

# **MIGRATION AS A PROCESS: JOURNEYS IN TIME, SPACE, IDENTITY**

## **ITALIAN REPORT ON CATEGORY V**

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## **Foreword**

This report is in three parts.

The first part is an outline of immigration in Italy, particularly referring to the quantitative dimensions of the phenomenon, to its articulation (especially the segmentation of the labour market with regard to the country of origin) and to the laws in force (section 1).

The second part deals with the analysis of biographies (section 2). We have interviewed five subjects of different sex, age, origin and condition. Two of them are women: Nirmali, a Singhalese woman, has been living in Italy for many years with her husband and sons, and she has a regular permit. Teresa, younger than her, comes from Poland, isn't married and has no residence permit. Of the three men, one of them comes from Ghana: Francis, who works with a regular permit in a city in the North of Italy; another one, Adams, comes from Senegal, and even though he has obtained the residence permit he's limited to precarious jobs; the last one, Herald, is an Albanian boy who has come to Italy to study.

Finally, the third part tries to draw some general conclusions from an analysis of the cases. On the basis of a comparison among cases (section 3), it offers some consideration of the biographical meaning of the migratory experience and of the implications for the use of concepts in studying migration (section 4).

### **1. Immigration in the Italian context**

Although a great flux of international migration started in Europe in the years of post-war reconstruction (in the 50's and 60's), Italy wasn't immediately one of the countries of destination (Mottura, 1992). On the contrary, in that same period Italy was characterised by remarkable fluxes of emigration, both external ones, towards the so-called 'strong areas' in Europe and internal ones, towards the more developed and industrialised areas of Italy itself.

Only in the latter years of the 70's did the Mediterranean countries begin to become targets for immigration; and this became a notable phenomenon only in the 80's – as a consequence of both the policies of blocking, and of the incentive to the repatriation of immigrant workers already present which

have been passed by the European countries traditionally affected by migratory fluxes (Maciotti and Pugliese, 1991), and the process of internationalisation of the labour market (following the oil crisis of the middle 70's) which has involved an increasing number of countries both as supplier and consumer of labour (Pugliese, 1990).

Among the Mediterranean countries, Italy and Spain have been not only the first ones to be transformed from places of emigration to places of immigration (then followed by Portugal and Greece, in smaller numbers) but also to being the countries where the phenomenon of immigration has reached more significant proportions, due also to rather permissive legislation, at least in the case of Italy.

### **1.1 The Legislative framework**

During the 70's Italy continued to keep its frontiers virtually open since there wasn't actually any law on immigration (Magni, 1995). But also in the two following decades the measures taken concerned mostly the act of indemnifying, or the regularisation of the immigrants workers already present across the country.

The first three measures adopted (in 1979, 1980 and 1982), which weren't actual laws but ministerial circulars, referred to the regularisation of immigrant workers - at that time mostly male and female domestics. It provided only for those who, having arrived in Italy before a specified date, had already found or were able to find an employer disposed to engage them, and who were able, in any case, to prove they had been working continuously since their entry. Thus those were measures concerning a relatively small number of subjects; at the same time they didn't actually restrain the entry of new immigrants.

The act n. 943 of 1986, the first real legislative provision in the field of immigration, marked a real turning point in immigration policy in Italy. Besides providing for the act of indemnity for all those who were in illegal situations (their number having increased thanks to the ineffectiveness of the previous measures), this law established an essential principle - that of the equality of foreign and Italian workers, assigning to the local bodies a central role in the integration of immigrant workers. On the other hand, with this law, they intended to limit new immigration through the immediate

repatriation of clandestine immigrants and very severe sanctions against those who assisted their entry.

The result of this act, which was indeed extended three times (from 1986 to 1988), was the regularisation of nearly 120,000 workers (mostly coming from Africa and Asia), but that is all it did achieve. Actually little was accomplished for the integration of foreign workers and even less in blocking new entries. For this reason a second immigration act passed in 1990 (the act n. 39, called the Martelli act from the name of the Socialist vice-president of the Cabinet who proposed it), had to be charged again with a general act of indemnity for all those who could certify their entry before 1988. In order to achieve regularisation it was no longer necessary to provide proof of having worked, mere presence on Italian territory was sufficient. Since the previous constraint relating to proof of working had expired, it was a much wider measure that led to the regularisation of nearly 250,000 workers, once more mostly people from North-African and Asia .

However since the fluxes of clandestine immigration didn't cease, on the contrary they increased following the fall of the Wall, the Italian Government put into effect another measure in 1995 (then made part of act n. 617 in 1996) which provided for the regularisation of foreign workers present countrywide<sup>1</sup>. The decree establishes new measures which are extremely severe with regard to grounds for expulsion, and new regulations regarding seasonal work, health assistance and permission for family members. Even so it was still a measure involving a substantial number of people: at the dead-line for presenting the request to regularise, nearly 250,000 requests had been presented, mostly in the Centre and North of Italy (75% of total requests).

The extent of the phenomenon was such that, according to the latest figures supplied by the Minister of the Interior on 31 December 1997, there were in Italy 1,240,000 foreign citizens with residence permits. If we compare this with the numbers referred to in the two previous years, it shows a rapidly increasing trend (991,419 immigrants registered in 1995 and 1,095,622 in 1996, with an increase of 9,5%; 1,240,741 in 1997, an increment of 11,6%). Anyway, the recent measures for regularisation passed by the Italian

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<sup>1</sup>On 14th of February 1997 a new bill was drawn up - the Parliament is still examining it - aiming at a yearly monitoring of the new arrivals through stricter controls and a favouring, through the extension of the regular immigrants' rights (such as the right to vote), of their stronger integration.

government have affected the rise in official immigration since they have actually reduced the proportion of those who are clandestine (which has been estimated to be 25% in 1996 and within 15-20% in 1997).

Nevertheless even though the legislative measures have aimed at reducing the number of clandestine workers and favouring the integration of immigrants already present countrywide, they haven't been successful in reducing the number of illegal entries which basically continue at the same level. Without any doubt the problem relates to the difficulty of controlling the frontiers of a country which has thousands of kilometres of coastline (this is the feature which makes it impossible to restrain the entry of clandestine immigrants from Albania who land in Italy from makeshift vessels, and recently also refugees coming from Kurdistan and Kosovo). But it depends also, to some extent, on the several measures for indemnity which have contributed to spreading the rumour (from what Francis, one of our interviewees coming from Ghana, says) that Italy is a friendly country, where sooner or later one succeeds in obtaining a residence permit.

## **1.2 The development of migratory fluxes and the articulation of the 'immigration archipelago'**

One peculiarity of Italian immigration is the large variety of foreign communities. The phenomenon of immigration in Italy is characterised, in fact, by the progressive arrival of new groups of immigrants from different countries. In the first phase (which we can consider over by the early 80's) it was restricted to two large groups of workers - the Eritrean, Philippine and South-American female domestics who worked with middle class families in the large cities (often through the mediation of the Church in helping them to find a job), and the casual and seasonal farm labourers coming from the Magreb; in the following phase the range of nationalities seems to be much wider (Mottura, 1992). The 80's are characterised, in addition to the consolidation of the groups arrived in the 70's, by the entry of new nationalities, mostly from North-Africa (Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast) and Asia (Sri Lanka). The same happened in the 90's when, in consequence of the fall of the Wall, we observe the progressive increase of large groups of immigrants coming from eastern European countries, especially Albania, ex-Yugoslavia and Poland<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>The composition of immigrant population results very clearly from the latest data put out by the Minister of the Interior, where we observe that 13,6% of citizens with residence permit come from

The immigration scene becomes ever more diverse. However the greater articulation which characterises the universe of immigrants from the second half of the 80's doesn't concern only their country of origin. Indeed it's important to stress that immigration had been drawn mostly by the industrial development up to the previous decade; yet the latest immigration takes place in full post-Fordism. This has particular consequences for the placing the new immigrants, who seem to concentrate increasingly in the services sector and, more generally, in the minority segments of the labour market. Thus if we can explain the fluxes in traditional immigration in terms of an expansion of demand for a stable job in industry (Bohening, 1984), in the present framework what arises is the demand for temporary and precarious jobs, for local as much as for immigrant workers (De Filippo e Pugliese, 1996).

As it has been noted (Maciotti and Pugliese, 1991) this development begins to undermine those analyses, such as Bohening's<sup>3</sup> which suggest a step by step development, according to which the immigrant workers first filled the less skilled and qualified jobs left vacant by the local workers to the following waves of immigrants, who would gradually ascend the occupational scale. On the contrary there appears to be a kind of polarisation (as exists among local workers) between groups of immigrants who succeed in having access to stable jobs and groups who are left out. Research carried out some years ago has emphasised that two poles emerged in the diversified framework of Italian immigration: one is represented by the figures of female, Catholic, subordinate workers (domestic), mostly coming from the Philippines, Eritrea, India, Sri-Lanka (in these cases the presence of men in the same conditions and with the same features is high) and Capoverde, Somalia, South-American countries; the other is represented by immigrant male, Islamic, ambulant workers,

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countries of European Community, 8% from other developed countries, 23% from Eastern Europe countries, 54,8% from several countries of the so-called Third World (African and Asian). The most largest communities are those from Morocco (nearly 130,000 people), Albania (83,000), Philippines (60,000), United States (59,000). They follow Tunisians, ex-Yugoslavs and Germans (nearly 40,000 persons), while Romanians, Chinese, Senegalese and Poles exceed 30,000 personsts.

<sup>3</sup>Bohering suggests four stages: from the first arrival of young single workers, usually male, it reaches, through a phase when also adult and married individuals come, the phase of maturity, when the immigrants become consumers besides workers (demanding for services, houses etc.) and begin aspiring to more prestigious jobs, so defining a fourth stage when arise tensions from the local population (Bohening, 1984).

coming from Magreb and sub-Saharan Africa (Amaturo and Morlicchio, 1989).

The coexistence of a demand for temporary, precarious work on the one hand, and on the other a double kind of segmentation which offers variable opportunities for stable work not only in relation to the ethnic belonging but also to the long standing character of the work arrangement, all that explains a further peculiarity of the Italian framework. We refer to the non-linearity of fluxes, or the fact that the various communities have changed remarkably in number both as a consequence of the different measures adopted and of the events in their country of origin, and finally in relation to the different opportunities for inclusion in the labour market<sup>4</sup>. This aspect, the irregularity of fluxes, is important for several reasons. The first one is that the change in the size of each group actually corresponds to the existence of different phases of the migratory process (Birindelli, 1991) for different nationalities, which in turn produces different needs for inclusion and for services (for example, the communities which are growing tend to re-integrate their households, and therefore they find themselves to be users of school services, to have different housing needs etc.). The second reason is that irregularity of the flux of the various communities reveals itself to be an important indicator of an existing variety of 'migratory models'. These are defined as the result of a sequence of interactions between subjective connotations, linked to origin and previous experience on the one hand, and on the other the institutional, social and economic framework they join. Such models, which are frequently connected to the ethnic origin, represent in some measure the trajectories typical of the different communities, and they are crucial to set in context the biographies of individuals. Indeed 'nationalities' are not read in these models as 'mythical cultures of origin', but arise out of people's actual experience with the Italian framework in which many social problems are shared (Mottura and Pugliese, in Mottura 1992).

So what emerges is a highly articulated universe; not by chance we call it the 'Archipelago of Immigration', where there's a sort of stratification by ethnic origin, recognisable in the different opportunities for entry into the labour market, for obtaining regularised status and, more generally, for

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<sup>4</sup>To give an example, by the 80's already the Egyptian community had decreased, as had - in the late 80's - that from Capoverde and Eritrea. In contrast, the Philippines community (arrived later) has increased over the 80's and that of Sri-Lanka (still later) is still increasing.

integration, to which the territorial dualism characterising the Italian framework isn't unrelated. The situation in the North and South of Italy is, in fact, completely different (Altieri 1991, Calvanese 1992). While the South is characterised by the massive presence of irregular immigrants (the irregularity ratio in 1996 was 21,3% in the regions of Centre-North and 61,2% in Campania) and by the largest diffusion of the black economy; in the Centre-North of Italy, even though situations of precarious working conditions and social marginalisation are widespread, mostly in the large cities, the presence of immigrant workers legally employed isn't insignificant in agriculture, the services sector, and in the factories, especially in the middle to small firms of Veneto and Lombardia where they have a substitutive function (due to the lack of local labour). Amongst other things, this explains another side of the phenomenon of Italian immigration, that is the high domestic mobility which leads foreign workers, after a transit period in the southern regions, to move to the North (Calvanese 1991, Luciano 1992).

## **2. The Cases**

### **2.1 Nirmali**

#### **Her life in brief**

Nirmali is a Singhalese woman aged 40. She's married to a man from her own country aged 43 and has two daughters of 14 and 2. She's the last born of eleven children, six sisters and five brothers. Nirmali's family isn't a poor family. Her father, now 80, was a wholesaler of glue and her mother, a housewife, had a passion for sewing and manufactured clothes at home. Her brothers are nearly all settled down (one is a teacher; the others are tradesmen; three sisters are married and are housewives; another sister is Mother Superior in a convent). In her family only Nirmali and an older sister emigrated.

Nirmali studied up to the age of 18, then started sewing at home like her mother, who had taught her. At 21 she loses her mother who dies of cancer, leaving the husband and four daughters not yet married. One of the older sisters, who had retired into a convent seven years before, returns home to help the father left alone with the youngest daughters. In the same year Nirmali gets engaged to a boy three years older who is a welder. Three years later they get married. Even before the marriage, that took place in



1980, Nirmali was preparing to come to Italy in order to join her sister, the ex-nun, who had arrived earlier searching for a job to help the family. One month after the wedding Nirmali's husband left to go and work in Jordan and Nirmali joined her sister in Italy.

One year later her husband comes to Italy. They find a job as domestics and a short time later (in 1983) their first daughter is born (during the pregnancy Nirmali undergoes an operation on her ovaries). From 1983 to 1993 the couple always worked together as domestics, moving to two cities (after having settled in Rome, they moved to Genoa and finally to Naples). Up to then they'd always lived at the employer's house. In 1993, after having left the house where they had been for five years, they change their mode of living: they rent a flat in the historic centre of Naples and start working part-time in two different families. Two years later (1995) their second daughter is born. Nirmali stops working (now she's a housewife) while her husband continues working as domestic. Her older daughter attends the high school in a public Liceo in a residential (and elegant) quarter of the city.

From time to time Nirmali and her family return to Sri-Lanka on holiday. Throughout these years she has maintained very close ties with the sister emigrated to Italy (even though she worked in Rome) who has married and had children in the meantime. Both of them plan to return home once their sons have finished school (her sister's eldest son has already returned home after taking the diploma). At the present time Nirmali is very anxious about her health since they have diagnosed a fibroma in the womb. She's receiving treatment at the public medical centre in her area.

### **Self-presentation**

Nirmali's main narration is extremely short. Nirmali refers, in fact, exclusively to her migratory experience and she does that through a report (only ten lines long) where she mentions three facts: a) her motivation to leave (*I decided to go to Italy to earn more*); b) the fact she has attained her objective (*now I've built a house in my town*); c) the fact that nevertheless she doesn't want to leave (*a little longer here, then I will leave forever to, to... I've decided to, my husband and me; I don't want to go to my country because I don't want to leave Italy but my husband wants to return and stay there*).

The picture which emerges is fairly clear: Nirmali presents herself as the victim of a situation imposed on her. The brevity itself in the main narration isn't attributable to her characteristic as an interviewee (on the contrary, Nirmali is very loquacious; in fact, the interview is very long), but has a clear meaning: Nirmali speaks so little because she can't speak about going back home, the reasons for which she can't understand; for it's alien to her and contrasts strongly with her strategy of progressive integration (from immigrated worker to middle-class housewife) that she has tenaciously pursued.

### **The reconstruction of the case**

Nirmali has been marked in her infancy and adolescence by a situation of status inconsistency. Her father was a man who earned a fair amount of money from his job but who hadn't provided his family with the status symbols required in their culture in order to earn 'the respect' of others. Nirmali has suffered from an inferiority complex resulting from the fact her family had often received aid from relatives (*my father had a lot of money since his job was good; he helped his nephews, the sons of his sisters, and they learned his job and also earned a lot of money... but we were down, and my mother's relatives, her sisters and brothers, helped my family*), due to paternal irresponsibility in economic management.

What induced Nirmali to leave her town was the search for economic stability and social respectability which her father hadn't given her. The symbol of stability for her is represented by the house - that house which everybody but them had built: her cousins (*they earned a lot of money and put money away, built a house, a large house*); her parents in law (*my husband's father had built a large house, and he has rented it to us; this house cast a poor light on us; the house is fine, it's large but it's not good for us, it's bad for a family, for the master of the house*).

Her father's considerable guilt, a father whom she loves yet (*he loves me because my sisters are exactly like him, they are white, fair; I'm the only one to have a dark skin and he likes me, he's always saying: 'Where's my Nimi?', he always wants me; when I go to my sister's house he always comes to take me because he can't stay at home without me*), is that of having been irresponsible (*my father is good but the master of the house was my mother; he's like a child; my mother had all the responsibility*), of not having saved anything for his sons (*he goes and play cards; he goes to*

*the club, no, he hasn't saved anything for us; he spent all his on food, clothes and for the house; nothing saved; he didn't save anything for us so we had to come to Italy) and then of not having built a house (my father was so generous but not to us, he hasn't left anything to us).*

Therefore Nirmali tells us the truth when she asserts she left for the sake of her children, unlike her father with her (*I've come here for our future, for my children, for... I've thought I must not behave like my father; my father had twelve children and he hasn't given them anything*). Nirmali and her husband have come to Italy and have built a house in their town (*now we have earned enough money and built a house; the first time we did it, for our children, and then a second time we bought land for the other daughter*). Anyway this is only a part of her story. For Nirmali the migratory experience has had another meaning too, that is offering her a kind of social revenge through the realisation of her status aspirations. Nirmali, who has suffered a deep sense of social inferiority in her birth community, has completely redeemed herself after coming to Italy where she found herself in a condition of absolute privilege with regard to her new reference group (that of immigrant workers). Indeed Nirmali belongs to a sort of 'aristocracy' of immigrants: she has come to Italy with a regular permit; has managed to join her husband easily; has lived at her employer's house with her husband and daughter while many domestics are dismissed once they become parents. And most of all she's Singhalese: thus she comes from that ethnic group along with the Philipinos who achieved a 'monopoly' of 'high level domestic help' in Italy, especially in the first years of the migratory wave, the period when she arrived.

Although Nirmali has worked only as domestic, she has lived the migratory experience as an experience of social mobility; in fact this appears paradoxical for a person who has proudly asserted she comes from a middle-class background (*in our country many of the poorest people go to work in the houses of the rich; we who are from the middle-class don't do housework for others*). Nirmali is proud of her privileged condition (for example, she mentions the fact of having worked for two princesses) and she does her best to differentiate herself from other immigrants: she has enrolled her elder daughter in a public school in one of the more elegant quarters of the city, a school attended by young people from the upper middle-class; she avoids associating with people of the same nationality as her and lives in the limited circle of her relatives (*I go to some parties when*

*they invite me; I don't go to Mass in Piazza del Gesù - usual meeting point of Singhalese - many people go there but I don't go, we alone in the family go to another church... I haven't friends here; I've nephews, relatives).*

For Nirmali, who has suffered a sense of social inferiority in her own country and who has experienced, in contrast, a condition of social superiority during the migratory experience, returning home is very risky. So Nirmali, who fully embodied for a long time the migratory model of her ethnic group (that is women in the active role, usually emigrating first; their job as daily domestics with their husbands; a migratory project of short duration for the purposes of buying a house and land, see Morlicchio 1992), subsequently moves away from it. This resulted from the radical change in her migratory project which at first didn't provide at all for the possibility of permanent residence.

Probably Nirmali has dreamt of returning home 'like a lady' (in fact she says that, once there, she doesn't want to work any more but apply herself to sewing as hobby) but the conditions of her return still don't seem to be such as to allow her high status in the social stratification of her country. The house she has built doesn't seem to be adequately prestigious (*where we have built our house there are very large houses because the husbands have good jobs, some of them in other countries; then they have built very large houses*); she's afraid to find herself marginalized in her environment (*when we return to our town, they consider us strangers, we too meet strangers since we don't know them; my sister in law now lives in my house, she knows everybody*) and she had dreamed of taking back with her a daughter already graduated, but she must renounce it due to the pressures from her husband.

For her husband, who was a welder in his country and came from a more economically stable family and has found himself to be a domestic, migration has probably been experienced as a down-classing rather than as an improvement. That has brought about some turbulence in the family which can be interpreted in terms of differing relationships between geographic mobility, social mobility and gender. This turbulence doesn't involve only the relationship between the partners but also between the generations. Nirmali, in fact, has carried out a strategy of integration both to preserve her privileged position towards the reference group of immigrants and to avoid her return home (*a friend of my sister has got two children, and has bought a house; in Italy they will live here forever; her*

*first son goes to University; and the sister of this woman lives in Rome and she does the same, she returns only on summer holidays, she wont return to her country of birth; now her daughter is a doctor, and she too has bought a house, in Rome).* While her daughter, having been put into a school in a wealthy area, has probably suffered from her minority status and had problems of integration, provoking a desire to return home.

The family conflict is clearly evident in the different levels of adhesion to Italian culture of each family member. Nirmali cooks in the Italian fashion but her husband claims to eat Indian foods. Nirmali dresses in Western fashion (*I always wear trousers, they're fine and comfortable; even when I go to my country I wear trousers; when I wear a sari I'm afraid of falling down, I'm no longer accustomed to it*) but her daughter puts pressure on her to go to Sri-Lanka whenever possible and she wears the sari there; moreover she lets her hair grow like an Indian women (*she said if I make her cut her hair, she'll leave home*). In the middle of these tensions, Nirmali has been obliged to plan a strategy for returning home (next Autumn she will send the younger daughter to an Indian teacher who privately coaches immigrants' children so that they learn the language of their country). In cultural terms this contradictory situation translates into an attempt at cultural mediation (Nirmali cooks in Italian fashion for the children but in Indian fashion, *very spicy* for her and her husband; she wears trousers but wears the sari *only for parties* when she goes to her country). In personal terms it reveals itself in health troubles (Nirmali is very anxious about her fibroma even though she knows very well it's benign). Among the other things, even the sphere of medicine is invaded by this sort of cultural conflict: Nirmali considers Indian medicine risky and Western effective (*I've decided to have the operation on my womb here, here yes, I'm afraid to have it done in my country*).

Thus her case is significant mostly because it stresses an interesting connection between geographic and social mobility (in the sense that social mobility isn't always 'spendable' in the birth country); secondly because it points out the different meaning the migratory experience can assume in terms of status according to gender and generation (so the migratory experience can't always be considered as an unequivocal 'family' project); thirdly because it shows very clearly how the different strategies of inclusion are deeply affected by the social group which is settled on as the normative reference group.

## 2.2 Teresa

### Her life in brief

Teresa is 31 years old and comes from Poland. She has been living in Italy for two years and is a maid. She's the daughter of a housewife and a farmer and has four brothers, two sisters married with children; one brother is now in the Army and another emigrated to Russia.

After having taken her diploma, Teresa started working in a shoe factory where she stayed for seven years (up to 1994). The factory shut down in the time of de-nationalisation and Teresa found herself unemployed for a year and a half. Then she found a job in another shoe factory and got engaged to a boy of the same age. One year later she came to work in Italy, in Naples, for a couple of old people where she is still working. Her fiancé, who is a bricklayer, also left Poland and now works in Germany. A short time after her arrival in Italy, Teresa met an Italian man and had a relationship with him. When Teresa realised he had no serious intentions she left him. During the relationship Teresa hadn't broken with her old fiancé; on the contrary, when she returns periodically to Poland to see her family (she went there last summer) she meets him too, for he comes back from Germany to see her and his family.

### Self-presentation

Teresa presents herself from within her family constellation. She begins her narrative by describing the composition of her family and only after having mentioned all its members and their occupations, she introduces herself and her school and work experiences (*I attended the Liceo in Poland, I took a diploma, then I worked in a shoe factory in Poland for ten years*).

The most remarkable aspect of her self-presentation is the ambiguity in Teresa's account of decision to emigrate. On the one hand she presents it as imposed by necessity, on the other hand as a decision originating from necessities of a different nature.

In the first part of the main narration, Teresa seems to focus on poverty as the context for her migration (*when I took the diploma, I couldn't go to University since my parents weren't sufficiently well off*). Soon after she changes her tone. She doesn't mention her experiences of unemployment (she will mention it only in response to the internal questions) and even in

talking about her decision to emigrate she tends to minimise the dimension of necessity. The decision to leave is explained as being a result of chance (*I went to Italy because a friend of mine rang me; she wanted to leave Poland and said there would be a job for me too*); then to general cultural interests where work also appears as a theme (*and I came also because I wanted to know what it was like living in Italy; and also for a job; I wanted to know about your culture*); only at the end of her shortest main narration she mentions work explicitly (*moreover I've come to Italy to work too*).

But also in this case the emphasis is placed not so much on her need of work as for a 'development' plan, shared with her boyfriend, where the migratory choice takes the role of an investment for their future (*because I've a boyfriend in Poland; we've been engaged for three years; we think we'll marry next year but if we want to marry we need money for a house; we want to buy a house in Poland*).

The key to understanding the principle that structured Teresa's self-presentation is given in the last sequence of the main argument where she asserts her wish to return to Poland (*because I'm not looking for a partner*) a statement in which Teresa wants to testify to her faithfulness to the fiancé.

The analysis of the case shows, in fact, that Teresa feels she has betrayed both her family and her fiancé. Her betrayal consists in having made an individual decision, thinking only about herself and her life and 'forgetting' to be a daughter/sister and a fiancée. This explains why Teresa talks about herself more as part of her family than as an individual (an act of reparation her family) and why she has shown a certain ambiguity in justifying her migratory choice before opting to present it as a long-term plan shared with her boyfriend rather than as a personal strategy.

### **The reconstruction of the case**

When asked about the period spent into the factory Teresa mentions for the first time the experience of losing her job due to the process of de-nationalisation (*when everything was denationalised, all, all the largest firms were shut down by the Government since it had to de-nationalise*) and the subsequent experience of 'de-classing' suffered when she, after one year and half of unemployment, was hired in a shoe factory which worked on a job order for a large Italian firm (*then I stayed at home without working for a year and half; then I found another job in a large shoe factory, but we*

*didn't make the whole shoe we only sewed for an Italian firm, the Diadora; they brought the material to Poland, we worked on it and when the shoes were ready they took them to Italy without the label.)*

In contrast to her accounts in the main narration, the migratory choice is now definitely presented as result of exploitation and poverty (*I had been working there for a year but I earned little money because that man always told us that the Italians paid little; but I think that he took the money for himself, moreover I spent the money to pay fares, to buy lunch and I had hardly anything left*). She presents the situation as being so unbearable as to justify the fact of having made the decision after only four days (*then, one year later, when my friend rang up and told me there was a job for me in Italy, I obtained the passport and within four days left for Italy*). Actually the situation wasn't so difficult since Teresa, soon after having mentioned her precipitate departure, feels the need to show that she hasn't 'abandoned' her family, thus showing her sense of guilt (*within four days I went to Italy and have spent more than two years here; I've been to Poland three times to see my family; I was last there this June*).

Indeed there is an element in her biography which contrasts with her version of 'intolerable exploitation and need', and that is the fact Teresa in the past had been able to put up with the much more difficult situation of absolute unemployment over a long period. Being part of a rural family of the traditional type (her married sister and the nephews live in the paternal house; the women at home help her father with the agricultural work while only the youngest men are employed in other sectors) Teresa, leaving her job in the factory, didn't have great difficulty in fitting in again with domestic life, and was actually securing her survival by contributing to the family activities. The question then remains of why she doesn't resist conditions of exploitation in the new job?

In fact it's at the time of her second job in the shoe factory a new element enters her life, that is her engagement, and it's precisely this new personal situation which brings her to settle on leaving. The decision to emigrate is, in fact, a temporary and common decision: the project is that of working abroad only for some years, in order to earn the money necessary for marrying and building a house. The implicit agreement that Teresa stipulates with her family and her fiancé is that the journey doesn't imply emancipation on her part: the mission entrusted to her is only that of gaining economic resources to meet a family objective and not to constructing her



own autonomy and independence. This legitimates her departure in a context which provides only for male emigration (her brother and fiancé) and not a female one (her sisters are wives and mothers).

But anyway Teresa broke the pact. Once in Italy she meets a man and, as long as the relationship continued, forgot about her family, her fiancé and Poland too. She has thought, maybe for the first time, she could construct her 'own' future independently of the family. Only when she discovers the man she has met is unreliable, tells lies and is totally indifferent to committing himself to a life with her, Teresa 'comes back' psychologically to Poland and acts again as a fiancée and a daughter. From this moment on she starts feeling guilty: her parents and her fiancé had known nothing of the episode and the plans it had entailed.

In having thought only about herself and having secretly desired to make a life in Italy on her own account, she feels an acute sense of guilt. This is particularly evident when Teresa compares herself with a friend who has also come to Italy to work. Unlike that girl, who returned to Poland after only three months since she longed for her boyfriend (*but she stayed in Italy only three months since she couldn't bear to stay any longer, no, she didn't like Italy because she had a fiancé too in Poland; then she longed very much for her fiancé; and she returned to Poland; three months later she got married and now she has two children*), Teresa stayed and even got engaged to another man. Moreover she didn't leave her boyfriend, as she herself honestly admits (*I think I would have left my boyfriend if he, the other man, had been sincere and hadn't told me lies; I had to think but I didn't leave my Polish boyfriend, I had to think about it*).

Once she'd ended the relationship with the Italian, Teresa 'returned to the fold' and oriented herself again to Poland, to her fiancé and to her family. Under the burden of her betrayal she has retreated into her community, goes about only with Polish friends (*these friends go out with men; they do it - pause - but I don't want to*), spends her free time (two afternoons a week) going to Church and has included into her horizon again the idea of returning home.

In short, she has turned out to be a good daughter and the description she gives of her work for a couple of old people has the function of demonstrating that (*these two people, where I work, one is 80 and the other 84 years old; the one who is 80 is full of aches and pains since she has*

*diabetes and only one kidney, I have to take care of her, I must always monitor her medicine timetable, moreover I must check every morning if the diabetes is high or low; if it is high I must give her another medicine; the whole day I must monitor her; then, the other person, she is 84, she can't see anything, I must assist her too, I must take her around because life is bad if you can't see; then I cook, I must do everything, the housework, like a woman who stays at home... they consider me a member of their family, I've never felt like a stranger; because I come from Poland I'm not a member of their family but they consider me to be one).*

Teresa has also turned out to be a good fiancée. She admits that she's no longer in love with her Polish boyfriend (*something's changed, I like my boyfriend but since I see him only every eight or nine months, I've become distanced from him, it isn't, it isn't like before; I like him but no, our relationship isn't like before, I don't know, maybe it depends on me, even if it's because he is far away, I see him little, then he - pause - I don't know, I can't explain that*). In spite of that she professes herself to be decided about returning to him.

Actually Teresa is living through a phase of deep inner conflict. Her rational part tells her to abandon the idea of meeting the 'prince charming' who would allow her to build her future in Italy (*here men, in their cars, always stop; I'm afraid; here when men see a woman all alone, they always pursue her; in Poland it never happens, I feel safe, I don't worry*). The desire to meet her family's expectations (*my parents told me to save some money for my wedding, they said to me: go and save money*) and to repay her fiancé who didn't deserve to be betrayed (*I couldn't find a person better than him since this person is very good; he works, doesn't drink, doesn't smoke cigarettes; a very good person; he has left Poland to earn more money since we want to buy a house*) induces her to return home (*in the future, I want to marry as soon as possible, then I want, first of all I must have a house, then I want children since that's all you need for living*). On the other hand, Teresa isn't yet ready to give up and she wants to enjoy a period of freedom for a bit longer (*I don't know how long I want to stay in Italy but one day I'll decide to return to Poland*).

To sum up, we can say that in the case of Teresa the migratory experience represents a failed attempt at emancipation. The transition from a rural traditional context to a western urban environment has stirred up in her a new project. Teresa has thought of remaining in Italy, so escaping from her

destiny of traditional wife and mother. However the project has failed since Teresa hasn't sufficient resources to escape the Polish migratory model, which in Italy offers to Polish women exclusively housework in the domain of the black economy; nor has she sufficient resources to feed a real process of gender emancipation. In other words she hasn't been able to think of herself independently, as a 'person', but remains dependent on a man as the 'key' to a new life. The effect of a deeply male and racist culture (immigrant women are the preferred victims of a peculiar category of men coming from the lowest classes in search of sexual adventure) has been fatal to her. Teresa can't see any way out other than returning to tradition. She's victim of a process of 'reification' (Berger and Luckman) which prevents her from realising that her return to Poland, the marriage and motherhood aren't punishments but options.

In short the case of Teresa can be classified as a case where the problematic nature of the 'cultural migration' shows itself mostly in the sphere of love relationships and, more generally, of gender relationships. In this sphere, Teresa is subject to a double risk: that of being by now unable to find again a place in her context of origin (so becoming a probably unhappy wife and unwilling mother) and that of being again a victim of domestic sexism which could expose her to sexual exploitation and prostitution, as often happens. Although the strength of her moral values and her family bonds represent without doubt a protection against this risk, the fact that she remains in Italy shows clearly she isn't completely immune from it.

## **2.3 Adams**

### **His life in brief**

Adams is a boy aged 23 who comes from Dakar in Senegal. He has two brothers and two sisters; he is the youngest boy in his family. His 70-year old father is bigamous. Adams' mother is the second wife of his father; she is a housewife and is 65. Adams' family isn't a poor family: his father has always been a truck driver (he owns a lorry) and one of Adams' brothers works with him. The other brother works in Paris; one sister is married and is a housewife, her husband works with Adams' father too; the other sister, the youngest one, lives with her mother.

Adams' childhood has been marked by a long period of absence from home (8 years, from 9 to 17) when he was sent to school and to study the Koran in

a village outside Dakar (St. James). All through these years Adams lived with his family only one month a year, during the summer holidays.

Once back home, he started working as truck driver with his father; then he was a welder for some time (he's qualified). He was engaged to a girl at the age of 14.

Three years later (that is at 20) he leaves for Italy. His stay in Italy is marked by great instability. At first, Adams settles in Naples but then, since he can't find a job as welder, he moves to the North of Italy in the hope of finding a job there. However he meets with many difficulties since he hasn't a residence permit. So he returns to the South, to the provinces of Naples, and he finds a job as bouncer in a night-club. During this time he meets an Italian girl and falls in love with her. They have a relationship that lasts only four months (in the meantime Adams hasn't left his African fiancée). In spite of difficulties Adams persists in his attempts at integrating himself and finding a stable situation. In fact, he moves to Naples where he rents a flat with a friend and buys a used car with him. Moreover, taking advantage of a new legislative measure, he obtains his residence permit. In order to get this he has to provide proof of having a job through the payment of tax contributions. Since Adams hasn't a job, he pays the contributions out of his own pocket (two million lira) asking for a loan from a friend he'd met in Italy.

Notwithstanding his efforts to get all his papers in order - to become integrated both into the society and the labour market - Adams meets great difficulties. He simply can't find a stable job: in the summer he sells necklaces on the beach (in fact we met Adams for the first time there, and it was there the interview took place). At the end of the summer he does some temporary work in agriculture, working by the day picking tomatoes in Puglia (a region in the South of Italy) and apples in Trentino (a region in the far North). He does his best but he lives in a condition of constant economic instability: often he hasn't enough money to pay the rent, and also from time to time he sends help to his mother (he sends her very expensive medicines) and presents to his relatives (clothes and toys for his nephews).

At the moment Adams is intent on returning home: he can no longer bear the instability and he longs very much for his mother who is seriously ill.

## Self-presentation

From the beginning of the main story Adams presents his emigration as his father's choice. Indeed, the story is constructed in such a way as to show that his father did his best to 'send' him away. Adams stresses that when he asked his father for money to go abroad, he gave him a good 12 million lira (a sum well higher than the few thousands lira he asked from him from time to time) and soon after, to show further evidence of his father's wish to send him away, Adams mentions that his father had sent him away to study elsewhere when he was only 9, as if to say 'it isn't the first time he's sent me away' (*I came here to Italy, because when I was, when I was 18 I was ashamed to say: 'dad, give me 10, give me 20, give me 30 thousand lira'; then I said him: 'give me some money, I'll go abroad.' And he gave me 12 million lira and I've come here to Italy, but when I was a child, I was 9, my father sent me away for a long time; I live in Senegal, in Dakar, but he sent me to another place called Saint James; he sent me there for some time to, to study, and to study the Koran too, Koran means... well you say Bible in Italian*).

Moreover Adams seems keen to show there was no real need to make him emigrate: his father isn't poor (he has given him 12 million lira) and has a business in which he could have worked (*at 17 I returned, I returned home and I worked with my father; my father is a truck-driver, he has lorries, he's educated and has a house too*).

In short, Adams presents his departure from Senegal as a choice imposed by his father, a choice that seems to be cruel because unnecessary but also very sad for him. In fact, Adams spends a long time describing the difficulties he met in Italy in the labour market (*when he gave me the money I came here, to Italy, but it doesn't work out; in winter I work in discos, in summer I work on the beach; I work as bouncer*) and he seems to be very keen to demonstrate his efforts and good will (*I was a welder in Africa, then I moved North to find a job; I didn't have a residence permit; when I applied somewhere they would want to hire me but without the residence permit they couldn't hire me... now I've come to Naples; at the moment I haven't got a job, I'm looking for a job, now I have the residence permit, I'm still looking for a job*).

Continuing with the theme of the difficulties he met in Italy, Adams introduces that of racism. Strangely, even though Adams tells his story to

provide evidence of the problems he met in Italy, he speaks about racism in a much less dramatic way. The episode with which Adams illustrates the discrimination he suffered in Italy is told with a noticeably low emotional tone (*there were two boys on the bus who teased me, they said: 'ehi guy, you must sit there since you are a coloured man.' I didn't like that, since we are all God's children, black or white we're all the same; for me, blood is always red, there isn't any difference*). Moreover, as we'll see later, in the course of interview there are several references to the good reception received in Italy and to the generosity shown by the Neapolitan people. The reference to the theme of racism in the main narration seems rather to assume an instrumental value in the text with a double function: that of introducing his dual engagement to an Italian and an African girl, a striking element as we'll see later (*I had a girlfriend before, I had an Italian girlfriend too... well I have another girlfriend in my country of origin; we've been engaged for nearly 9 years; sometimes I ring her up, and she rings up me here, she asks me: 'When will you come back?', she says: 'You have... have you another fiancée?', well... but I still love her, anyway I loved the Italian girl too*); secondly, that of justifying the end of his engagement with the Italian girl by the racist behaviour of her parents (*her father didn't want to meet me so I told her: 'It's better to separate now; since your parents don't want to meet me, it's better we separate'. I liked her; we've been together for three or four months; but we didn't get on well together because her family didn't want us to; I don't know why; she had fallen in love with me but her family didn't want it*).

The loneliness and the homesickness for his family, particularly his mother, the financial straits in which he is forced to live, the long wait for his girlfriend lead into the end of his main story - his wish to return home (*when I'm at home alone, I always think about my family, since when you are alone, alone, without your family, without anything, it's a bit hard; in the evening, when I stop working, I go to the bar and drink to forget my problems and, I think, in order to not think about my family all the time; but now I want to return home because my mother's not well, moreover I have a girlfriend; I've been engaged to her for nearly 9 years, and she is waiting for me, she rings me up and says: 'Adams you must come back, you must return', and I too want to return*).

In short, Adams presents himself as a victim of his father who has unfairly forced him to leave, exposing him to difficulties, sufferings and frustrations.

In contrast to Nirmali, in Adam's case the imposition doesn't concern his return home but his departure from it. The development of his story (I wouldn't have left but my father wanted it and this has caused me a lot of suffering; in spite of that I've tried to do my best but unfortunately I haven't been successful) seems to be constructed to justify his decision to return home. Anyway, as we'll see later, the key to understanding his case lies in the only part of the story emerging from the linear narrative, that is the section where Adams, on grounds of racism, presents his dual engagement to an Italian girl and the African one, who is waiting for him in Senegal.

### **The reconstruction of the case**

Adams has felt very conscious of the investment his father has made in him. He has been the only child his father has sent away to be educated; the only child his father hasn't involved in his job; the only child for whom his father has allocated a large financial investment so that he could find abroad a job consistent with the professional skills he acquired at school (*I'm the youngest boy so came to Italy*). His other brother emigrated to France without any help. Adams tries hard to fulfill the paternal aspirations; he moves to different towns to find a job as welder; he gets into debt to obtain the residence permit; he tries to become integrated (he buys a car, rents a flat and gets engaged); even when he realises it's hard to find a stable job due to high unemployment, he continues travelling round Italy to do any kind of temporary job.

His family expects support from him, and he tries not to disappoint his father and relatives (*every year I go to Foggia to pick tomatoes; I go to Bolzano to pick apples, only to earn money and send it down there... my sister has got two sons, they are my nephews; sometimes I send them clothes, I buy them here; well, my mother isn't old but she's not well; two weeks ago I sent her 400 thousand lira's worth of medicines - I bought them here to send her*). Anyway, three years later Adams begins to give up; he can no longer play the part of someone who's making a fortune abroad (*If I work I manage to pay the rent but if I haven't a job, some months we have problems with the owner since we have to pay for the flat, 200 thousand lira per month, moreover I've to send money down there, so I've got problems*).

Once Adams is fully aware of the impossibility of realising his plan, he reacts by ascribing to his father the responsibility for the wrong choice, that

of coming to Italy. His difficulties in Italy make acute again old problems which date back to his childhood. Adams has been deeply marked by the eleven years lived far from home. Thus his migratory experience opens up again an old conflict with his father, by whom he has felt rejected. In the light of his failure even the help his father gave him to emigrate is reinterpreted as his father's wish for his departure. Not only he has sent him far from the family for eleven years, but he has also 'sent' him to Italy whereas he could have worked with him, as his brother and his brother-in-law do; or else he could have found a job as welder (*I've a skill; I work; I'm a welder; I work well*).

In short Adams feels himself to be the victim of a wrong choice made by his father; he feels he has a clear conscience since he has done his best to carry out the mission entrusted to him. For this reason he claims his right to return home and retake the place due to him from the beginning (*my brother works with my father since my father has a lorry, they work as mechanics with my father, and my sister's husband too; now I want to return home*). However, even returning home is a further source of suffering and frustration for him; for Adams it isn't easy returning as poor as when he left (*I want to return but the problem is that to return will cost a lot of money, really, I pay more than one million lira for the flight, one million and half; then I need more money to pay for clothes, to pay for presents for my friends, something, t-shirts, it depends*).

Adams has no intention of paying alone for all that. He's taking revenge on his father. His father has sent him to study the Koran: he is a convinced Muslim and has two wives. In contrast Adams has westernised; now he refuses bigamy (*my father has two wives, I'm a child of the second mother; so there's a problem too; two wives, the first wife doesn't like the second wife*) and he demonstrates it by leaving his beloved Italian girl-friend (*I loved her, and she also loved me, really; when I was with her we didn't consider the colour of our skins; we were peaceful, it was really easy*) in the name of faithfulness to his African fiancée, even though he isn't really in love with her (*she, she loves me, I met her when she was 12, when we grew up I fell in love a little with her, and she too, yes, we were engaged for nine years; now I want to marry her, really, because I don't want... even if I fall in love with another girl... I can't fall in love with another girl because we are very... I've been engaged to her so long, I've spent a long time with her*).



The monogamy, that is his sense of fidelity, is the revenge that Adams takes on his father. He has broken off with Muslim culture. His father has made him lose three years of his life sending him to Italy; and his response is to frustrate the investment his father has made in him, that is the study of the Koran for eleven years.

In short, the racism that Adams adduces as a reason for the end of his relationship with the Italian girl is only a pretext. This explains Adams' ambiguity in speaking about it during the interview, where he continuously alternates evidence of Italians' racism and proof of their absolute generosity and positive attitude towards coloured people (*'My friends are all coloured people...'* and then: *'My friends in Naples are all white people, I have many friends, all of them are white they come here every day or they ring me up they like me a lot they really do.* Following: *Once a man in a disco said 'Nigger' to me and another insulting word, I got angry and quarrelled'* and afterwards: *'Carmine - a Neapolitan boy - lent me two million lira to pay the insurance contributions when I went to his house to give back the money he said: 'Adams, I don't need it; take it!' I like him very much, really.* Again: *I had a friend I met in Senegal; he had heart disease, he came here and they changed his heart; they gave him the heart of a Neapolitan woman who had died).*

Therefore, the problem of the case has to be placed in the field of problematic and conflictual family relationships. This is the difference between Adams' trajectory and the migratory model typical of his group. After the regularisation offered by the latest legislative measures, the Ghanese immigrants follow in fact two typical trajectories: those who reside in the South look for work as itinerant salesmen - sometimes considering it as a refuge among all the other precarious jobs - and in wintertime they return to their country; or they attempt to move to the North, mostly if they have a diploma; in this case, once they've found a regular occupation in industry, they stay longer (Campus, Mottura, Perrone 1992). In contrast Adams, even though he has a professional qualification and a residence permit, has decided definitely to return home.

Adams has experienced migration as an imposition to which he has responded by trying to fail. His 'cultural conversion' is his way of responding to the paternal imposition. A response which will reveal all its risk potential when Adams returns to Senegal. The opportunity to find a job (better if as a welder) will be essential not only from the material point of

view but also from the psychological, to demonstrate that Adams had been right when he thought it would have been better if his father hadn't sent him to Italy.

## **2.4 Francis**

### **His life in brief**

Francis comes from Ghana; he's 40 and has lived in Italy since 1989. He comes from a relatively poor family with eight children, five sisters and three brothers (another brother died some time ago). His father, a workman, started another activity (as an itinerant food trader) after having retired but he stopped it once he became too old; then he died. His brothers are still living in relatively straitened circumstances: two sisters and a brother are unemployed; another brother has found a job in his country, Ghana, but he has to provide for his job-less relatives with his modest income. Francis isn't the only one in his family to have left his country: before him, another brother emigrated to England where he's still living with his wife and children.

Once he finishes his studies at 24 (he hasn't been to University), Francis starts looking for a job but he finds only unskilled and underpaid work. In spite of that he gets married to a girl of 18 who has a diploma as teacher but has never worked; a year later she has her first child. Soon after he decides to go and work in Nigeria, a relatively richer country, where at first he finds a job as house-painter and then other jobs in building. From time to time he goes to Ghana to see his wife; after a six years stay in Nigeria he has three children (born respectively in 1982, 1985 and 1987). Shortly after the birth of his third son, Francis - who has managed to save some money - decides to return home; yet less than a year later he decides to leave for Italy. All his relatives contribute to buy the ticket.

The arrival in Italy certainly isn't easy. Once arrived in Naples, Francis turns to a religious association that is very active in helping immigrants and they direct him to a town in the Neapolitan hinterland where it's very easy to find a job in agriculture (it's a real ghetto where immigrants live in subhuman conditions and their exploitation reaches unbelievable levels). Francis submits to each kind of job, both in the agricultural and building sector, moving to different places in the South of Italy.

A year later (in 1991) an amnesty granted by the Socialist Administration gives him the opportunity of coming out of clandestinity. Francis obtains the residence permit; once his documents are in order, he decides the turning-point in his life will be a move to the North (to a city in the Veneto) where immigrant workers with the residence permit have reasonable opportunities to find a regular job.

Even now he has severe problems: he doesn't find a job for three months and is obliged to sleep in the railway station, suffering hunger and cold. Finally he finds a job, but it's an irregular one and so he leaves it. He changes jobs several more times since he aspires to regular work; at last, he settles for a building company where he stays for two years. Once more it's Francis who leaves the job, even though it's a regular one, since they don't pay him regularly. In 1994 (so nearly five years after his arrival in Italy) Francis reaches the position he's wanted for so long: he becomes a worker in a metal work firm. He's still working there and is very satisfied with his job. He has rented a flat but must share it with three other Ghanaians for economic reasons.

From time to time he returns to his country. On one of his visits his wife gets pregnant again, and in 1993 he becomes a father for the fourth time. Naturally, he sends a large part of his income to his wife; sometimes he sends also small contributions to his brothers.

When we interviewed Francis, he had just arrived from the Northern town where he lives. He was passing through Naples and was about to leave for Ghana, with a present for each member of his family.

### **The self-presentation**

Francis focuses the main narration on his experience of Italy, although he had spent six years out of his country (in Nigeria). No reference is made to his childhood or to the years spent in Ghana or those spent in Nigeria. Moreover even though Francis married 18 years ago and has four children, he starts his narration introducing himself from within the constellation of his family of birth, that is to say as 'son and brother' rather than 'husband and father' (*'I am Ghanaian, we are ten in our family, one died so we were left with nine'* are his first words). Soon after he speaks about his migratory experience and the reasons which have forced him to leave (*'I was finding life in Ghana very difficult because I wasn't working so I had to*

*travel to come in search of money*); about the means which he could count on (*it was a contribution from my sisters and brothers, and my father and my mother to come to Europe*); about the selection of the destination country (*we saw the economic situation of Italy was quite good, and moreover we found Italians to be very kind, good people*); about the several vicissitudes and difficulties he has had to face (the difficulty of finding a job, the difficult conditions regarding accommodation etc.); all that takes nearly a half of his main narration.

The story of his difficulties takes the form of a report, chronologically organised, and is characterised by the presence of positive events: his difficulties as clandestine worker come to an end with the amnesty granted in 1991; his difficulties in getting placed in work, experienced in the North of Italy, come to an end when he's engaged as a factory worker. Up to this point Francis presents his migratory choice as a choice matured in his family of birth and imposed by economic need; moreover he presents himself as a person who has responsibly done his best to keep going and to carry out his project.

The presentation of his present job marks a sort of splitting between past and present in the story: his job as workman in the factory is shown, in fact, as the acquisition of a new identity and even more a new status (*I changed to factory work, that is metal work, and that's what I am actually doing now*). Soon after he uses his positive evaluation of Italians to introduce the second part of his narration, focused on present difficulties (*I think Italians are very good people because they appreciate, they do appreciate, they..., but there is this problem of accommodation*).

The main subject concerns the difficulties met in connection with the absence of family, a theme he articulated frequently through a variety of issues. First of all we find practical difficulties (*I go to work, I come back very tired, I have to prepare my own food, and I have to go, I have to, I have to do so again the following morning, I have to stand on my own feet I find it very, very difficult without my wife*), presented as personal difficulties. Moreover we find the risk of falling into 'wrong' behaviour that is actually connected to the absence of his wife but presented as a problem shared by all immigrants (*we want to bring our wives because it's very difficult to stay here without our wives and some of us go to prostitutes which is very bad*). Finally we find a sense of impotence in the face of bureaucracy (*you have your document? Ok, are you working? Have you*

*accommodation? Ok, if you have your document you go to the embassy and you show it, I think that they should allow your wife to join you, the Americans do) that is presented as responsible for deviant behaviour on the part of immigrants, and is discussed in impersonal form (some people go about, people get friends or... and this brings a lot of troubles but if our wives were to come here I don't think anybody would go to prostitutes or maybe just looking around for... a friend or a woman).*

Anyway such difficulties don't diminish a substantially positive evaluation about his migration to Italy (*personally I feel better than... it is better for me than in Ghana*) that is connected to the fact that working in Italy offers him the chance to provide for his wife and children (*because I'm able to work, to send some money to my wife and children*). A further positive evaluation about Italy introduces the end of his main narration, where Francis, shifting from the present perspective to the future perspective, thinks of re-uniting the family and of the possibility of 'making one's life' (*so I think Italians are very good and I like Italy, but if I can bring my family, for example my wife when I get some accommodation, and bring the children, so they work over here, you can see how you can make your life*).

In short Francis presents his story as an experience of migration that is initiated in his family of birth and ends with his own family. Francis leaves with the help of his relatives in order to help them but today he draws up a positive picture of his life since he can provide for his wife and children. Francis splits his life into three phases: the past, a difficult time that he has faced successfully; an ambivalent present, where positive and risk elements live together; an inevitably uncertain future. Thus Francis presents himself as still in the middle of the process; the conclusion of his project is at risk; there are risks connected with being so far from his wife; the possibility of 'finally making a life' depends on re-uniting the family .

### **The reconstruction of the case**

Why does Francis, who has been able till now to overcome so many difficulties, feel at risk? And why is the risk connected to the family re-union? The case reconstruction shows that the threat hanging over Francis is that of returning home; and so the arrival of his wife in Italy represents for him the only condition which can protect him from that eventuality.

Since he was a boy, that is when he ended his course of studies at the age of 24, Francis had been determined to emigrate. He wasn't a pioneer in that, in fact a large number of people from the same country, by the early 80's, in consequence of the several coups d'état which had progressively impoverished their country, had emigrated towards richer countries, or politically more stable ones (among these Nigeria), and probably the migration of his eldest brother represented a model for him as well.

Anyway behind his migratory choice lies a strategy of estrangement from his family of origin, which doesn't confine itself to a geographical shift. It seems rather to be articulated on two different levels: on the one hand Francis creates a physical distance by choosing to go and work in Nigeria; on the other hand he establishes affective distance by founding his own family still in Ghana. In fact Nigeria isn't a country so rich as to justify migrating there (on the contrary, after the oil crisis in 1983, Nigeria ejected two million Ghanaians who had emigrated in previous years, and many Nigerians in the same period emigrated, often to Italy too); moreover, his marriage and subsequent paternity seem to be premature given his economic difficulties.

In other words marriage and fatherhood legitimate his decision to leave his family of birth and are functional in his emigration: Francis needs to take upon himself the role of breadwinner in order to be able to leave home. The very fact that his wife has a teaching diploma yet has never worked, shows the existence of the possibility of combining two incomes (which would allow Francis to be satisfied with a lesser paid job and so remain in his country) was rejected at once. The subsequent paternity (that is the two children procreated in the years spent in Nigeria) do nothing but strengthen this strategy: each new born, in fact, makes more indispensable his staying abroad (*Oh, Nigeria, you know, when I went to Nigeria the economy was a little bit better than in Ghana, so I enjoyed my life over there, but I went there to work, to look after my family, so I was working there to get some money, to come home, so I had to try every possibility in order to be there for some time to get money and come home*).

After the birth of his third son the difficulties in the management of his family probably challenged the functionality of his choice ( because in fact he earns little) at least in the eyes of others (*when I went to Nigeria, the first time I came home I had one child, the second time I came home I had two,*

*and the last time I came, the last time I came, I had three, so I decided to come back home).*

The risk of being forced to return home seems to be high for him; Nigeria isn't far enough or rich enough to protect him from the threat of being obliged to return home (*in Nigeria they're black, all of them, so there was no difference between us and the weather is like Ghana*). Therefore Francis decides to return home but only to organise a new departure, this time a final one, at least it's intended to be. It is now that Francis commits his cardinal sin: that of escaping from his family of birth at the same time being helped just by those people (his parents and brothers) from whom he wants to escape (*it was the contribution from my sisters, brothers, and my parents that let me come to Europe*). Francis, in the name of his responsibilities towards his new family, neglects his duty as a son and brother. In Ghana the old age pension doesn't last forever; they pay it only for a few years. In fact they expect the sons, once adult, to take care of their parents. For this reason Francis' father, once he got through his pension, started another job, but when he became too old to work his sons had to support him (*in Ghana, if you have a pension, you'll have it for a short time and not to the end of your life; you have sons and the sons have to support their parents, for this reason in Africa we like having boys and girls, since when I'm too old my child has to maintain me*). However Francis refuses this task; he escapes this 'pact among generations', and even though he isn't the oldest brother, he decides to leave, abandoning to his brother the duty to provide for his father and sisters (*I'm not the eldest son but since there was my father we had to leave a brother or two brothers there with my father to help him... for this reason I left my brother there, to provide for my father, to help my father and also to look after my sisters, my sisters' children too; this is important, leaving there one or two men*). The effort made by his relatives who, though poor, collect the money to allow him to leave, prefigures a commitment by Francis to provide for all of them when he, once in Italy, finally would have made his fortune.

In Italy Francis puts up with every kind of difficulty and renews his strategy of physical estrangement but rising involvement in his new family: in one of his visits to Ghana he fathers another child. Once again fatherhood has the double function of increasing the necessity of an income thus legitimating further his limited commitment towards his family of birth, to which he sends presents and money only when it's possible (*if I send money to my*

*family I've little money left over, do you understand? If I send money to my family I've little money left over but from time to time I send a little money to them for basic living, but if I make fortune I'll help them; but now isn't the right time).*

After his arrival in Italy his strategy of 'estrangement' acquires another element that appears absolutely necessary to cement his decision to migrate. Francis, in fact, needs to settle and to be fully integrated, in order to remain in Italy. For this reason he leaves any job that doesn't give him sufficient guarantee of stability and citizenship. Furthermore even the choice of country follows this logic: Francis chooses Italy - and not England, where his brother lives - because he knows that Italy is a very tolerant country, where clandestines aren't expelled and where periodically they grant an amnesty to regularise the position of illegal immigrants (*Italy is somehow good because Italy is not a police state, if you get into Italy without documents the police don't send you away; they are generous, generous people; every year, every two years they give you a residence permit*).

For this reason the stable job as metal worker, in one of the richest provinces in the North of Italy, represents for Francis a turning point: he feels he's gained the rights and the duties of being a true father who is responsible for his wife and children (*With regard to the situation in Italy we feel, personally I feel it is better, it is better for me than Ghana, when I was there, because I'm able to work; you know, send some money to my wife and children, I'm able to buy food for them, to pay their school fees, at least I am happy for this*).

Anyway after he has passed three years in this new situation Francis begins to feel threatened again. How long is it possible to be a good father so far from home? How long can he stay so far from his wife - with whom he has actually never lived - before putting under discussion his permanence in Italy? (*I think the Government should limit the period of time, now it is too long the time, the time involved is too long, two or three years which I think is too long, it is too much two years before you can bring in your wife*).

The problem of re-uniting the family becomes the main problem for Francis: he has had to construct himself as a good father to avoid having to be a good son and brother; anyway, if he doesn't succeed in taking his family to Italy, his strategy could be said to be a failure. Even the 'temptation' to betray his wife represents a threat for him, not so much from



a moral perspective but to the image of husband and father that he has constructed (*I have had problems for years over accommodation, an accommodation problem; we need to bring our wives because it is very difficult to stay here without our wives and some people go to prostitutes which is very bad*).

Insofar as it lay with him Francis could overcome any kind of difficulty in order to remain in Italy. Unfortunately now the problem isn't in his hands but in those of the bureaucracy. He can't control the situation and he feels under pressure. Only re-uniting his family group would legitimate the definitive separation from family of birth and from Ghana. Emigrating for him has meant a release from the roles imposed on him by a traditional large family; re-uniting his conjugal family means for him legitimating this emancipation.

Therefore the principle that structures the case concerns the modernisation of the family model. In a way Francis is a pioneer of the nuclearisation process. From this point of view Francis doesn't differ from the migratory model typical of people coming from his country. Recent studies, in fact, have shown that the reasons for expatriation of this ethnic group are several. They vary from economic reasons - which often concern not just their survival but also the search for higher earnings and a job more appropriate to their education - to cultural reasons, particularly the attraction of westernised life models for those who have higher education, which sometimes cause the prolongation of their stay abroad, if not the choice of never returning, as in the case of Francis (de Filippo 1992, Calvanese e Pugliese 1991).

Francis's 'journey' has been a journey towards economic stability and towards Western culture, but has also meant for him a journey towards other family models: he has started out from responsibilities (which he shirked) towards the fathers' generation and towards blood relations, and has arrived at responsibility only towards his wife and children. The migration has been his means of transport.

## **2.5 Herald**

### **His life in brief**

Herald is 21 years old, Albanian, and has been living in Italy (in Naples) for less than two years. He comes from a middle class family. His father has a

degree in Economics and worked for the Civil Service under the Communist government up to 1986, when he – having fallen seriously ill - retired (at the present time he's paralysed and suffering from heart-trouble). His mother is a nurse; his sister, eight years older, is married and has a child; she's a popular singer of pop music (she has won more than once the most important music competition in Albania). Another child was born before Herald but he died at birth.

After completing compulsory school Herald enters the high school. However since he has a beautiful voice his teachers suggest he change his course of study and enter the Art Liceo (the Conservatory) to become a singer. The liceo, where entry is through a tough selection process, lasts four years; then whoever intends to continue has to attend four years more at an Academy of Music.

Herald goes to the Liceo and does well for the first three years; moreover he meets a girl who attends the same school and gets engaged to her. But at the end of the third year something happens which is destined to change the course of his life. He gets into problems with girls - he has an adulterous relationship with a girl who's engaged to another boy - and is knifed. Both Herald and a friend, who intervened in the fight to protect him, are seriously hurt. Herald is stabbed three times and wounded in the liver and diaphragm. His father, who suffers from heart disease, has a heart attack because of the horror and fright. After the surgical operation Herald recovers his health and goes on with the school, but the damage to the diaphragm compromise his voice: they tell him that he won't ever be a singer. Thus Herald gives up his plan to enter the Academy of Music and decides to leave for Italy. The opportunity is offered him by his girlfriend, who has remained with him notwithstanding his frequent betrayals. The girl is, in fact, from an Italian family. Her grandfather, an Italian man, who moved to Albania during the first World War, was obliged to remain there when the frontiers were closed under the Communist regime. Her parents returned to Italy soon after the fall of the regime (in 1990). The girl, who remained in Albania with an aunt for some time, having finished the Liceo, decides to join her parents in Italy in order to enter the Conservatory.

A few months after her departure (in November 1996), Herald joins his girlfriend in Italy. Through her parents he is lodged in a Reception Centre for non-European people, run by a religious group. For some months, Herald can't find a job and stays as a guest in the community. Then, thanks

to the interest of the friars who lodge him, he finds a job as cleaner. During the summer holidays ( August 1997) he returns to Albania to prepare all the documents required to enrol at university. Herald, who had followed with great anxiety the Albanian rebellion during the first months spent in Italy, is severely affected by the situation he finds in his country. His parents are alone (his sister moved to Macedonia soon after the first disorders); many friends and acquaintances have died, all of which he learns only at this point, since his parents had always minimised the danger of the situation in order to keep him quiet. Once he has obtained the documents Herald returns to Italy and enrolls in the Faculty of Law.

He leads a very busy life. In the morning he has to go to university; in the afternoon he works and when he returns home in the evening tidies his room. In his limited free time he goes out with his girlfriend (who studies Languages at the university and Violin at the Conservatory) and devotes himself actively and gratis to the activities of the Reception House (devoting to them the whole of every Sunday). Actually, in the last Sundays (his only free days) he has painted, together with a friar, more than twenty rooms in the House. It wasn't expected of Herald that he should do this because he's no longer a guest in the community, for since he started working he pays for his accommodation. It isn't a large amount (250,000 lira per month), nevertheless the sum represents half of his income. For this reason Herald, who must maintain himself at the university, has serious economic problems.

### **Self-presentation**

Herald focuses his main narration exclusively on the time around the accident that changed the course of his life (*'I start when I was 15-16'* are the first words of his narrative). During his very brief self-presentation Herald tries to balance the importance of the interruption suffered in the course of his life. On the one hand he presents his life as fractured and irremediably marked by the renunciation of his vocation as singer. On the other hand he minimises both the cause and the consequences of this renunciation. The cause, that is the event which brought to an end his career as a singer (the wounding), is, in fact, presented as a common quarrel among boys. As for the consequences Herald seems to be concerned to minimize their importance since he claims he'd always had another plan to become a lawyer (*Well, I start at the Art Liceo, Conservatory, as you say here, I want to be a singer, to tell you the truth, but I couldn't do it because*

*though I attended the school something happened... always there, eh... it was to do with a boy, I quarrelled with another boy and got into trouble, got stabbed, things like that, and I can't sing any more, anyway I had also another idea, to be a lawyer).*

The second theme Herald raises is that of his migration, which seems to be closely connected to the possibility of this second vocation. The possibility of becoming a lawyer is, in fact, connected to his staying in Italy, a place where studies 'are worth more' (*studying in Albania isn't bad but I saw that there wasn't any prospect over there, the future, we could say, I couldn't work there because...there isn't anything wrong with doing it there, it is worth something, but in a way it is worth nothing, we say, the degree is worth nothing there, because it's exclusively for Albania).*

The 'value of studies' in Italy introduces the following theme concerning his own 'value' as a person. It is illustrated by his courage in starting difficult studies in difficult circumstances (*going to university in Italy is no small matter, it's quite something, I'd say, particularly for me coming from another country, you know the difficulties, but I know them even better* ). Secondly, by his good will and involvement in facing difficulties and hard work (*now, I'm in a reception house they are good to me there, I must do quite a lot of work there, for this reason I told you before it's difficult, I don't know, partly because I haven't the whole day free, and then in the afternoon I come and work here, for example, now I must leave, go to the university, I must do some more work in the house where I live, they are painting, they have painted nearly the whole house, then I must work here, up to 7,30-8 I work here, then I eat and and at last start studying*). Finally, by the evaluation that Herald makes of himself (*anyway, I try to do my best, I don't know what else I can say*).

The most meaningful passage in the text is that where Herald ends his main narrative, when he devotes a long sequence to his life. He shows it as a life divided in two (*my life, my life started off on a different path but was broken off, and I liked so much doing what I did then* ). The episode of stabbing marks the shift from the past to the present. The past, which is 'the fine days' definitively lost, is associated with Albania, with light-heartedness, with being a son. In contrast the present is connected with responsibilities, work and Italy (*what I experienced in Albania was good, and to tell you the truth since I came here the difficulties, difficulties arose, not really difficulties but a hard life, truly a hard life; because as long as I*

*was there my parents acted for me, they worked for me, but now I must work for myself, I must study, I must do so many things).*

Notwithstanding the regret and homesickness (*it was fine, eh, really, when... I always, the whole day, when I start thinking, I think of the life I've spent there, the school, the Liceo, everything*), Herald doesn't present himself as a victim either of fate or of the person who has deprived him of his future by wounding him. On the contrary he introduces himself as a person who has paid for his error with the sad renunciation of his career, and who isn't, in any case, irremediably a failure. Since it results from an error he made 'as a child' (thus he's only partly guilty for it) they have granted him a second chance (the opportunity of becoming a lawyer studying in Italy) even if it's a challenge that's very difficult to meet.

In short we could say that Herald presents himself as a 'convert': migration represents his conversion. The 'wrong' life - the easy one - is that of adolescence and Liceo ( in Albania). The 'right' life - the difficult one - is that of maturity, University and work (and thus in Italy).

### **The reconstruction of the case**

Herald was probably spoiled; his family is relatively wealthy; his sister is much older than him and left home when he was still a child. Moreover Herald was born after a male child who lived only for a few days; perhaps he has been particularly loved and over-protected for this reason. Moreover his father is seriously ill and paralysed and probably this circumstance too pushed Herald into precociously centering his life on a world external to the house (friends) and, in some way, opposed to it. Girls and pleasure were, without any doubt, in great contrast to the atmosphere in his house; since his mother worked, his sister had gone away and his father, who was ill, was the only one at home.

In order to escape the greyness of family life, Herald chooses his older sister as a reference model and decides to follow in her footsteps. Thus his adolescence is marked by a dual orientation, in some ways ambivalent, of at once irresponsibility and commitment. On the one hand, in fact, by getting engaged, acting out the latin-lover and having fun, he escapes the greyness of his family; on the other hand, by committing himself to study, he protects himself from the risk of having a sad and unsatisfying future like his father's. Both his father and sister, in other words, have represented an

orientation model, the former negative, the latter positive (*my father attended university, he studied Economics to be an accountant, I don't know... he has always worked, we say, because under the Socialist/ Communist regime, in Albania, they worked for the Government, they went from the workplace to home and from home to the workplace, nothing else, that was their life. Then this happened - he fell ill in '86/'87, and he has remained in this condition since, maybe he is a little pessimistic too, even because if, if he had done more at first, he wouldn't be in this condition, now he would have been walking, if he had done something, things would have gone much better, my mother is a nurse; but the person who has been most successful in my family is my sister, I don't tell you that because she's my sister, but if you mention to an Albanian my sister's name, he knows it. She's a singer, she has won first prize in the most important competition in Albania three times; and then second prizes, third prizes, so, every year she wins something, sure, she has been winning for seven years*).

The end of his dream (of becoming a singer) puts his strategy in crisis. Since he has lost the goal that led him along the path of commitment (that of becoming a singer), Herald can no longer sustain his irresponsibility, his lightness, in other words, his youth. So he falls into a deep crisis from which he comes out completely changed (*I finished school, or rather they gave me the diploma anyway since I hadn't even the will to do... because they give a concert at the end of the school year, I hadn't even the will to... to do it, it was too much of a blow... I've... I've gone towards... I was really pessimistic at that time, I can't tell you, I did nothing, it's since then since then I'm not as I was before, since the accident I'm not like I was before, maybe I think more, I've always the memory of that*).

His injury, which he presents as the end of his career as singer, has actually meant the end, a sudden and unexpected one, of his adolescence; it has meant for him being forced to grow up. That explains why the episode that caused his injury is shown as a quarrel between boys (*boy's quarrel, we say, I quarrelled with other boys*) and to a degree justified by his lack of experience and his youth (*the problem came from the girlfriends I had a problem... perhaps it was my fault, I don't know, because I went too much, I turned too much to women, and not with only one or two girls but several*).

Italy is the scenery of his 'new life' as an adult; for this reason, when Herald talks about it he always emphasises the differences from Albania, both when he speaks of the school system (*the degree is worth nothing there, it's*

*just for Albania, while going to university in Italy isn't a trifle) and of the different customs in the field of relationships with girls (in my country things are different if you want to get engaged to a girl, things aren't like in Italy where it's easy to split up because in Albania, we say, there are rules, unwritten laws, acting in that way could cost you your life), and even when he speaks of hospitals (here in Italy I've seen the hospitals are clean, but I went to the hospital there, stood for three hours injured, just for an x-ray – it was hell). The difference/opposition which Herald attributes to the two countries, in other words, is connected to the difference/opposition between 'Herald in the past' and 'Herald today'.*

Moving to Italy represented Herald's redemption, a way of recompensing his parents who, though being upset by the error he made, have never accused him. On the contrary, they were ready to help him come out of the crisis into which he'd fallen (*once school was finished, as I told you, I went through a bad time, then little by little, very slowly, my friends, my girlfriend have been, they have been very close to me, without counting my family which has been the closest to me) and most of all his father (he had the worst shock; because he's paralysed and has had three operation too, to his stomach, and one to his heart, and he's also paralysed, he has had a stroke, the shock was the hardest, we say, he had another heart attack when he knew).*

When Herald left for Italy he didn't actually have a definite plan (*they all said, I said, now I must recover otherwise things won't go well, I've a passion for languages, to tell you the truth, I wanted to go to university, the Language University in Italy, I like languages, and I' not bad at them, so I liked attending this faculty... but the others, I don't know who made me change my idea, anyway I like studying Law) except to make his parents happy and to satisfy their expectations (anyway I made a choice, I said, OK, I will study law, my parents were so much happy when they knew that... they can't still believe it). Actually he wasn't fully conscious of what he was about to do (my departure was like something out of a movie... like a movie, I assure you, like a movie, when the day of departure came my friends said ' Herald, tomorrow we'll go there, to the pub, without, without thinking I said ' yes, tomorrow we'll meet at the pub ').*

It was really a decision forced by outside forces. Herald feels strong pressure to change and grow up (*the liceo, for me that time remains great, still I knew that things couldn't go on in that way), but he hasn't the*

necessary resources. Once he arrived in Italy the day of reckoning had come. Herald realises he hasn't grown up at all. He's obliged again to apply to 'adults' for help: his girlfriend's father (who at first lodges him and then helps him find accommodation in the reception community); the friars (who lodge him for free); his parents (who continue to treat him like a child, since they protect him from the bad news of the Albanian situation).

Above all Herald, who left Albania to expiate his sin - having been a spoilt, irresponsible and feckless boy (*my friends came along with their cars, I went out with girls to the pub - half a hour with one girl, half an hour with another girl, not everybody had the means, there were few people who had the means*) - finds himself again in a similar situation. In Italy the Albanian people arrive from famine, or for political reasons; in contrast Herald has come to study (*I left long before, long before; the disorders started towards February March in '97, I left in November '96, when I left Albania it was OK*). The others live in tragic conditions: very often they are intercepted at the frontier and sent back home; many of them have died on the journey by drowning during the crossing in makeshift boats; the women start with prostitution, while men do precarious jobs in conditions of terrible exploitation. Finally, those who are officially accepted by the Italian Government live in refugee camps in terrible conditions. In contrast he has been welcomed with affection into a religious community, has a girlfriend from the upper-middle class and studies at university. His friends have died, while his most serious problem is that of having to study and work at the same time (*in August I went to Albania because I had to prepare documents for the university I saw things I can't describe, I don't know how... how to tell others, I didn't find the friends I had before, I found them in the cemetery they were 18 or 20*). Once more he's privileged compared to the others.

So at the present time Herald finds himself facing his sense of failure. He tries to do his best (he's a domestic worker, has the papers he needs to enter university, tries to repay all those who have helped him, tries to pay for his privileges compared with the 'real' Albanian immigrants by helping his roommate (*the other Albanian, poor devil, who works for thirteen hours and when he returns he hasn't even the strength to eat, who gets even more tired than me, I don't leave anything for him to do*)) but he isn't ready to meet the obligations and responsibilities to which he's called, even if he



feels pressured to do so (*my parents, now, are confident... and if I don't succeed, then... I don't want... to disappoint them*).

The risk of not succeeding is very high and Herald is very conscious of it. The migratory experience, far from having meant for him the full assumption of an adult role, has meant for him only the end of carefree youth (*now I'm afraid of the future, I wasn't before but... I have never had this fear... I didn't think... I said today's OK, tomorrow who knows... but now... I'm too afraid of future... people say let things go the way they will..., who knows if that's right...I could die tomorrow... who knows... but, anyway, I don't know*).

In fact at the moment Herald can't entertain ideas of projects or dreams other than that of fully growing up. Nothing is more significant than Herald's statements with which he ends the interview: (*I try to make plans, first to go to university and then... my girlfriend... I hope to go on to have a really serious relationship, but the most important thing for me is to finish university, to be able to finish it, as I told you I have no means, I haven't enough time, I try to do my best... these are my plans for the future, I can't say anything else, only that I'm afraid; from now on I want to lead a serious life, I'm tired of the life I've told you about; then I want to marry, the future for me, I believe is here... it's not to return any more... not to return, to... stay here and work and then to return there because my family is over there, yes, my future, my plans are here, maybe there too, maybe, I don't know, probably it's here because the profession I've chosen, to be a lawyer, gives me the opportunity to work there too*).

In short Herald's problem is completely confined to his inner and private life. Herald grapples with the problems of growing up. The fact that he finds himself facing this difficult task outside his own country would be less important if it were not for the fact that his comparison of himself with the reference group of Albanian immigrants sharpens his sense of inadequacy.

### **3. A comparison of the cases**

Migration, with the exception of those who have no choice (for example young people obliged to follow their family to another country), is always a choice and thus implies some kind of project. It's not fortuitous that we talk about 'migratory choice' and 'migratory project'. Therefore an individual's

migratory experience is connected directly to how much the subject, through migration, succeeds in meeting his or her goal.

It's also true that the possibility of realising this goal depends to a great extent on the subject's awareness of their aspiration (and therefore on their self-reflexivity) before emigrating. Moreover it depends on the personal and relational resources they have at their disposal (having reached a high education level or not; and being one link in an established migratory chain as opposed to being the founder ). Finally, the migratory experience isn't simply a single event but often a whole long phase of life. Therefore the way immigrants gradually come to deal with their experience as 'strangers' may contribute to their re-considering their goal from time to time (renouncing it, changing it or making it more ambitious, according to their success hitherto) and it can also affect their chances of being successful (a person who has positive experiences with the host country, for example, will be able to initiate strategies for integration, and these in turn will facilitate his trajectory of inclusion). Obviously the structural conditions, the state of the labour market, the availability of accommodation and the policies concerning legalisation, aren't unrelated to that.

This introduction may appear complex, but it is so just because of the complexities of the biographical perspective itself; actually, we have to conceptualise migration as a dynamic process or 'career', but also consider the subjects in their dual roles as exiled people and as guests.

Therefore in comparing the biographies of our subjects, we need to establish some fixed observation points. Three of these seem to be important in our opinion. From the outset we look at the role of the subject from the point of migratory choice – whether this is passive or active. Then deal with the kind of project which has led to this choice. Finally we view the degree of success of the project itself. The biographical meaning of the migratory experience, as we will see, turns out to be the result of these three elements, or rather the way in which they interact as factors.

Starting from the first observation point, it's immediately clear that the opposition between active /passive isn't to be considered as a dichotomy, but as a continuum: at the one extreme someone who decides to emigrate with absolute autonomy, at the other extreme someone who suffers - quite passively - the decision by others (this is the case with children, for example) and between them a succession of intermediate positions, which

are particular - those who decide as a couple, or are 'incited' by others, and so on.

If we consider just this continuum it's clear that among our cases we don't find the extreme case of passivity (none of our interviewees has been 'led' to another country) but we find a remarkable variety of intermediate positions. Francis is certainly the most independent of our subjects since he has decided to emigrate on his own, pursuing his own project to improve the conditions of his life. In contrast Nirmali and Teresa (and it's not by chance they are women) have come to their decisions as part of a couple, the former already married and the latter engaged. Finally Adams and Herald are definitely the most passive. Although neither has been really forced to follow someone else, both have been incited to leave in some measure, the former - in a more obvious way - by his father, who largely financed Adams' migration to Italy in order to build his future; the latter - in a less explicit way by the pressure he felt after he had disappointed his parents' expectations.

Coming to the second observation point, concerning the project which has oriented the migratory choice, we can observe a close relation between the degree of activity/passivity and the kind of aim pursued. Even though all our interviewees (and it's reasonable to suppose all those who emigrate voluntarily) share the general project of improving their life conditions, there is, indeed, a remarkable difference in the aspirations which have induced them to emigrate. Francis, the most independent in such a decision, is also the one who pursues the most independent project. As we have seen, Francis wants to leave conditions of backwardness which are not only economic. His aim is not simply that of enrichment but also modernisation and the breaking of links with the traditional large family. Nirmali and Teresa, who are part of a couple project and come from a background which has already begun to legitimate individual initiative (following the end of the caste system and the fall of the Communist regime), pursue, in contrast, a project of stabilising the family group, with however an important difference: Nirmali, who comes from a higher social milieu and a more closed society, where each group has clear rights/duties in terms of status, has in fact aspirations to social mobility, or more precisely has to overcome a condition of status inconsistency (she's the daughter of a wholesaler but she doesn't own a house). In contrast Teresa has a shorter-term project - that of earning abroad the resources required to marry. Francis and Herald,

the most 'heteronomous' among our interviewees (probably because they are the youngest) haven't really broken off with their family of birth, with the role of child, and therefore with their country, and for this reason their project is limited by their relationships with their parents, even though these are contrasting: the rebellion against the father in the case of Adam, and the fulfilment of the parents' expectations in the case of Herald.

Finally, the degree of success of the project seems to be another crucial point of comparison, which demands further reflection. Francis, the most independent, is also the one who has succeeded most in reaching his objective. We can see the extent to which it had depended on greater personal resources: he's a young man, has studied to the age of 24, has left with very clear ideas as to what he wanted to do, has arrived in Italy after a six-years training in Nigeria; and also on the fact that his project (that of modernising by having stable work and becoming the bread-winner only for the nuclear family) seems to be completely in accordance with the characteristics of the geographical context he has chosen. Francis has prepared himself for this metamorphosis: first moving to Nigeria, then to the South of Italy and finally to the North of Italy. The congruence between his desire to modernise and the characteristics of the area (we could say the closeness, even though it isn't a geographical one, between his own mental map and the culture of the host country) has, without any doubt, facilitated his project. The construction of his identity as a modern father-husband has been, in other words, supported by his experience as a metal worker in one of the richest provinces of Italy.

In contrast, Nirmali and Teresa have paid, to a certain extent, for their being women in a couple. Even though Nirmali has been successful in solving 'her problem' (to improve her status), she can't fully enjoy the results. The return home, to which she will be obliged to acquiesce, will take her back to her starting point. As for Teresa, she hasn't been able to realise her objective. Her younger age, the weaker couple links (she isn't yet a wife or mother), the contacts with a group of people of the same country formed mostly by single women who are easy prey to a sexist culture (differing from Sinhalese people, who have been able to re-unity their families in most cases, since they are immigrants of longer standing, and have steady relationship networks as well) have made her more vulnerable. The impact of a different culture, which is definitely more individualistic and more open, which she has interiorised from the position of a woman from a rural

context in a communist country, has stimulated in Teresa demands for emancipation (thanks to which she has discovered it's possible to think of herself as 'I' and not only as 'we') which are incompatible with the 'couple' character of her migratory project. Moreover the cases of Nirmali and Teresa show that among the structural conditions which can influence the realisation of the migratory project, in addition to the possibility of becoming legal immigrants (Nirmali has her papers while Teresa hasn't) we must not neglect the 'hierarchy' existing within the different ethnic groups in the labour market, even of the domestic job market where Indian, and Asian women generally, hold a clearly privileged position compared with the women coming from the Eastern Europe<sup>5</sup>. This is also simplified by a peculiarity of the Italian framework, and particularly of the Southern context, that is the presence of full time domestics who live-in (in more developed regions this is an exclusive privilege of the upper class) in middle class households and, often, even the lower middle class (which have therefore less 'luxury' domestic help), resulting both from the greater shortage of public services, the existence of traditional social ways of life, and from the consequent survival of antiquated status symbols (Pugliese 1990).

Finally, Herald and Adams, who lack any really positive project, haven't had the necessary tools to focus on an objective, or to realise it. In fact Francis is already preparing to go home, while for Herald it's only a matter of time.

All this has important consequences both for the 'migration of soul and mind' and for the 'placing of time' of our interviewees. For Francis, who has completed at this point his process of building a new identity, Italy represents his home, his Ithaca now reached, his place of the future, while his past is Ghana. Nirmali, who has settled for a long time 'her place' in Italy, faces now a difficult and hard task: to come to terms with accepting Sri-Lanka as the place of her present and future, and Italy as the place of her past. For Teresa, her place is still in her country of birth, and any hope of

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<sup>5</sup>Also considering the migratory model, Nirmali and Teresa belong to different types of immigrant. While Nirmali belongs to the category of 'bread-winner women', domestics who have come before or with their husbands for the economic consolidation of their family, Teresa indeed represents the so-called 'tourist', usually Polish women who enter Italy with the tourist residence permit. For this reason their stays are very short (three months) and are alternated with returns home and much less defined projects. The typology mentioned includes 'the wives', women from Magreb who have left following their husbands, and 'the travelling mates', mostly from Ghana and Senegal, who leave with their partner or join a man (their husband or a relative) but unlike 'the wives', they are willing to pursue their own working project (de Filippo, 1994).

moving it to Italy is vanishing at this point. However her doubts concerning whether to prolong or not her stay in Italy show that she hasn't completely given up. Actually Teresa, for whom migration is a process still in progress, can't set a geographic location for her future. In contrast, Adams and Herald have never really left. What Herald does in Italy is directed towards an hypothetical Albanian witness (his parents, his friends, those who died in the rebellion, his fellow countrymen living in Italy). And Adams himself, even though he has been active in attempting to integrate himself in Italian culture and society, has done so only to rebel against his father and Islam, which actually still represent - even though in opposition - his main source of identity and the symbolic place of his future.

Not by chance they are the only two interviewees to stress the problematic nature of their condition of immigrants. The perception of difficulties seems to be connected more to a sort of inner turbulence than to the objective situation and the material conditions of living, and particularly to the sensation of not being in control of their own present and their own future, in other words, of themselves.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The comparison among our subjects suggests some considerations of a general order concerning immigrants as a category, and emigration as a biographical experience.

A first element to emphasise is that, although migration has been an important experience for all our interviewees, it doesn't represent for all of them the first source of significance. As we have seen the main problem for Nirmali is that of improving her status; Francis' problem is that of escaping from the links of a too large and too traditional family; Teresa grapples with her identity as a woman, trying to free herself from the role of daughter and fiancée, and to claim her right to exist as a person; Adams faces the problem of rejection by his father; Herald confronts - with great difficulty - the assumption of his role as an adult.

A second element to consider, and it surprised us in a way, is represented by the 'lack' of reference both to the theme of racism and to that of difficulties of their living conditions. Even when the migratory experience is described as problematic, the perception of difficulties seems to be connected more to a sort of inner turbulence than to the objective situation and the material

conditions of living, in other words, to the sensation of lacking control over one's own present and one's own future. Francis, who speaks about his solitude in a dramatic way, does it precisely to express his impotence towards bureaucracy which obstructs his family re-uniting and really prevents him from fulfilling his new identity as father and husband. Herald really stresses the problematic aspects of his condition only to 'balance' his privileged situation compared to other Albanian immigrants. Adams introduces the theme of racism and his family difficulties to justify his desire to return home. Finally Teresa dwells upon the difficulties of Polish girls who are 'seduced' by Italian men only because men in general represent a problematic area within her conflictual demands for emancipation.

If we add to this that references to the situation in their native country are absolutely secondary (Nirmali devotes only a few words to the Tamil question; Teresa alludes to the end of Communism in one sentence only, and only to say that the denationalisation of the factory has caused the loss of her job; Herald certainly devotes more space to the Albanian rebellion but only because he has the problem of not having joined it), we can note a clear tendency among our interviewees to speak about themselves more as individuals than as emigrants or immigrants.

Why is the ethnic dimension so little present? One might think that, for example, one of the reasons for the slight relevance of ethnic identity lies in the great tolerance towards diversity which characterises the South of Italy, and particularly Naples. This city, which has known in its past Arabian, Spanish and French rule, and which has had a long tradition of emigration among its own inhabitants, at first overseas and then towards the North of Italy, has indeed some features of multi-ethnicity evident also in its dialect. All that doesn't encourage in those who come to live in it as foreigners a deep sense of ethnic belonging, which is presumably more evident where they feel themselves to be strangers and not accepted. Anyway, insofar as this interpretation is valid, we cannot but observe that even Francis, who lives in the most intolerant region of Italy, where frequent episodes of intolerance and racism occur, not only toward non-European immigrants but also towards Southern people, (and where the most important political movement, the Lega Nord, promotes a secessionist project in the name of defending local identity), doesn't mention episodes of racism or intolerance.

Moreover we might find some explanation in the economic role that immigrant labour has played. In the case of Southern Italy, for example, we observed how the distribution guaranteed by the hawking on the part of immigrants has even stimulated the production of goods by local firms (Reyneri 1996) and has offered the opportunity to sell off obsolete goods, no longer marketable (Rebeggiani 1989). In the case of the North of Italy, we have already noted how immigrant workers have had an important function in covering the shortage of local labour, mostly in the humblest and hardest jobs. But we must not forget that in some sectors (for example in agriculture, where we find a 'race wage' far lower than that required by the local workers) there is actually strong competition for labour, mostly at the lowest levels.

Therefore the reason for the weak ethnic identity noticed among our interviewees lies elsewhere. It probably lies on the one hand in the willingness to accept the culture of the host country, mostly by those who identify themselves with the values of Western culture, since they have ambitions to improve and emancipate themselves. On the other hand, and more importantly, is the fact that migration - as the biographies analysed have well shown - isn't isomorphic with the whole biographical experience but is only a part of it and not necessarily the most important source of identity and significance.

It means that the migratory experience - however important it is - doesn't cancel out what they were 'before'. On the contrary, it's often one's past that shapes the migratory experience rather than migration shaping one's present. For example we couldn't understand the case of Nirmali without considering her problem of placing herself in the stratification system of her country, nor the case of Adams without referring to his experience of 'rejection' by his father. And probably it's precisely these experiences, rather than ethnic belonging, which turn out to be crucial.

In saying this we don't want to imply that migration in itself doesn't represent a very important experience for the biographical path. On the contrary, Nirmali's refusal to return home, for example, would be incomprehensible if not considered in the light of the success of her project of social mobility - a project that she has been able to carry out as an immigrant among immigrants and for this reason hardly transferable to the country of her birth. Furthermore we could even assert that the migratory experience has a strong impact on a subject's identity and pushes him/her



into the difficult task of re-socialising and reconstructing an own identity. But in this process it isn't so much the ethnic dimension which is the main one for the subject: for Francis it is his role as bread-winner; for Nirmali her social role; for Teresa her gender role; for Adams and Herald their generational roles as sons. These are roles which seem to be more crucial than being Ghanese, Albanian, Polish and so on.

Thus, if we considered the contribution that the biographical approach can offer to the study of migration as a life experience, we would discover that such a contribution consists precisely in confirming the assumptions of the biographical approach. In outline then the following are the main findings:

1) migration isn't a condition but a process, which implies a new definition of identity as an individual one in its entirety:

2) migration always implies another kind of journey too, in addition to the geographical mobility: in the social hierarchy (Nirmali), into modernity (Francis and Teresa), into the different stages of life (Adams, who wants to recover his childhood; Herald, who aspires to reach the adult age);

3) the main character in this process is an actor whose reality isn't confined to the present but has its roots in the past. Each immigrant is also an emigrant, and above all he's a 'person' with his gender, class and generational attributes, and with his store of experiences and affections. The migratory experience doesn't obliterate all that.

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