
Immigration in Italy before Jerry Masslo: the social profile of the immigrant in 1980s research

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Attraverso la consultazione di fonti d'archivio e dei lavori di ricerca scientifica prodotti nel periodo di riferimento, l'articolo ricostruisce la rappresentazione pubblica dell'immigrazione in Italia tra la fine degli anni Settanta e la fine degli anni Ottanta. Incentrato principalmente sul ruolo della comunità scientifica nel considerare la complessità dell'immigrazione, l'articolo ripercorre l'evoluzione della figura dell'immigrato fino all'assassinio di Jerry Essan Masslo (1989), lo spartiacque per la storia dell'immigrazione in Italia.

Parole chiave: storia dell'immigrazione, ricerca scientifica, Jerry Essan Masslo

This article reconstructs the public representation of immigration in Italy from the late 1970s until the late 1980s. Using archival sources and research produced during the period under consideration, with a special focus on the role of the scientific community in considering the complexity of immigration, the article traces the evolution of the immigrant's social profile up to the assassination of Jerry Essan Masslo in 1989, a turning point in the history of immigration in Italy.

Key words: history of immigration, scientific research, Jerry Essan Masslo

Scholars who have studied the evolution of immigration in Italy have observed that the phenomenon entered the public sphere in the 1980s. The assassination of the young South African immigrant Jerry Essan Masslo in the countryside of Caserta, in the summer of 1989, marked a turning point in the history of immigration in Italy, attracting media and political attention and legitimising the first great Italian anti-racist movement.¹ However, even before the inci-

Received: 20/06/2020. Accepted for publication: 18/10/2021.

First publication in "Italia contemporanea" 301/2023.

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¹ On this point, see Michele Colucci, *Storia dell'immigrazione straniera in Italia. Dal 1945 ai nostri giorni*, Rome, Carocci, 2018, p. 73. For a narrative account of Jerry Essan Masslo's assassination, see also Giulio Di Luzio, *A un passo dal sogno. Gli avvenimenti che hanno cambiato la storia dell'immigrazione in Italia*, Nardò (LE), Besa Editrice, 2016.

dent, there had been a growing public awareness of the scale and characteristics of the complex and evolving phenomenon of immigration. One of the first to study the presence of foreigners in the peninsula was the sociologist Enrico Pugliese, who spoke explicitly of the ‘discovery of immigration’; he noted how in the early 1980s, ‘the novelty of the existence of immigrants’ added to ‘the traditional migratory movements that had affected Italy in the past’.² Legal experts such as Paolo Morozzo della Rocca have focused on the perception of immigration in public space, arguing that it was already ‘a problem in the 1980s, when migratory flows, far from being impressive’, were nevertheless becoming ‘visible’.³ Some of the historians who have written important works on Republican Italy have placed the ‘discovery of immigrants’ in the second half of the 1980s, claiming that even then ‘the eruption of the phenomenon’ was accompanied by ‘an explosion of fears, be they sincere or not’.⁴ Luca Einaudi, who analysed the evolution of Italian policies in the period 1986-1990, observed that ‘immigration was beginning to be visible’,⁵ whereas Paola Corti and Matteo Sanfilippo, who have traced the historical evolution of human mobility along the Italian peninsula, demonstrate that ‘starting from 1981 [...] the numerical quantity and above all the media perception of the immigration phenomenon’ increased ‘from year to year, sometimes undergoing real upsurges’.⁶ Finally, Michele Colucci — author of the first history of foreign immigration in Republican Italy — wrote that in the same period, the presence of foreigners seemed able to ‘penetrate mass culture’.⁷

This broad consensus on the identification of the 1980s as the moment when the theme of immigration permanently entered the Italian public sphere, expressed at different times and by scholars from different disciplines, was justified both by statistical data — representative of a real numerical increase in the number of foreigners in Italy — and by the occurrence of episodes and

² Enrico Pugliese, *L'Italia tra migrazioni internazionali e migrazioni interne*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002, pp. 72-73. Historian Valerio De Cesaris has also recently referred to the interpretative category of “discovery”; referring to the period between the late 1980s and early 1990s and the massive arrival of Albanian immigrants in Italy on the merchant ship Vlora in July 1991, De Cesaris defined the period 1989-1991 as the ‘three years of the discovery of immigration’. Valerio De Cesaris, *Il grande sbarco. L'Italia e la scoperta dell'immigrazione*, Milan, Guerini e Associati, 2018, pp. 7-8.

³ Paolo Morozzo della Rocca, *Gli immigrati e i dilemmi della nuova cittadinanza*, in Enrica Asquer, Emanuele Bernardi, Carlo Fumian (eds.), *L'Italia contemporanea dagli anni Ottanta a oggi*, vol. II, *Il mutamento sociale*, Rome, Carocci, 2014, p. 155.

⁴ Guido Crainz, *Il paese reale. Dall'assassinio di Moro all'Italia di oggi*, Rome, Donzelli, 2002, p. 267. See also Piero Craveri, *La repubblica dal 1958 al 1992*, Turin, Utet, 1995, pp. 1008-1023.

⁵ Luca Einaudi, *Le politiche dell'immigrazione in Italia dall'Unità a oggi*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2007, p. 134.

⁶ Paola Corti, Matteo Sanfilippo, *L'Italia e le migrazioni*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2012, pp. 158-159.

⁷ M. Colucci, *Storia dell'immigrazione straniera in Italia.*, cit., p. 73.

incidents that reflected an objective qualitative evolution of the phenomenon. From a quantitative point of view, although the collection and analysis of population data tackled the problem ‘of reorienting a statistical system organised to capture outflows that were by then declining and, by necessity, unprepared to account for incoming flows’,⁸ signs of a significant growth in the number of immigrants on Italian territory began to appear as early as the early 1980s. The 1981 population census, for example, estimated the presence of ‘211,000’ legally resident foreigners, to which ‘110,000 temporarily present’ were to be ‘added’,⁹ with ‘an increase of 45.4 per cent’ between 1979 and 1980.¹⁰ From a qualitative point of view, as early as the second half of the 1970s, there was a real proliferation of surveys and scientific research — particularly of a demographic, economic and sociological nature — on the living and working conditions of immigrants, which further developed the public representation of foreigners in Italy. In addition to these in-depth studies, the main national newspapers published discussions between experts and scholars that revealed the fear — expressed by some of the most eminent Italian economists — of a damaging ‘replacement effect’ of Italian labour by foreign labour in an already precarious labour market.¹¹ In terms of the wider public debate, a profile of immigrants began to take shape in the early 1980s — sometimes also subject to simplifications and stereotypical narratives — in a growing number of journalistic investigations, which were conducted in response to both news events and the first overt episodes of racism and xenophobia.

The immigrant in Italian research in the late 1970s and early 1980s

Scholars from different academic disciplines were among the first to assess the quantitative dimension and deepen their qualitative knowledge of the foreign presence in Italy between the 1970s and 1980s. Demographers, economists, sociologists and anthropologists launched research projects and surveys from their respective points of observation and with different instruments, depending on their disciplinary backgrounds. In the second half of the 1970s, there was no shortage of studies aimed at developing more detailed knowledge of the first

⁸ Corrado Bonifazi, *L’immigrazione straniera in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2007, p. 107.

⁹ These numbers are also mentioned in C. Bonifazi, *L’immigrazione straniera in Italia*, cit., p. 130.

¹⁰ P. Corti, M. Sanfilippo, *L’Italia e le migrazioni*, cit., p. 157. The increase in the number of presences after 1980 is also due to a new counting method by the Ministry of the Interior, which, starting that year, began to record foreigners who were issued a residence permit lasting less than three months, previously excluded from the count.

¹¹ For an account of the interventions of several Italian economists, including Giorgio Foà and Romano Prodi, all of whom essentially agree in objecting to the arrival of foreign labour in local and national labour markets, see M. Colucci, *Storia dell’immigrazione straniera in Italia*, cit., pp. 60-61.

concrete examples of labour migration and the innovative scope of the entry of immigrant labour in certain territorial contexts and specific segments of the Italian labour market. In 1976, the anthropologist Antonino Cusumano published a volume entitled *Il ritorno infelice*,¹² in which he analysed the stories of Tunisians who were initially employed as deck-hands on Italian fishing boats operative in the Mediterranean, to later enter the agricultural labour market in western Sicily, not without controversy and fibrillation.¹³ The profile that emerged from the Sicilian scholar's work was that of an almost exclusively male form of proximity immigration, within which, however, the choice of clothing — other than being an element of recognisability — also reflected a generational gap, especially between the elderly, who were reluctant to abandon traditional clothing, and the young, more inclined to assimilate the customs and traditions of the place of arrival. With regard to the Tunisians of Mazara del Vallo, Cusumano wrote the following:

They can be recognised by their darker faces, their black, frizzy hair and their dry, somewhat lanky figures. Their way of dressing includes some typical Arab clothing in the now common European look. In fact, in Tunisia, several still wear the famous 'kaftans', jackets and those hooded cloaks called 'burnous'. There are also quite some immigrants who leave their brides wrapped in the characteristic and traditional veil, the 'sefsari'. However, However, for obvious reasons of practicality, no one carries the traditional costumes of their country of origin with them in their suitcases. The elderly, who out of objective necessity are less sensitive to Western clothing trends, usually wear short, loose jackets over shirts that are wide open at the collar. The younger immigrants, instead, tend to conform their way of dressing to that of the local youth, and therefore take care to buy new shirts with a modern cut and bright colours. Many wear sandals — not just for the summer season; their fine and elegant workmanship testifies to the Arab craftsmanship. Sometimes one can spot older Tunisian immigrants wearing the typical 'chechia' on their head. This typically red, brimless headgear adheres perfectly to the head in its concave part and differs from that most commonly used in Morocco, the 'fez', which has the form of a truncated cone, with a silk tassel falling from the centre.¹⁴

In the same period, the founder of the Api-Colf association, Father Erminio Crippa, coordinated a study on the employment of foreign women in the home care sector,¹⁵ published in 1976 under the title "Lavoro amaro: le estere in Italia".¹⁶ The text described a situation of articulated immigration, covering a

¹² Antonino Cusumano, *Il ritorno infelice: i tunisini in Sicilia*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1976.

¹³ On the story of Tunisian workers in Sicily between the 1960s and 1970s, see M. Colucci, *Storia dell'immigrazione straniera in Italia*, cit., pp. 39-43. For a more in-depth study, see Giuliano Beniamino Fleri's paper *Fili invisibili. Il caso di Tunisia e Sicilia tra anni '60 e '70*, presented at the conference *Immigrazioni. Migrazioni internazionali e lavoro dagli anni Settanta a oggi. Una prospettiva storica*, held in Salerno and Naples on 22-23 May 2019.

¹⁴ A. Cusumano, *Il ritorno infelice*, cit., p. 31.

¹⁵ For a historical reconstruction of the arrival of foreign women workers in the home care sector in Italy, see Alessandra Gissi, «Le estere». *Immigrazione femminile e lavoro domestico in Italia (1960-1980)*, "Meridiana", 2018, n. 91, pp. 37-56.

¹⁶ Erminio Crippa, *Lavoro amaro: le estere in Italia*, Rome, Api-Colf, 1976.

wide range of nationalities and a great variety of profiles, within which it was nevertheless possible — even if ‘each foreigner [had] a story that was almost always linked to some drama’ — to find very common representative characteristics in the universe of the first ‘foreign domestic helpers in Italy’.¹⁷ These include, for example, a medium-high education level: ‘[T]hree indications are clear to us, namely that there is a category of illiterate women; a consistent proportion of primary school girls; [and] a thick layer of domestic helpers with a middle school certificate and, among Filipino and Ceylonese women, university or high school graduates, analysts and teachers.’¹⁸

These were mostly case studies, which enhanced knowledge of specific territorial contexts of the peninsula that hosted the first immigrant workers or of dynamics linked to the strong presence of foreign labour in specific sectors of the labour market. It was not until the publication, in 1979, of a study conducted by CENSIS on behalf of the Interministerial committee for emigration that the image of the foreigner evolved thanks to this first attempt to quantitatively analyse foreign immigration in Italy as a whole.¹⁹ The work already anticipated in its title, “I lavoratori stranieri in Italia”,²⁰ a representation of immigration centred on the figure of the guest worker, a person solely identified with their function in the national labour market and destined, in a short or long period, to return home, as had happened and continued to happen to many Italian emigrants abroad.²¹ This portrayal of the immigrant was supported by the CENSIS researchers even though they were aware of the ‘spectacular contradiction’ between ‘the importation of foreign labour and the presence in Italy of about 1.5 million unemployed people’.²² Confronted with quantitative estimates that estimated the overall phenomenon at figures oscillating between ‘280,000 and 400,000 people — of which 70/100,000 workers in the domestic sector, 40/60,000 Maghribi (Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria), 20/30,000 Yugoslavians and 30/40,000 Egyptians’,²³ the research offered a description of the foreign worker in a condition of social marginality and exposed to the risk of discrimination, also at the level of public opinion:

Since foreign workers are concentrated, out of necessity and not by choice, in the poorest areas of the large cities, leading a very secluded, almost hidden and isolated life, it is very

¹⁷ E. Crippa, *Lavoro amaro*, cit., p. 28.

¹⁸ E. Crippa, *Lavoro amaro*, cit., p. 29.

¹⁹ L. Einaudi, *Le politiche dell’immigrazione*, cit., pp. 75-76.

²⁰ CENSIS, *I lavoratori stranieri in Italia. Studio elaborato dal CENSIS nel 1978*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1979, in Centro Studi Emigrazione Roma (hereafter CSER), BA 17.02.C36.

²¹ For a historical framework of the regulatory model of incoming migration flows based on the figure of the guest worker, see Michele Colucci, Matteo Sanfilippo, *Le migrazioni. Un’introduzione storica*, Rome, Carocci, 2009, pp. 79-83.

²² CENSIS, *I lavoratori stranieri in Italia*, cit., p. 123, loc. cit. note 20.

²³ CENSIS, *I lavoratori stranieri in Italia*, cit., p. 63, loc. cit. note 20.

easy for public opinion to see in them elements that feed these marginalised areas of the city, if not an actual danger to public health.²⁴

Finally, the research sought to understand the reasons behind the new flows to Italy by making a distinction between the arrival of immigrants and ‘our migrations that occurred in the early 1900s, particularly those heading towards overseas destinations’.²⁵

Emilio Reyneri’s volume “La catena migratoria” (1979) followed precisely in the footsteps of the models that had guided studies on Italian emigration abroad.²⁶ The Milanese sociologist interpreted the new immigration that was affecting southern Europe and Italy as a process to be explained, above all, in relation to the ‘import or export of labour, in order to understand the functioning mechanisms and contradictions of the labour market and productive structure’ of the countries of arrival.²⁷ Not without exposing itself to criticism of a mainly methodological nature,²⁸ this “labourist” approach was visibly oriented to universalise the study of migration by referring to the economic balance between labour demand and supply, and hence to interpret the functioning of flows according to models that could be applied to mobility in different historical periods. Inspired also by a large body of international literature on the “economicist” study of migrations to Europe and the West, which had met with approval starting with the works of Roger W. Böhning,²⁹ this approach left only limited space for the definition of a specific profile of immigrants in Italy, described as people who arrived ‘illegally with tourist passports or without a work contract’, eventually finding precarious employment ‘in the tourist and hotel sector (bartenders, shop assistants, dishwashers, labourers) and in personal services (maids, cleaning companies)’, but also ‘on Sicilian fishing boats, at petrol stations, in the Piedmontese mines (Poles), among street vendors and on building sites in almost all large cities’.³⁰

²⁴ CENSIS, *I lavoratori stranieri in Italia*, cit., p. 123, loc. cit. note 20.

²⁵ CENSIS, *I lavoratori stranieri in Italia*, cit., p. 125, loc. cit. note 20.

²⁶ Emilio Reyneri, *La catena migratoria. Il ruolo dell'emigrazione nel mercato del lavoro di arrivo e di esodo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1979.

²⁷ E. Reyneri, *La catena migratoria*, cit., p. 7.

²⁸ One of the most critical objections to Reyneri’s work came from Corrado Bonifazi, who wrote that ‘the work still moves too much within the conceptual schemes and interpretative paradigms that are typical of the just-ended European migration experience, failing to grasp, also because of the objective difficulty of highlighting the new features of the phenomenon at the international level and of identifying all its consequences, the transformation taking place and the transition from *demand-oriented* to *supply-oriented* flows, more yielding than the previous ones and capable of expanding even in environmental situations that are not very favourable to their development’. C. Bonifazi, *L'immigrazione straniera in Italia*, cit., p. 89.

²⁹ I am referring, in particular, to Roger W. Böhning’s *The Migration of Workers in the Kingdom and the European Community*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972. Böhning would later pick up his arguments in *Studies in International Labour Migration*, London, McMillan, 1984.

³⁰ E. Reyneri, *La catena migratoria*, cit., pp. 117-118.

Apart from the investigations conducted by research institutes or public universities already at the end of the 1970s, trade unions and certain exponents of the lay and Christian associative universe began to express an interest in the production of a constant ‘documentation of the migration phenomenon’, a sign that private organisations were assuming a leading role also ‘at the level of the representation’ of the foreign presence in Italy.³¹ An example of this tendency was the work promoted, again in 1979, by ECAP-CGIL in collaboration with the chair of sociology at the University of Rome. Still based on a “workerist” approach to the interpretation of migration flows to Italy, the research produced several outputs, including a summary and two separate texts that were published in advance. The first was a review of the sources used to study the foreign presence in Lazio, published in 1979,³² which went so far as to mention different categories of immigrants, juxtaposing the profiles of ‘Tunisian fishermen employed on Sicilian fishing boats’ and ‘female domestic helpers of African and Asian origin’, by now assumed to be widely representative of the foreign presence, to the figures of ‘refugees and students’.³³ On the other hand, the innovative scope of the publication consisted in the intention — even if only indirectly mentioned — to understand the perception of immigration in society and ‘to also encourage a documented response to all those instrumental interpretations that [had] already appeared on the subject’.³⁴ The caustic criticism of the ECAP-CGIL researchers was motivated by the observation that the vast majority of references in the press to the condition of foreigners in Italy should ‘be considered as “crime news”’ and, in any case, ended up offering a partial and reductive representation:

From the articles, it is possible to draw a ‘typology’ of foreign workers (or potential foreign workers): illegal immigrants, refugees, students, COLF, border workers, seasonal workers, precarious workers; a typology that certainly characterises this presence but which is also more articulate: in fact, hardly any mention is made of technical and administrative managers, interns, etc.³⁵

The observations contained in the research promoted by ECAP-CGIL in 1979 were included in a second in-depth study that preceded the publication of the

³¹ M. Colucci, *Storia dell’immigrazione straniera in Italia*, cit., pp. 70-71.

³² ECAP-CGIL, Cattedra di sociologia 2b, Università di Roma, *Documentazione di base per una indagine su: i lavoratori stranieri in Italia*, Rome, 1979, in CSER, BA 17.E2.

³³ ECAP-CGIL, Cattedra di sociologia 2b, Università di Roma, *Documentazione di base*, cit., pp. 11-13, loc. cit. note 32.

³⁴ ECAP-CGIL, Cattedra di sociologia 2b, Università di Roma, *Documentazione di base*, cit., p. 34, loc. cit. note 32.

³⁵ ECAP-CGIL, Cattedra di sociologia 2b, Università di Roma, *Documentazione di base*, cit., p. 35, loc. cit. note 32. The ECAP-CGIL researchers were even more dismissive in defining how the press outlined the journalistic representation of immigration in Italy: ‘In any case, not many articles give correct information about this new reality that is the result of careful and objective observation and analysis.’

summary, which the trade union's training body in Corso Italia launched in 1980 in collaboration with the Lazio region.³⁶ Largely referring to the condition of immigrants in Rome and the Lazio region, ECAP's new in-depth study also focused on three specific foreign communities where interviews had been conducted: Cape Verdean domestic helpers, Eritreans living in the capital and a group of Middle Eastern students. With regard to the first group, the publication denounced above all 'the humiliating treatment by the families in which' they were 'housed (insufficient food, uncomfortable night lodgings)' in exchange for 'a salary of between 200 and 280 thousand lire a month for working up to 15 hours a day'. On the presence of the Eritreans in Rome, by contrast, the ECAP researchers highlighted the postcolonial nature of the migration flow and mainly considered how 'the causes of emigration from Ethiopia' were 'often of political origin'.³⁷ As for the Middle Eastern students, who were gathered in an association active within the La Sapienza University of Rome, the research also grasped an important qualitative aspect concerning the role of foreign university students: the frequent link between migration to Italy officially for study and the flight from the motherland for political reasons.³⁸ Finally, the study emphatically described precisely the importance of public engagement for the intercommunity socialisation of the Middle Eastern students, mostly Palestinians, considering that their main 'contacts with the outside world' took place 'in relation to the political aims' of their student association.³⁹

The two publications edited by the CGIL trade union formed the basis of the publication, in December 1980, of the actual research produced by ECAP and the Centro Studi Emigrazione Em.Im., entitled "L'immigrazione straniera nel Lazio. Quadro di riferimento e condizioni".⁴⁰ Divided into detailed studies on specific topics, the work brought together the information and elaborations contained in the two preceding publications; in particular, part four — enti-

³⁶ ECAP-CGIL, Regione Lazio, *Considerazioni sul problema dei lavoratori stranieri nella Regione Lazio*, Rome, 1980, in CSER, BA 17.24.E3.

³⁷ ECAP-CGIL, Regione Lazio, *Considerazioni sul problema dei lavoratori stranieri*, cit., pp. 19-20, loc. cit. note 36.

³⁸ The "political" role of the presence of foreign students in Italy had already been the subject of journalistic attention in the 1960s. On this subject, see Carlo Benedetti, *Studenti stranieri: quanti sono e cosa chiedono*, "L'Unità", 22 December 1964, p. 8: 'There is, then, a political commitment that is developing among various foreign students living in Italy. A political commitment that is being carried out in a sometimes hostile environment, amidst a thousand difficulties, in a country not yet equipped to recruit a mass of foreign students'.

³⁹ ECAP-CGIL, Regione Lazio, *Considerazioni sul problema dei lavoratori stranieri*, cit., p. 22, loc. cit. note 36.

⁴⁰ ECAP-CGIL, Em.Im., *L'immigrazione straniera nel Lazio. Quadro di riferimento e condizioni*, Rome, December 1980, in Archivio personale di Francesco Carchedi (hereafter Arch. F. Carchedi). I sincerely thank the Carchedi archive for giving me the possibility to consult research and publications, including in original editions.

tled “La condizione di vita e di lavoro degli stranieri nel Lazio. L’indagine di campo” — described the foreign presence in Lazio in a way that could lay the foundations for an accurate representation of immigration, based on the origin, age, gender and education levels of its protagonists. The profile of the immigrant that emerged from the study was based on a ‘heterogeneity of the countries of origin’, on ‘an almost equal gender distribution between males and females’, on ‘an age structure shifted to medium levels, albeit still within the working-age range’ and on ‘a majority with medium-high education [...] with accountants, nurses, schoolteachers doing domestic work and graduates doing unqualified work in restaurants or garages’.⁴¹ This configuration of the foreigner’s profile was innovative compared to existing interpretations, as it was able to question — starting from the collection of data and information — some of the most widespread assumptions concerning the definition of the characteristics of first immigration waves: being too focused on an “economicist” approach, these assumptions portrayed first-generation immigrants as predominantly male with a low average age, or automatically extended the interpretations used to study Italian emigration to the new phenomenon in Italy.⁴²

The differences we found with respect to this scheme [i.e. that contained in Reyneri] are related to gender (presence of a high female component), age (within the range that scholars consider to have the ‘highest propensity to emigrate’, but at levels not too markedly youthful) [...] These discrepancies help to highlight some of the limits of the model [developed by Reyneri]. In particular, we noted that in characterising the flows, the model takes the coincidence between ‘first immigration’ and ‘first emigration’ for granted; secondly, characteristics such as masculinity, which can be (and are) relative to emigration flows and a certain type of labour demand in the country of immigration, are considered to be dominant. Finally, this classification fails to take into account the possible political component of emigration, which is not exclusive to certain national components with a high number of refugees.⁴³

The surveys carried out by the CGIL at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s were part of the internationally renowned research conducted by Samir Amin, which started with *Modern Migration in Western Africa* (1974),⁴⁴ and contained the most important new elements in the consideration of additional characteristics (i.e. in addition to those related to job placement) of the foreign presence in Italy. While giving priority to the economic analysis of migration flows and the immigrants’ placement in the job market, the ECAP’s studies also sought to identify — albeit only through short references — their social position, public visibility and ability to interact with the cities and contexts of settlement.

⁴¹ ECAP-CGIL, Em.Im., *L’immigrazione straniera nel Lazio*, cit., pp. 18-38.

⁴² The polemical reference is mainly addressed to Emilio Reyneri’s *La catena migratoria*.

⁴³ ECAP-CGIL, Em.Im., *L’immigrazione straniera nel Lazio*, cit., pp. 65-66.

⁴⁴ Samir Amin, *Modern Migration in Western Africa*, London, Routledge, 1974.

The research published in 1983 by the Milanese architect Paolo Caputo, “Il ghetto diffuso”, went in a similar direction.⁴⁵ Based on a reconnaissance conducted between the end of the 1970s and 1981, while also borrowing from American research on migration and space,⁴⁶ it analysed the condition of foreigners in relation to the processes of urban transformation and social change taking place in Milan. In particular, it described the process by which immigrants, during the “migration” of the Lombard capital’s population from the centre to the suburbs and to make room for ‘services, business and commercial activities’, did not ‘occupy vacant housing, almost always transformed into offices, but precarious, degraded and leftover spaces, not approved for residential use (attics, basements)’.⁴⁷ Although it described the dynamics of ghettoisation and social exclusion, for the first time, scientific research placed the foreign presence in a system of relations with the urban context and the social fabric that did not limit its attention exclusively to the immigrants’ job placement.

Between the end of 1982 and the early months of 1983, two publications by the Istituto Fernando Santi came out, which both focused on international cooperation policies aimed at planning immigrants’ returns to their homeland, thus embracing the idea of transitory or temporary immigration. The first report, titled “Immigrazione straniera in Italia. Possibilità di intervento per un rientro programmato dei lavoratori stranieri nei loro paesi, nel quadro di una politica di cooperazione socio-economica”,⁴⁸ considered four objects of investigation — Algerians in Lombardy, Egyptians in Emilia Romagna, Moroccans in Lazio and Tunisians in Sicily — but also contained, in some extracts, a general definition of the immigrant’s profile and public image. The research highlighted the ‘young age of Arab emigrants from the four countries taken into consideration’, who ended up being the protagonists of an uncertain migratory experience in a phase of their lives ‘where they had already acquired a certain maturity’. With regard to the education level of immigrants in Italy, the research did not seem to subscribe to the increasingly widespread idea of a medium-high level of education in foreign communities: ‘Culturally and socially, who are the young people who are leaving their countries? In truth, the survey and interviews on this are not very clear. It goes without saying that in principle, a capable young person does not need to find work elsewhere.’⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Paolo Caputo, *Il ghetto diffuso. L’immigrazione straniera a Milano*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 1983.

⁴⁶ Richard Basham, David De Groot, *Current Approaches to the Anthropology of Urban and Complex Societies*, “American Anthropologist”, 1977, n. 79, pp. 414-440.

⁴⁷ P. Caputo, *Il ghetto diffuso*, cit., p. 18.

⁴⁸ Istituto Fernando Santi, *Immigrazione straniera in Italia. Possibilità di intervento per un rientro programmato dei lavoratori stranieri nei loro paesi, nel quadro di una politica di cooperazione socio-economica*, Rome, 1989, in Arch. F. Carchedi.

⁴⁹ Istituto Fernando Santi, *Immigrazione straniera in Italia*, cit., p. 12.

The second report, “Immigrazione straniera in Italia. Politiche di Cooperazione con i Paesi Emergenti”,⁵⁰ was even less successful in considering immigration as a phenomenon to be tackled through international cooperation with the countries of origin and, therefore, based on the idea of considering the immigrant as a person destined — albeit through incentives — to return home. While it was still focused on the four national communities considered in the first report, the work nevertheless contained an in-depth study of the ‘general characteristics of foreign immigration in Italy’.⁵¹ In particular, the image of the immigrant that emerged from it was characterized by an ‘almost exclusively male composition of the migration flow’, with some ‘partial exceptions constituted by the family groups of Egyptians and Tunisians’, by a strong focus on ‘youth and middle age groups’ and by a ‘much more composite’ picture related to ‘professionalism and working conditions prior to immigration’.⁵²

Although the two reports by the Istituto Fernando Santi were based on a survey that covered a well-defined part of the foreign presence in Italy, they tended to present an immigration phenomenon with different and articulated characteristics, but in any case animated by foreigners who had good reasons to see their migratory experience as a tiring and difficult passage before an easier — and economically stable — return to their homeland. This characteristic, which is repeatedly mentioned in the texts, portrayed the immigrant as someone unable to emancipate themselves from a “hard” bond with their community and country of origin, which could also limit the success of integration processes: ‘In all the different contexts where surveys have been conducted,’ the authors of the study argue, ‘the vast majority of immigrants seem to be oriented towards a future return to their country [...] It should be noted that for [them] the link with their country of origin is still deep and that they have hardly been able to rebuild satisfactory relations in our country.’⁵³

Another text published in those years, “Il mondo a Roma. Le etnie diverse nella città”,⁵⁴ was more imaginative. This collection of photographs by Adriano Mordenti and Mimmo Frassinetti traces a “non-Roman” presence in the capital since the foundation of the Eternal City. The pictures in the last part of the volume, which records the faces of foreign immigrants, testify to the remarkable vitality of the communities present in Rome; scenes of everyday and family life, immortalised in the immigrants’ homes and thus conveying a certain rootedness of foreign families in the city, alternate with photographs of foreigners at work but also with the political prominence of certain groups —

⁵⁰ Istituto Fernando Santi, *Immigrazione straniera in Italia. Politiche di Cooperazione con i Paesi Emergenti*, Rome 1983, in Arch. F. Carchedi.

⁵¹ Istituto Fernando Santi, *Immigrazione straniera in Italia*, cit., p. 25.

⁵² Istituto Fernando Santi, *Immigrazione straniera in Italia*, cit., pp. 28-30.

⁵³ Istituto Fernando Santi, *Immigrazione straniera in Italia*, cit., pp. 31-33.

⁵⁴ *Il mondo a Roma. Le etnie diverse nella città*, Rome, Edizioni AGF srl – Imago coop, 1983, in Arch. F. Carchedi.

in terms of legitimising national issues in the Italian public debate, as in the case of the Polish supporters of the Solidarnosc movement — or moments of leisure, free time and religious practice. Overall, a non-stereotypical image of immigration in Italy emerged from the work, which avoided focusing exclusively on the theme of immigrants' job placement.⁵⁵ Alongside the photographic review, it also contained a commentary by one of the main representatives of Rome's Jewish community, Rabbi Riccardo di Segni; confirming the interpretative approach already adopted by the authors of the photographs, he urged against giving overly rigid representations of the foreign presence in the capital.

On the part of the majority, there is a general tendency to homogenise the analysis; in reality, each group's situation is quite different both in terms of the type of economic reason that drives them to arrive in Italy and the problems of social and cultural adaptation they encounter in the city. For example, it is wrong and simplistic to speak of 'North Africans'; the various groups that should be included in this single definition (Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians, etc.) are quite distinct.⁵⁶

In 1983, one of the first attempts was made to describe the "state of the art" of research on immigration in Italy, on the initiative of demographers who took up the task in an innovative way. On 22 March, they held a conference in Rome with the objective of 'deepening knowledge of the phenomenon', and also to take up 'a sort of challenge on various concrete fields of knowledge and intervention'.⁵⁷ One of the scholars' prerogatives was undoubtedly the need to fix the discrepancies between the data disseminated by different agencies on the quantitative consistency of immigration in Italy, so much so that one of the main conference organizers, Marcello Natale, had appealed 'to the various agencies that, for various purposes, conducted data collection' to work 'in close contact by exchanging their experiences'.⁵⁸ However, Nora Federici — another conference promoter — had expressed an intention to provide a picture of the 'physiognomy of the migrant mass' alongside quantitative information on the immigrants' employment situation, investigating 'the demographic structure (gender, age classes, marital status)' but also 'the social structure (level of education, religion, spoken languages)' and 'the non-occupational condition (students, housewives, other conditions)'.⁵⁹ In fact, other than numerous talks

⁵⁵ *Il mondo a Roma*, cit., pp. 52-68.

⁵⁶ *Il mondo a Roma*, cit., p. 73.

⁵⁷ Eugenio Sonnino, *Apertura, L'immigrazione straniera in Italia* conference proceedings, 22 March 1983, "Studi Emigrazione", 1983, n. 71, pp. 259-264, here p. 260.

⁵⁸ Marcello Natale, *Fonti e metodi di rilevazione della popolazione straniera in Italia, L'immigrazione straniera in Italia* conference proceedings, 22 March 1983, "Studi Emigrazione", 1983, n. 71, pp. 265-296, here p. 295.

⁵⁹ Nora Federici, *Le caratteristiche della presenza straniera in Italia e i problemi che ne derivano, L'immigrazione straniera in Italia* conference proceedings, 22 March 1983, "Studi Emigrazione", 1983, n. 71, pp. 297-305, here p. 298.

presenting a statistical analysis of data on residence permits and the presence of foreigners in the labour market, the conference also included discussions of the qualitative aspects of immigration in Italy. Roberto Bertucci and Fabio Gemelli, for example, gave a presentation on immigrants' access to public health, arguing, among other things, that the health sector was one of the main grounds for cultural confrontation and mediation: 'The customs, living habits and behaviour of foreigners from underdeveloped countries often differ from the European ones. Awareness of the right to health, along with knowledge of public health services and information on rules of good conduct, are often absent.'⁶⁰

On the other hand, the representative of the Centro Studi Emigrazione Roma, Gianfausto Rosoli, talked about focusing on a sociological classification of immigration in Italy:

Foreign immigration in Italy could be roughly divided into two blocks, quite similar in weight but very different in quality, composition, lifestyle and organisation: skilled immigration and Third World immigration. The former [...] is generally statistically measurable, more visibly organised and settled in the industrial areas of the country, with the exception of Rome. The latter, a more unskilled form of immigration, is located on the margins of Italian society; hence its characteristics of 'low visibility', its difficulty of statistical measurement and its concentration in the low tertiary sector.⁶¹

All in all, the demographers' conference provided the first systematic review of contributions on immigration in Italy, at the same time when the Senate approved a bill on the job placement of immigrant workers, drafted by the then Minister of Labour and Social Security Michele di Giesi and never debated in the other chamber of Parliament following the end of the legislature in August 1983.⁶² Signs of a general increase in attention to the foreign presence were also visible in the numerical growth of studies and scientific research: between 1983 and 1985, various works were published that managed to represent the condition of immigrants in specific contexts and from different disciplinary points of observation.⁶³

⁶⁰ Roberto Bertucci, Fabio Gemelli, *Riflessi sanitari dell'immigrazione in Italia, L'immigrazione straniera in Italia*, conference proceedings, 22 March 1983, "Studi Emigrazione", 1983, n. 71, pp. 432-445, here p. 434.

⁶¹ Gianfausto Rosoli, *Aspetti dell'organizzazione comunitaria degli immigrati in Italia, L'immigrazione straniera in Italia* conference proceedings, 22 March 1983, "Studi Emigrazione", 1983, n. 71, pp. 427-430, here pp. 428-429.

⁶² I have reconstructed the parliamentary process of the Di Giesi bill in an earlier publication: *Braccia e persone. Storia dell'immigrazione in Italia ai tempi di Jerry Masslo (1980-1990)*, Turin, Claudiana, 2020, pp. 61-63. In the early 1980s, the legislative process had begun to follow up on the 1975 convention of the Organizzazione Internazionale del Lavoro (OIL) on the equal treatment of migrant workers, ratified by the Italian Parliament in 1981, which called for the adoption of laws on the placement of foreign workers in adhering countries.

⁶³ Some examples include: Francesco Calvanese, *Gli immigrati stranieri in Campania*, Rome, Filef, 1983; Giorgio Gaja and Adelina Adinolfi, *I lavoratori stranieri in Italia: prob-*

The immigrant in Italian research in the second half of the 1980s: interpretative clarifications and established models

With the growth of research on immigration in the mid-1980s, some scholars delved into particular aspects of the phenomenon. In particular, following a now consolidated international (especially American) scientific interest in ethnic diversity in urban contexts,⁶⁴ the condition of immigrants in cities — and, in particular, in metropolitan areas — became one of the issues that was most investigated in scientific terms, also because it contained evidence of a growing foreign presence in those contexts where it was more articulate and visible.

The Milanese context was, for example, the focus of research conducted by a group of sociologists, published in 1985 in a volume entitled “La nuova immigrazione a Milano”, edited by Umberto Melotti.⁶⁵ Rich in qualitative references to the social condition of immigrants living in the Lombard capital, the study presented the results of a number of surveys carried out on a sample of foreign citizens, trying to confirm or contradict certain stereotypical interpretations that were already thickening in the public representation of immigration. The immigrants’ presumed rural origins, for example, were not confirmed by the data, which showed that ‘73.2% of those interviewed’ came from ‘large or medium-sized cities’, while the image of immigrants with a medium-high level of schooling — supported by statistical research on qualifications — turned out to be true: 48% had a high school diploma and 11.6% a university degree’.⁶⁶ One of the most original outcomes of the research concerned the immigrants’ religious affiliations, which scholars had until then hardly taken into account. The results of the survey conducted on the sample described a situation of considerable religious pluralism in the foreign community present in Milan and attributed an essential role to immigration in the evolution of the city’s confessional panorama:

lemi giuridici dell’assunzione, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1984; Duccio Demetrio (ed.), *Immigrazione straniera e interventi formativi. Bisogni, programmazione locale, esperienze*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 1984; Enrico Pugliese, *Quale lavoro per gli stranieri in Italia?*, “Politica ed Economia”, 1985, n. 9, pp. 69-76.

⁶⁴ In particular, American studies conducted in the 1950s are taken as references: for example, Stewart G. Cole, Mildred Wiese Cole, *Minorities and the American Promise. The Conflict of Principle and Practice*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1954 and Charles Wagley, Marvin Harris, *Minorities in the New World: Six Case Studies*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1958.

⁶⁵ Umberto Melotti (ed.), *La nuova immigrazione a Milano. Primi dati di una ricerca*, Milan, Mazzotta, 1985.

⁶⁶ Umberto Melotti, Antonio Aimi, Leila Ziglio, *Integrazione sociale e identità culturale degli immigrati del Terzo Mondo a Milano: un’indagine campionaria*, in U. Melotti (ed.), *La nuova immigrazione a Milano*, cit., pp. 51-52.

The most widespread religion among the foreigners we interviewed is Catholicism, professed by 40.6% of the sample (Filipinos, Latin America). Another Christian religion, Coptic, is practised by 14.3% of the respondents (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Egypt). Islam is the second largest religion with 26.2% (North Africa, Middle East). Buddhism is declared by 4.2% (Sinhalese and Chinese) and Hinduism by 1.2% (Indians and Sri Lankan Tamils). The fact that about a third of respondents do not practise their religion, at least publicly, is partly due to the lack or inadequacy and remoteness of places of worship for non-Christian religions.⁶⁷

With regard to Rome, two studies promoted by the capital's diocesan Caritas and municipality, conducted between 1986 and 1988, focused on the condition of immigrants in Rome.⁶⁸ Both were coordinated by the sociologist Franco Ferrarotti who, from the very first pages, evoked a precarious and marginal image of immigration:

The foreigner is black, [...] a typical marginalised man. He has left his culture of origin, often violently, but has no guarantee of being accepted by the new culture to which he turns for hospitality. He is a human caught between a culture that, for the most diverse reasons, he has decided to reject and a culture from which he does not yet know whether he will be accepted.⁶⁹

The first of the two studies proposed a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the users of the two reception centres for foreigners run by the Caritas in Via delle Zoccollette and Via Magenta on the initiative of historical figures known for their charitable commitment, such as Luigi di Liegro. The profile of the "marginal" immigrant as identified by the researchers varied from that referring to 'young or very young subjects, with a higher education or university education, mostly men but with a consistent female presence (Ethiopia)' to that coinciding with 'immigrants from Islamic Arab states, with high levels of education and widespread knowledge of European languages'.⁷⁰ The second study had a broader scope, also presenting data and information on a less vulnerable foreign population, which was taken as a representative sample. The profile that emerged was that of a form of immigration that was 'young (84.9% of those interviewed under 35 years old)', mostly male '(only 28.6% of women)', mainly employed in the sectors of 'domestic help, services and the tertiary', 'illegal in terms of residence permits' and able to produce cultural variety in a cosmopolitan city.⁷¹

⁶⁷ U. Melotti, A. Aimi, L. Ziglio, *Integrazione sociale e identità culturale degli immigrati*, cit., pp. 66-67.

⁶⁸ Caritas Diocesana di Roma, *Stranieri a Roma. Immagine degli immigrati dall'Africa e dall'Asia attraverso le schede di rilevamento della Caritas diocesana*, Rome, Sares, 1986 and Comune di Roma, *Roma: immigrazione dai paesi del Terzo Mondo*, Rome, Uspe, 1988. I am grateful to Prof. Maria Immacolata Macioti who gave me the opportunity to consult both texts.

⁶⁹ Caritas Diocesana di Roma, *Stranieri a Roma*, cit., p. 5.

⁷⁰ Caritas Diocesana di Roma, *Stranieri a Roma*, cit., p. 57.

⁷¹ Comune di Roma, *Roma: immigrazione*, cit., pp. 74-127.

The two studies promoted by the Caritas were published at a time when the first law on the job placement of foreigners was being approved and applied, as part of a process of reform of immigration laws that had already affected countries such as Spain and France. The Foschi Law came into force in 1987, intending to introduce a new system for recruiting workers from abroad and granting an amnesty to illegal immigrants, who were assumed to make up the majority of the immigrant population.⁷² The debate about the law and the effects of the amnesty would strongly influence research on immigration after 1987, even though it was precisely in that year that the results of two surveys were published and a new important conference was held. On the initiative of the CISL trade union, a volume edited by Nino Sergi was printed, entitled “L’immigrazione straniera in Italia”.⁷³ Although it was conceived in trade union circles, the research showed more openness compared to the “labourist” model of investigation that had dominated until then. The foreign presence, described as ‘young and predominantly single or unmarried’, with communities characterized by ‘medium-high levels of acculturation (Filipinos, Egyptians, Nigerians, Indians)’ and a ‘consistent Catholic-Christian religious affiliation (Muslims are also important)’, found its *raison d’être* not only in the employment of immigrants in the labour market:

In addition to economic reasons, there were also specifically political and what we might call socio-cultural reasons for arriving, especially for certain communities. For example, the desire to break away from closed social environments. In general, then, it seems fairly clear that economic, political and socio-cultural factors all play a role in the decision to migrate, but in different degrees; each of these factors can be more or less decisive.⁷⁴

In 1987, the results of another study were published, this time commissioned by the president of the Council of Ministers.⁷⁵ The work devoted a lot of space to the qualitative definition of foreign immigration in Italy and, in particular, discussed the perception of the phenomenon that was most widespread in society and mainstream media using polemical tones:

⁷² On the content of the Foschi Law, see, in particular: L. Einaudi, *Le politiche dell’immigrazione in Italia*, cit., pp. 129-132. For a reconstruction of the political and cultural climate in which the law was passed, see my previous publication *Braccia e persone*, cit., pp. 68-73.

⁷³ Nino Sergi (ed.), *L’immigrazione straniera in Italia*, Rome, Edizioni Lavoro, 1987.

⁷⁴ Francesco Carchedi, Giovanni Battista Ranuzzi, *Tra collocazione nel mercato del lavoro secondario ed esclusione sociale dal sistema della cittadinanza*, in N. Sergi (ed.), *L’immigrazione straniera in Italia*, cit., pp. 36-47. The authors of the research also seemed to explicitly question the guest-worker model: ‘[T]he highly changeable factors affecting immigrants make it problematic for them not only to stay in Italy, but also to return first, and then permanently, to their country of origin.’

⁷⁵ ISPES, *La condizione dei lavoratori extracomunitari in Italia. Riflessioni sulla legge n. 943 del 21.1.86*, in Archivio Storico della Camera dei Deputati (hereafter ASCD), Fondo I Commissione – Indagine conoscitiva, fasc. 1, f.15.

Consider, for example, the journalistic language used to describe the problem [...] We apply categories and weights of rights and duties to the African or Asian worker that are completely alien to their mentality and often also to their reasons for emigrating [...] One of the most obvious aspects of what we are saying is the tendency to generalise the category of non-EU workers, not to mention the differences that exist, for example, between a Cape Verdean and a Filipino woman, or between an Eritrean refugee and a Ghanaian worker. They are all the same: at most, Africans are distinguished from Asians on the basis of their skin colour. They rename our squares, and we keep talking about Africans, when not ‘blacks’ tout court.⁷⁶

Towards the end of the year, a conference promoted by the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, “La presenza straniera in Italia”, was held in Rome. At the centre of the meeting was the request to align the survey sources regarding the consistency of a phenomenon that ISTAT, for example, estimated at ‘327,037 residents’, while INPS — drawing on registrations in the social security system — attested it at ‘96,338 people’. In any case, the shared idea emerged that these figures were not really representative of an undeclared phenomenon such as illegal immigration, which was estimated to be higher than the official figures.⁷⁷ Relevant qualitative data concerned the countries of origin of the immigrants who had benefited from the amnesty provided for by the Foschi Law: with 16,130 regularisations, Moroccans became a permanent feature of immigrant presence in Italy and Moroccan nationality, among other things, the most frequent foreign nationality.⁷⁸ The figure of the refugee also entered the discussion, albeit to a limited degree; a representative of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, who had been invited to the conference, polemically recalled how the status of beneficiary of international protection in Italy was reserved for foreigners of European origin by virtue of the geographical reservation, the restrictive clause with which the Italian government had decided to sign the Geneva Convention.⁷⁹ In definitional terms, though, the most interesting insights into the public representation of immigration and the description of a common image of the immigrant emerged during the concluding debate. Pugliese’s speech is particularly noteworthy: the sociologist grasped the difficulties of applying the new Foschi Law to the profile of foreigners, who had

⁷⁶ ISPES, *La condizione dei lavoratori extracomunitari in Italia*, cit., f. 16, loc. cit. note 75.

⁷⁷ See Guido Manese, *La presenza straniera in Italia alla luce della recente rilevazione anagrafica*, pp. 326-334, here p. 333 and Anna Maria Berardo, *La presenza straniera in Italia*, pp. 335-343, here p. 340, “Studi Emigrazione”, 1988, n. 91-92.

⁷⁸ Raimondo Cagiano de Azevedo, *La presenza non comunitaria in Italia: prospettive di studio*, “Studi Emigrazione”, 1988, n. 91-92, pp. 531-543, here p. 540.

⁷⁹ Laura Garugno, *L’attività dell’ACNUR ed i rifugiati in Italia*, “Studi Emigrazione”, 1988, n. 91-92, pp. 618-621, here p. 620, where the author also claims that ‘some exceptions were made to this rule and the Italian government accepted the following under the Geneva Convention: 1) Chileans who, at the time of the coup, had taken refuge at the Italian embassy in Santiago; 2) Indochinese picked up by Italian ships; 3) a small group of Afghans stopped at Fiumicino airport; 4) 106 Chaldean Iraqis; 5) an Eritrean family. This is all’. For a discussion of the performance of the geographical reserve over time, see Nadan Petrović, *Rifugiati, profughi, sfollati. Breve storia del diritto d’asilo in Italia*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2016, pp. 26-28.

been considered — in the legislative formulation — representative of a much more complex presence and, above all, one that could not be reconstructed through the stereotype of the guest worker:

The immigrant was assumed to be an industrial worker, or at least an employee, generally employed on a permanent basis. It was with this image of the immigrant — which was certainly valid for Germany 15 years ago — in mind that the relevant legislation was drawn up. Therefore, the law passed by our country ends up applying poorly to the vast majority of new immigrants.⁸⁰

Pugliese's position reflected the gradual evolution of scientific research on immigration in Italy towards a consideration also of the immigrant's social dimension, which was, among other things, a significant criticism of the legislative interventions that had just come into force. Such progress in the development of an organic analysis of the foreign presence in the peninsula already emerged from another study promoted by the Istituto Fernando Santi, on behalf of the Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro (hereafter CNEL), between 1988 and 1989, whose results were published in "L'immigrazione in Italia: comunità straniere a confronto".⁸¹ From the very first pages, the authors noted the need to move beyond a "labourist" approach to the phenomenon, instead developing a vision that would grasp its diversity and articulations:

It is certain, though, that when we speak of immigrants we cannot speak only of foreign workers, but [we must] also [speak] of the foreign population, that is, we cannot speak only of individuals but [must speak] of family units and, more extensively, relatives. In fact, within foreign communities, alongside workers, there are students, refugees and political refugees, most of whom are forced to go underground because, as we know, Italy only grants refugee status to those coming from Eastern Europe. Problems more directly related to the labour market are thus flanked by issues that concern both our educational institutions and the political asylum sector.⁸²

In general, the authors of the study adopted an organicist approach to the analysis of the foreign presence in Italy, assuming that the immigrants would eventually return to their country of origin. In this regard, the novelty of the study lies, if anything, in its criticism of a 'vision of the problem that was entirely projected onto the country of arrival', developed by scholars and experts, and in the call for 'a comprehensive approach, capable of considering the migratory chain in all its phases (departure, stay, return) in the broader context of development problems, and hence of relations between countries of origin and countries of arrival'.⁸³ Another innovative element is, above all, the explicit

⁸⁰ Enrico Pugliese, *Dibattito*, "Studi Emigrazione", 1988, n. 91-92, p. 637.

⁸¹ CNEL, *L'immigrazione in Italia: comunità straniere a confronto*, Rome, CNEL – Quaderni di documentazione, 1989, in Arch. F. Carchedi.

⁸² CNEL, *L'immigrazione in Italia*, cit., p. 12.

⁸³ CNEL, *L'immigrazione in Italia*, cit., p. 50.

invitation not to dogmatise the — hitherto prevalent — representation of a form of ‘young immigration, with people aged between 20 and 35, unmarried, with a medium-high level of education and a significant professional experience obtained before leaving’; according to the authors, this is contradicted by a measured variety of motivations behind migratory projects that leaves no room for the “labourist” exclusivism with which migration to Italy has been interpreted.⁸⁴

The fact that scientific research on immigration developed in the late 1980s is also reflected in the detailed examination of issues that had not previously been considered. Between 1987 and 1989, for example, the first surveys on the foreign presence that was taking root in Italian society appeared, which proves that the phenomenon had by then become the subject of discussion in a wider public space than the one presided over by scientific research. The statistical research institute Doxa conducted a survey entitled “Gli stranieri in Italia”,⁸⁵ asking a large sample of interviewees a series of basic questions on immigration. The picture that emerged from the survey was that of a not-very-detailed public consideration of the widespread foreign presence in society, testifying to the fact that the phenomenon had only recently entered the public debate. In the context of very partial knowledge of immigration, ‘49% of Italians reported only or mainly inconveniences’, while 13 per cent identified ‘only or mainly advantages’.⁸⁶ The general mistrust of the phenomenon was attributed to ‘concerns about unemployment, as a threat to both newcomers and Italians, especially young people’, who saw themselves ‘compete with immigrants for the already few jobs available’.⁸⁷ Trade unions, which had always promoted scientific studies on immigration, also prepared a study of the perception of the foreign presence in Italian society. Thus, on the occasion of the Festa nazionale dell’Unità of 1988 in Florence, the Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Commercio Turismo e Servizi (hereafter FILCAMS) of the CGIL addressed a number of questions on the condition of immigrants in Italy to the patrons of the traditional event promoted by the Italian Communist Party, also trying to capture the views and intercept the knowledge of a population that it presumed to be more sensitive to and supportive of foreign citizens, given its membership of the political left. However, the snapshot taken by the union’s researchers showed how, even among people with varying communist affiliations, ‘a figure of the immigrant [emerged] with very clear and defined contours, a stereotyped

⁸⁴ CNEL, *L’immigrazione in Italia*, cit., p. 51. The researchers speak of far more consistent reasons — of a ‘political (i.e. wars, strong social tensions, authoritarian regimes) and cultural (study, training, long visits, etc.) nature’ — than those described by scientific research on the presence of foreigners in Italy until then.

⁸⁵ Doxa, *Gli stranieri in Italia. Risultati di tre sondaggi: del maggio ’91, del novembre ’89 e del luglio ’87*, “Bollettino Doxa”, 1991, n. 11, in Arch. F. Carchedi.

⁸⁶ Doxa, *Gli stranieri in Italia*, cit., p. 24.

⁸⁷ Doxa, *Gli stranieri in Italia*, cit., p. 31.

image, built on the univocal idea of the social outcast, the poor, coming from Third World countries'.⁸⁸ Among the interviewees, respectively 55% and 27% 'indicated black Africa [and] Arab countries' as the immigrants' main territories of origin, while 'almost no one thought of Europe (2.5%) or America (0.6%)'.⁸⁹ The prevalence of the "Third World" profile that emerged from the sample was also confirmed by the fact that '82% pointed to unemployment and poverty' as the main reasons for migration to Italy and, above all, by references to the immigrants' presumed material and working conditions in the peninsula. Commenting on the data collected in the survey, the FILCAMS researchers argued that

[t]he answers given in terms of the housing situation of the immigrants are also consistent with the picture outlined so far: they are imagined to be homeless (33%), or [living] in rented rooms (21%) or in beds/lodgings in flats and institutes (20%). As for the jobs they do, the most visible and characteristic is the figure of the street vendor, indicated by 81.5% of the sample (the total exceeds 100% because three answers could be given to this question), followed by domestic helpers (56%), unskilled workers (52.5%) and day labourers (36%).⁹⁰

Research on the public perception of immigration in Italy proved, among other things, that Italian society generally considered it a new phenomenon; in reality, some of its characteristics had already testified to its rootedness in the 1980s. One of these was undoubtedly the productiveness of immigrant associations, which became the subject of a study in 1989 that also elaborated some innovative representations of the foreign presence in the peninsula. In terms of classification, the study differentiated 'foreign workers available for integration based on personal reasons, type of activity, length of stay in the country, quality of friendship, relational and parental networks in Italy' from 'unstable foreign workers, because they are scarcely or not at all available for a stabilisation process, because they are employed in seasonal activities [...] because they lack sufficient structural and relational roots, because they are interested in short stays in Italy for study, health, family or tourism reasons'.⁹¹ However, the data and considerations on associations revealed a profile of the immigrant that was in line with the idea of immigrants already being widely present and rooted in Italian society. The research delimited a sample of 91 associations that were founded, led and animated by foreigners, which were depicted as people dedicated to volunteering, with 'managerial and non-managerial staff, employed in the various, almost exclusively voluntary organisations' amounting

⁸⁸ The results of the survey are contained in C. Treves (ed.), *Sindacato dei diritti e società multi-etnica. Oltre il razzismo, iniziative per i lavoratori extracomunitari*, Rome, Ediesse, 1989, pp. 49-51, which I consulted at the CGIL's archive of the Basilicata region.

⁸⁹ C. Treves (ed.), *Sindacato dei diritti e società multi-etnica*, cit., p. 49.

⁹⁰ C. Treves (ed.), *Sindacato dei diritti e società multi-etnica*, cit., p. 50.

⁹¹ Labos, *La presenza straniera in Italia. Primo rapporto*, Rome, Edizioni TER, 1990, p. 21, in Arch. F. Carchedi.

to ‘a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 13 [members] for each association’,⁹² and as highly educated men and women in positions of responsibility in the various associations.⁹³

Overall, the research produced up to the second half of the 1980s was one of the first clear signs of public awareness of a complex and constantly evolving phenomenon. The studies conducted between the end of the 1970s and 1989, which — compared to the Foschi Law passed at the end of 1986 — were more careful in defining the immigrant’s profile beyond their position in the labour market, produced a public representation of the foreign presence that was dominated by a rigid methodological approach, initially trapped by the temptation to use the same instruments to study Italian emigration abroad and gradually refined to divide data and information into sectors. Nevertheless, the contribution of research to the definition of immigration in the years of the phenomenon’s ‘discovery’ managed to develop a social profile of the immigrant that would accompany the descriptions given by the press and media, often in a less rigorous and more imprecise way.

Conclusion

In a period considered to be the moment immigration was “discovered”, its public representation through scientific research produced an image of the immigrant that was burdened by not always adequate interpretative frameworks and sometimes even by the use of stereotypical categories, despite a certain ability to grasp — improving over time — the progressive changes in the actual working and living conditions of thousands of foreigners in Italy. The model of the guest worker that emerges from most of the studies carried out between the end of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s was a reworked version of an instrument widely used in the study of Italian emigration abroad and now used to interpret a new phenomenon. The emphasis on the presence of “labour” migrants, in line with an interpretative approach typical of research conducted in other countries in previous decades, often failed to escape the patterns of a representation — much more applicable to the presences recorded between the end of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s — that focused excessively on the ‘domestic helps employed (and usually living) with Italian families’ of Cape Verdean, Filipino or Latin American nationality, and on the profile of ‘casual day labourers, mainly Tunisians’.⁹⁴ This

⁹² Labos, *La presenza straniera in Italia*, cit., p. 24.

⁹³ Labos, *La presenza straniera in Italia*, cit. p. 26, which points out that, of the total of 91 immigrant association presidents who were interviewed, 39 had a high school diploma and 41 a university degree.

⁹⁴ G. Mottura, *L’arcipelago immigrazione*, cit., p. 19.

interpretative approach was unable to see that immigration, already in the early 1980s and despite consisting mostly of ‘labour force’, nevertheless had ‘complex underlying drives and motivations that’ could not be ‘attributed solely to the search for work’.⁹⁵ Among the reasons for migration to Italy, for example, study or political reasons — which affected a foreign population with a strong presence on the peninsula — were not sufficiently taken into account. Additionally, a qualitative investigation into what Michele Colucci has called the ‘original characteristics’ of immigration in Italy, such as ‘the plurality of provenances’ and ‘the propensity to move far and wide across Italy’, also remained hidden.⁹⁶ Aspects related to the existential condition of immigrants, such as religious affiliation or access to education and services, which would have testified to the reality of a presence not confined to the interpretative model of the guest worker, were rarely explored.

On the contrary, the cultural and educational level of foreign workers in Italy in the early 1980s — generally considered to be medium-high — is one of the traits of immigration that has been studied most closely. The portrayal of a highly qualified immigrant forced to experience underemployment in Italy, which in many cases reflected reality, entered strongly into the narrative of the phenomenon, often clashing with the image of a poor, marginalised and vulnerable foreigner. A much more varied and articulated presence moved between these two extremes. Caught between images of “immigrant graduates” and “marginalised immigrants”, the history of certain national communities, present in the Italian social fabric since at least the early 1970s, was excluded — apart from a few exceptions — from the scientific portrayal of immigration.

The figure of the *vu cumprà*, widely adopted by the press and television, exalted a narrative that succumbed to the simplification of the phenomenon, to the tendency to use simple labels in the public debate, precisely when episodes of xenophobic discrimination and racism were emerging. At the same time, as expressions of solidarity with the immigrants’ difficult living conditions were developing in society and public opinion, Italian research struggled to legitimise — in the public sphere — an objective representation of immigration as a complex phenomenon based on empirical evidence, data and theoretical elaborations.

In a country that was experiencing economic growth and where ‘the wind of the 1980s blew with greater force than elsewhere’,⁹⁷ despite the fact that it was heading towards an exponential increase in public debt,⁹⁸ a generally sympa-

⁹⁵ Maria Immacolata Maciotti, Enrico Pugliese, *Gli immigrati in Italia*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1991, p. 30.

⁹⁶ M. Colucci. *Storia dell’immigrazione in Italia*, cit., pp. 66-67.

⁹⁷ Marco Gervasoni, *Storia d’Italia degli anni ottanta. Quando eravamo moderni*, Venice, Marsilio, 2010, p. 11.

⁹⁸ Francesco Barbagallo, *L’Italia repubblicana. Dallo sviluppo alle riforme mancate*, Rome, Carocci, 2009, p. 190.

thetic attitude towards immigrants reflected a precise idea: the foreign presence, the existence of a workforce imported from abroad, was functional for galloping development and widespread prosperity. The Masslo assassination in August 1989 would come to represent a turning point also for the public representation of immigration in Italy. As the events of the early 1990s interrupted the dream of the previous decade,⁹⁹ the new attention given to a rapidly growing phenomenon and the emergence of a political question around the foreign presence contributed not only to an increase in speculation on immigration issues, but also to the evolution of the profile of the immigrant in scientific research and to a partial overcoming of the model of the guest worker in which it had been trapped.

Translated by Andrea Hajek

⁹⁹ G. Crainz, *Il paese reale*, cit., pp. 195-212.

