and authenticity. They have been chosen basically because they reflect the strongest patterns in the collected data and may be helpful in

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 may 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 myself outside for two reasons. 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 it's 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)

As far as I understand my life, the priority is to choose the place to live. Work comes next (M, 33, Athens)

I would have liked to carry out a first experience abroad and for a series of coincidences ... I could say thanks to Facebook in a very indirect way. [...] A family friend of one of my current partners, who is very well positioned here in Bogota, had found her best friend from university, the mother of my friend, through Facebook. She realized that her friend had a son and invited him to vacation in Bogotá. He became convinced that the country had great potential. He managed to persuade 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 the emigration project as a difficult trade-off 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).

illustrating them to the reader (Corden and Sainsbury 2006, Lingard 2019, Eldh et al. 2020). Also, it should be noted that the colloquial nature of the interviews inevitably results in a somewhat imprecise language. Finally, it should be noted that some quotes have appeared in previous works (Maddaloni 2019b, De Rosa and Maddaloni 2020, Maddaloni and Moffa 2021, Delli Paoli and Maddaloni 2021, Maddaloni 2022).

I finished my studies with high hopes [laughs]. I had a good final grade, the highest grade, so I still hoped to find a job, to enter the job market even with an internship, to have at least an expense reimbursement and depend less on my parents. But I couldn't find anything. So, I started looking for jobs that were not related to my education. You get to a certain point and say, "I want to work no matter what!" (F, 33, Athens)

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

You felt sad.

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

This variance can be found also as regards the idea of coming back 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 backwards. I have a sense of guilt because I wish other people had this advancement that I had, but you understand well that getting ideas like feminism and integration understood would be a losing battle. I see it even 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... it 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 would have to let me return to an Italian university in a permanent role (M, 33, Bogota)

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

I would come back very gladly, because with all the flaws in the world that we have in our country, it is my home. In a way I was kicked out. For the time being I cannot come back, but if I wanted to come back, even if I was kicked out of this country, 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 the window I embrace the mountain, the hill and the sea, I am in the most beautiful place in the world for me and I say, "I don't have this in Madrid (M, 34, Madrid)

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

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

Honestly, no. [...] I wouldn't do it again [...] I wouldn't ... immigrate to a country, in this case Colombia, to settle down and work, okay? For all the experiences I've had [here] it's very positive. But if I had to decide again whether to move to Colombia, I wouldn't.

Would you prefer Italy then?

I would prefer Italy (M, 37, Bogota)

Moving on to considering the motives for choosing to emigrate to a particular place in the world, these usually refer to two dimensions which are crucial in most individual life plans. The first dimension is economic achievement, the second one being self-actualization. As for economic achievement, it should be noted, however, that Italian migrants see it in three distinct ways.

The first way 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 for a pasteria⁶, we wanted to open a classic Italian pasteria that would work only as a delivery, take away. Then, unfortunately, we had some problems with the venue, and all these things, and a space we had found near here [Athens neighborhood], we didn't get the permit because it was an archaeological area and so on. Now we are opening a space in [another Athens neighborhood] that will still be a pasteria, but it will be a little bit more of a restaurant, so we will also have Italian cutting boards, Italian wines. I would like to... I would like to bring here the classic Italian aperitivo, which does not exist in Greece (M, 33, Athens)

The second way 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 my primary education degree program... no, sorry in the fourth year, they gave me the opportunity to go to Madrid for internship [...]. [This was in] 2015. I took a project to the elementary school, a project to the preschool. Then I continued this project the following year, so in the fifth year, and there I did all the thesis work in the Madrid school, which is a bilingual public school, Spanish and English [...] I did a project on new technologies, on augmented reality at the preschool and elementary school. [...] After that, I wanted to have an experience outside Europe, and so, almost as a joke at the beginning, I sent four CVs ...

⁶The name *pasteria* usually refers to a workshop selling home-made pasta.

throughout the world, practically [...] because I sent one to Argentina, one to Beijing, one to Australia, and the last one to Colombia [...] and I got answers from Colombia and Beijing. [...] I had to go through the whole process, they hired me both here and there. Let's say on the basis of economic balance ... I would be in Beijing today [...] But you also have to live. [...] Let's say Colombians have a culture more like ours. [...] I left, giving up everything: the permanent job, the house, the family, everything... and now I've been here for four years (F, 34, Bogota)

The third way 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 in rank so there is a little promotion [...] It is also a job, yes, not very productive. It is nothing that you do all your life, at least those who [...] had a previous job and want to resume,. It works because it gives some help, it gives a certain stability, it allows you to be a little covered, then if you can [...] Unless one is so good that one becomes a manager as well. But that takes years. It takes at least six, seven years to climb that much (M, 29, Athens)

As we mentioned before, the second motivational dimension for these migration paths 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 destination.

At some point you met this Colombian guy...

Yes, in [Italian city].

What was he doing?

He was doing 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 of the Region [...], they took him on, he was chosen among some cartoonists, 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 different homes?

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

In terms of personal fulfillment, another possibility – often practiced by those under the age of 30 – is that the city was chosen because it offered the opportunity to stay abroad, thus living an experience that many young Italians (and not only Italians) greatly appreciate. In our opinion, in this case one can speak of nomadic migration (Delli Paoli and Maddaloni 2021), in the sense that Madrid, Athens or Bogota can be seen as stages in a process of enriching one's life experiences.

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

Moreover, below the motivations related to economic opportunities or life plans, 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 wages that would be considered relatively low at home.

Eh no, actually it's the cost of living that attracted me [to Greece], because doing two calculations, being a translator, it's clear that I would also like to go back [to the northern European country where I was before] because I had a very good time but life is very expensive and so [...] Greece is one of those destinations that is very ideal, where you spend very 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 don't I want to go back to Italy? Here in Madrid if you see a gay couple on the street, do you see someone making a comment or looking at them badly? No. That is a difference that would never make me go back. On the feminist side, también. Here you can even go naked on the street, nobody will say "A" to you, and if something happens to you nobody will say "It's your fault". It's a different mentality, I can't go back to Italy. Can you tell me why these things don't exist in Madrid? Yes, maybe [they occur sometimes], but public opinion is different. Italy... the more time passes, the less I want to go back (F, 34, Madrid).

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

[Bogotá is] a very big city, okay? A very big city with a lot of possibilities, okay? Despite the fact that many times it is difficult, right? 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, right? [...] From this point of view I find it a positive aspect. The thing 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 (M, 37, Bogota)

Concluding Remarks

We cannot begin these concluding remarks without mentioning that in this paper we have discussed only some of the research results obtained from working on recent Italian emigration to Madrid, Athens and Bogota. However, this comparative exercise has made it possible to point out that both theories of new Italian emigration (see section 2 above) capture some features of this rather new phenomenon.

Many young Italians leave Italy mainly because they want to escape the crisis 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 now shared as much by the South as by the North of the country.

In this search for a better future for themselves, they meet other Italians, motivated to expatriate primarily for reasons of self-realization, in both economic and personal terms. They may be seen as 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 outset as a path of international migration. Some of them set out to live authentic global lives – an attitude we can find both among younger people, who are oriented primarily toward accumulating life and work experiences abroad (Delli Paoli and Maddaloni 2021), and among those in their thirties who choose a career as a manager in an international organization or transnational company, or even set out to find even relatively de-skilled employment in the transnational segment of the labor market (Maddaloni and Moffa 2021). 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-19 epidemic and war events in Eastern Europe – are producing changes in this complex migration pattern.

From a more general point of view, we believe that these research findings on recent migration from Italy can highlight the increasingly composite character assumed by international migration in the era of neoliberal globalization. Usually, migration to the core of the global system is seen as the most important, while migration to countries with different economic or cultural qualities is less highlighted. However, Italians from different backgrounds (economic or social) have been involved in migrations not only to the Great North, but also to countries commonly perceived as semi-peripheral, such as those in Southern Europe, or even peripheral, “failed” or “corrupt”, like Colombia. Moreover, while there is no doubt that purely economic factors continue to explain a preponderant part of migration processes, the role played by other possible drivers should no longer be overlooked. Nor should the individual aspiration for professional and social mobility be considered only in terms of income. Contemporary migration research should no longer neglect the non-economic, social and cultural motivations behind many migration choices: which, therefore, should always be seen also as individual lifestyle choices (Benson and O’Reilly 2016).

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