THE GLOBAL IN THE LOCAL. UNUSUAL THOUGHTS ABOUT IMMIGRATION IN ITALY

LO GLOBAL EN LO LOCAL. UNA IDEA INSÓLITA SOBRE LA INMIGRACIÓN EN ITALIA

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RESUMEN

El flujo de inmigrantes procedentes del Sur del mundo continúa siendo un signo de los desequilibrios sociales y territoriales de dimensiones globales, que involucran a las propias regiones económicamente más avanzadas. El caso italiano ofrece la posibilidad de comprender el alcance real de la inmigración, ya que coincide con la difusión de una cultura meta-consumista de escala global, y además conserva las características de ser un fenómeno espontáneo, que todavía no cuenta, en muchos aspectos, con los filtros de la regulación institucional. Tras poner de relievelas connotaciones del fenómeno de la inmigración en Italia, este artículo ofrece una lectura de los procesos glocales - en los cuales la inmigración puede adscribirse - en el marco del debate más amplio sobre los objetivos de la sustentabilidad ambiental y de la valoración de las especificidades culturales. Se configura para Italia la oportunidad de jugar un papel pionero en la redefinición de la relación global-local.

Palabras clave: global, glocal, migración, Italia, sustentabilidad.

ABSTRACT

The flow of immigrants from the South of the world is the sign of spatial and social imbalances of global dimensions, which involve the same most economically advanced regions. The Italian case offers the opportunity to understand the real extent of immigration phenomenon, as it

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has coincided with the spread of a meta-consumerist global culture, and because it retains the characteristics of a spontaneous phenomenon, still lacking, in many ways, of the filters of institutional regulation. After highlighting the connotations of the immigration phenomenon in Italy, this article offers a critical reading of glocal processes - to which immigration can be ascribed - in the wider debate about both the goals of environmental sustainability and the enhancement of cultural specificities, foreshadowing for Italy the opportunity to play a pioneering role in the redefinition of the global-local relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'glocal' was introduced about thirty years ago to mean both the adaptation of global phenomena to local characteristics (taking as example the actions of multinational companies in specific market areas), and the global spread of local phenomena. The word was coined to circumvent the basic contrast between local and global, and to perceive these two crucially important concepts as two sides of the same coin (Robertson, 1995). Since then, different interpretations of glocal and glocalization have been given, including the *universalization of particularism* - which Bourdieu and Wacquant (1998) used to describe certain particular historical traditions and their international dissemination - and which implicitly includes its opposite, that is the particularization of universalism. In the geographical context, glocalization has been seen as a concept capable of resisting the rhetoric of globalization, and that supports the idea that regions and localities can actively resist to global pressures, and avoid socio-economic and cultural uniformity (Swyngedouw, 2004; Featherstone, 1995). Indeed, from the early 90s, the local-global relationship has established itself as a new interpretative grid, giving rise to a lively scientific and political debate which is replete with opinions, positions, terminologies and equivalent concepts, which we shall in part return to later.

For the purposes of this paper, the interpretation of Bauman is particularly interesting; for him the term glocalization embodies the murky effects of globalization, or rather the exacerbation of the inequalities and social injustices between middle-high income social classes (who can afford to extend their influence to the entire globe), and the low-income ones (who are forced to limit their activities to their immediate locality), so that, in the end, glocalization means globalization for some, localization for some others (Bauman, 1998). Also for the purposes of this paper, we consider the idea of Angelo Turco, according to whom, despite their complementarity, global and local are distinct 'geographic features' in the 'genesis and the evolution

of territoriality', the one involving the concept of space, abstract knowledge, calculation, logic, universality, generality, and the other embracing the concept of place, identity, specificity, the phenomenological, the singular experience, and housing, in the affective and responsible sense of the term (Turco, 2003, p. 649).

Such a distinction is therefore still necessary to understand the real extent of phenomena that have a global dimension in terms of intensity and breadth, but that occur, have an impact and generate changes at the local scale. In this sense, if the globalization of the economy and society, or rather, the movement of money, goods, people and information, seems to flow through networks of transport and communication with no apparent constraints and limitations, different conceptual categories of modernity, including that of border (in all its forms) and scale, remain valid, despite having radically changed their meaning (Bauman, 1998; Swyngedouw, 2004; Soyez, 2000).

Among these glocal phenomena, the scientific literature has paid particular attention to international migration and to the dynamics of multi-ethnic coexistence in the areas of destination, or rather, to the processes of hybridization, miscegenation and creolization that follow them, which have always existed but today are more intense (Laplantine and Nouss, 1997; Gruzinski, 1999; Massey and Jess, 1995). Before they become visible as signs on the territory, these processes are perceived, felt and imagined as suspended in some indefinite *in-between* spaces that can be linked to processes or instances formed in the interstices, in the expression of cultural differences, where 'the inter-subjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2).

In practice, if the condition of the migrant is more strictly bound up with ideas of diasporic, hybrid, borderland, or *mestizo* identity, and as such he needs to make sense of an existence that has become alien to two cultural worlds (Sayad, 1999), some re-thinking of how to understand the relationship with the Other is needed for both immigrants and natives, as well as the idea of community, nation, citizenship and ties to the territory, in other words the relationship with one of the elements that Tullio-Altan (1995; 1999) considered integral to a self-identifying *ethnos*[1].

Anthropological reflection on international migration and intercultural processes emphasizes the dimensions of the flow, of exchanges and of

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[1]   According to Tullio-Altan (1999) the ethnic identity of a people (*ethnos*) is based on five symbolic factors: historical memory (*epos*); the entirety of customs and the rules for living together (*ethos*); the common language (*logos*); the links of family, lineage and ancestry (*genos*), and the territory (*topos*). On the historical and cultural roots of the Italian archetype, see Braudel (1994); Cassese (1998).

symbolic and practical interactions, underlying the necessity of overcome the essentialist viewpoint, for a long time centered on the triptych culture-territory-identity (Appadurai, 1996; Amselle, 2001). From a territorial standpoint, the presence of local cultures in specific local contexts does not always give rise to unusual hybrid and mestizo conditions, indeed, it often becomes the reason for the transposition of the traditional categories of the 'near' and the 'far' from the global to the local dimension, amplifying their effects and giving rise to new social divisions based on ethnicity, as well as to new ghettos, *banlieues* and *ethno-burbs* (Montgomery, 2011; Spivak, Bass and St. John, 2011).

Glocalization, however, concerns not only the global movements of people, but also of natural components, agricultural and industrial products, arts and crafts, artefacts, information. Understood in this way, glocalization reaches its greatest intensity in the economically advanced areas, because of the continuous arrival of material, energy, ideas, practices, and people coming from elsewhere. But the so-called South of the world is not immune to this process, if we consider the arrival of consumer goods from international markets, and also the presence of enterprises, international cooperation initiatives, associations and non-governmental organizations which operate there in thousands of different projects.

In this sense, anthropology speaks of the need to overcome the traditional distinction between 'the West and the Rest', whereas the Other is in the West and the West is elsewhere (Scarduelli, 2003). However, it is difficult not to think that the economically advanced countries are bearers of an essentially uniform culture of capital, consumption and individualistic interest to the Southern hemisphere, and that people from underdeveloped countries, in areas of economic well-being, bring with them thousands of different cultures. In economically advanced areas, this multifaceted cultural specificity - as long as it is related to objects, services, practices or ideas coming from elsewhere - does not create any problems to the native citizens (in fact, it is sought out and appreciated), but when it is about people, implying relational involvement, coexistence and space-sharing, things get complicated and cultural diversity becomes a frequent source of conflict (Banini, 2010a).

Italy is a privileged field of study for the understanding of the real extent of migration, because in comparison to other European and non-European countries it is a recent phenomenon, and goes hand in hand with the so-called "brain drain", it is widely diffused and is grafted on to a historical geographical diversification, which is one of the strengths of Italian culture and economy in the world. The average Italian citizen, more than those from other economically advanced countries, thus has to face a series of

essentially discordant issues, resulting partially from modern tradition and partially from post-modern and late-modern trends, in that area of debate concerning belonging, social, cultural and territorial identity, the crises of nation-states, global meta-powers and the rise of movements, groups and global sharing networks (Castells, 2000, Touraine, 2005; Bauman, 2007; Beck, 2006; Kymlicka, 1995). The discourse on the extent of the migration process, then, in Italy more than anywhere else, lies between the idea of a national community (the outcome of the careful work of institutional building of the modern era, which still retains its symbolic value), the idea of a local community (prompted by the many initiatives aimed at strengthening local specific features and the participation in decision-making processes), and the growing impact with an intense and recent ethnic and cultural diversity, which calls into question the previous ideas of community and the concept of community itself, when understood in traditional terms.

After highlighting the connotations of the Italian immigration phenomenon, this paper proposes an examination of glocal processes in the wider discourse of the pursuit of targets of sustainability and of cultural diversity valorization, pointing out the limits, the risks and the perspectives, and foreshadowing for Italy the opportunity to play a pioneering role in the redefinition of the relationships between the global and the local.

2. IMMIGRATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Unlike a few decades ago, the lives of Italians are full of objects, practices, sounds, smells and tastes of the elsewhere: from ethnic furniture to traditional African music, from Brazilian capoeira to Arab kebab. The elsewhere is also visible in the streets, in shops and public offices: physical features, skin colour, the shape of clothes, the languages and smells of different worlds are now part of the daily experience of any Italian citizen.

The approach to immigrants is not always marked by mutual cordiality: discomfort and attitudes of distrust endure, fuelled by news media and by the delay in the developing of structural governmental immigration policies, which often are dictated by the emergency (Amato, 2008; Eurispes, 2010; Kymlicka, 2012). Compared to other countries, Italy ranks as among the most skeptical ones concerning immigration: 50% of Italians believe that it is excessive, 80% are highly upset about illegal immigration, 56% say that the immigrants cause an increase in crime, 47% think that immigrants are a burden on public services (Transatlantic Trends, 2010). Moreover, immigration in Italy from the South of the world is a recent and unexpected phenomenon, at least

in the dimensions it reached in little more than thirty years, so that in the assessments of international institutions, Italy is often still included among the emigration countries (Garson and Salt, 2011).

In other economically advanced countries, the immigration phenomenon derived from the surplus of labour supply, especially in industrial activities, in the same way that led many Italians to seek their fortune overseas and then across the Alps. At that time, migration involved an idea of permanence and stability in the elsewhere, to living a life there at least until the end of the work period, which often evolved into a non-return to the country of origin (Bevilacqua, De Clementi and Franzina, 2001; 2002). In countries with a tradition of immigration, the problem of how to comprehend and regulate the presence of immigrant communities has been faced earlier and in more structural terms than in Italy, giving rise to the development of state policies that still, in many ways, reflect the different ways of reconciling otherness with the idea of nation: from the North American *melting pot* to the French *assimilation*, from the English pluralism to the "guest worker" (*Gastarbeiter*) of the German model, with little concession towards participation in society (Melotti, 2004; Ambrosini, 2012).

Italy, like Spain in many ways, has instead encountered the migration phenomenon in an era marked by the crisis of the nation-State, the weakening of traditional references, the intensification of global relations and on a strong Catholic foundation and a tradition of emigration: a set of specific conditions that helped to fuel the idea that migration flows were a parenthesis, contingent on the particular historical moment, producing the persistence of an attitude of the balance between the ethical assumptions of hospitality without reserve, and the management of emergencies. In the absence of a regulation at the institutional level, a large part of the immigration phenomenon has been left to chance, and has acquired territory-based features, and relational outcomes that are different from place to place, depending on pre-existing situations and different levels of openness towards otherness (Caponio and Colombo, 2005)[2]. Probably for this reason also, Italy does not yet appear to be engaged in overcoming the issues

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[2] Within Europe, Italy is numbered among the countries with 'new' immigration, or those which have experienced the passage from emigration between the 1980's and 1990's, which have not yet established appropriate policies and are still involved in public debate over the control of immigrant flow, criminality and fears of loss of national identity (ISMU, 2011). Furthermore, in Italy there is a much higher risk of poverty or social exclusion for immigrants (39% of the total, compared to an average for UE-27 of 35%) (Caritas-Migrantes, 2011). Periodical reports by CNEL portray however a considerable difference between Italian regions as regards the potential for assimilation and social and occupational integration of immigrants, which is notably higher in regions of the Centre-North (CNEL-Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2012). For in-depth case studies, see Nodari and Rotondi (2007); Krasna and Nodari (2004); Brusa (1997;1999).

of multiculturism (at least in the State-sponsored sense) (Blunt, 2007), which affect various other European and non-European countries.

The understanding of the migration phenomenon in Italy seems to require a leap on the social and territorial scale, from the political, institutional, public sphere to the private, family, home context. Moreover, it is in the emphasis given to the 'family' and the 'home' that the connotations, all Italian, can be seen, relating to work and housing, for better or for worse, which have influenced Italians' way of understanding cultural diversity and their relation to it. The family-work relationship has been the basis of the *industrial district* (a source of Italian pride), but also of organized crime (in its various regional forms) and the logic of political lobbies, corporatism and interest groups (particularly widespread and important). The family-home connection is also at the roots of a certain indifference to social issues, which is also a typical Italian trait: *home* as the outer limit of the idea of inhabiting, *family* as the outer limit of reliable social relations, "beyond which begins that kind of no man's land, into which we should venture only if well equipped with distrust and suspicion" (Cartocci, 1995, p. XII).

Much of the history of immigration in Italy can therefore be read in the light of the changes that have occurred in the domestic microcosm, that is in families (the smallest social unit) and homes (the smallest territorial unit), and which have had significant implications on the supply and demand of labour. The family was the breeding-ground for the myth of the 'piece of paper' and the 'permanent job', where the 'piece of paper' has taken on a symbolic meaning of proof of social success and a reason for family pride, and the 'permanent job', preferably as an office worker, is seen as a guarantee against life's hardships and society's unpredictability. The interaction between these two national myths, in Italy more than elsewhere, has provided the excuse for refusing jobs that are considered too menial, strenuous, dangerous or low-paying, and has led to the subsequent arrival of immigrants.

The Italian experience of immigrants started in fact in the 1960s and 1970s, within those wealthy families who could no longer find Italians willing to do housework. A job demand that was covered by Somali and Filipino women, who were not too alien to Italian society, in the collective imagery, because of the colonial past with Somalia and Eritrea, and because of the common Catholic religion in the case of the Philippines. In fact, Catholic priests and nuns, who were already engaged with the Asian country, contributed to the arrival of the Filipinos directly or indirectly, with networks and cooperation projects, to which Italian families applied to find a maid or a babysitter. Having a *Filipino* or a *Somali* soon became a status symbol,

like luxury houses and cars, a reason to boast for the families who could afford them.

In the 1980s it was the turn of the street vendors, so that in the squares and streets of cities and towns, the typical pickup trucks with fruits and vegetables began to be seen less and less, and instead there were immigrants selling fabrics, pots and pans, clothes or shoes, and bed sheets lying on the ground covered in all sorts of wares, ornaments, ethically flavoured trinkets, while in the summer that trade, almost always illegal, moved to the beaches (Arena, 1982). The broken Italian spoken by these early dark-skinned immigrants led Italians to label them for the only reason they sought a contact with the natives, namely to sell them things, and so they were indiscriminately called 'vu cumprà' ("do you want to buy it?"). Then it was the turn of the pizza chefs, the bakers, the farm hands, the factory workers in the factories, the masons, the florists and the bartenders: all jobs progressively abandoned by young Italians, at the urging of parents and grandparents willing to make huge sacrifices in order to allow their children or grandchildren to acquire a degree or diploma, or to achieve a permanent position or an autonomous profession, safe, profitable and socially prestigious.

Those parents and grandparents then aged, and their children and grandchildren, burdened with other commitments, had to delegate to others the functions of care and support services previously carried out by members of the family. The chronic deficiencies of the Italian welfare system were partly covered by the activities of the voluntary sector and the so-called Third-sector, but again, most Italians preferred to resolve the matter within the family, giving rise to the phenomenon of *badanti* (carers), who today are estimated to be over 1.3 million (Caritas-Migrantes, 2011; European Migration Network, 2010). This time, attention was focused on women from Eastern Europe (Romanian, Moldavian, Ukrainian, or Polish), similar in appearance and cultural background to Italians, so that their foreign presence could be as non-invasive as possible and could be accepted even by the elderly.

Meanwhile, those immigrants who arrived in Italy in the 1980s and 1990s as domestic servants, workers, traders and farmers have become owners of small and medium-sized enterprises: in 2010 there were 228,540 foreign small-business owners, representing approximately 4% of businesses (ibid.). A form of closing of the circle was then created: these 'humble' jobs became a springboard for the economic and social take-off of many immigrants, who were able to create business and employment for about 200,000 employees (ibid.), and Italians, due to the economic crisis, have resigned themselves to the 'humble' jobs, but this time as employees of immigrants, creating conditions for the transfer of class conflict not only in social but also in ethnic terms.

While many Italians have begun working for immigrant entrepreneurs, many other young Italian graduates and postgraduates continue to leave Italy (Morano Foadi, 2006; Palombini, 2001). The brain drain, as well as the lack of ability to attract qualified human resources from abroad, is another purely Italian feature, which demonstrates the chronic inability of Italy to invest consistently in social, cultural and economic resources, but also the imbalance that has been created between the high expectations of the individual and the limited demand for qualified employment (and for work *tout court*), in a social system plagued by an aging population, fiscal pressure, tax evasion, and self-regarding and near-sighted lobbies and corporate structures[3].

The rejection of so-called menial jobs leaves traces even in international surveys: it is not a coincidence that, unlike the respondents of other economically advanced countries, Italians think that immigrants do not take work away from the natives (69%), help to cover occupations where there is shortage of workers (76%) and are exploited in the workplace (80%) (Transatlantic Trends, 2010). Probably, investment in the professionalization of menial unskilled labour would lead to the upgrading of many occupations essential to the life of a community, creating opportunities for many young people who pursue their studies without genuine motivation. At the same time, however, it would be wise to re-assess the myth of material wealth at all costs, since the refusal of 'humble' jobs is generally accompanied by the individual's need to earn as much money as possible.

3. URBAN ETHNICITY, RURAL INTER-ETHNICITIES

Immigration has left tangible signs in the cities round the world, demonstrating that the creation of a culturally significant space is an essential need for ethnic communities that are located in the elsewhere. The empty spaces of the cities, above all, have provided the setting for this transformation, which has been at times slow and silent, and at others fast and unmistakable; entire neighborhoods that have been left to decay and are not slated for redevelopment by either public or private capital,

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[3] "35% of the 500 best Italian researchers leave the country because they cannot find decent work. Among the top 100, one out of two choose to work abroad; in the top 50 the percentage of leakage rises to 54% and only 23 researchers are still in Italy. A constant brain drain over the past 20 years has caused economic damage to the country of 4 billion Euros" (www.fondazionelilly.it). In the countries of the South of the world, the number of immigrants holding a diploma or a university degree ranges between 12.3% in Senegal and 33.4% in Kenya, not to mention the extreme cases of Haiti (73.7), Sierra Leone (48.4), Mozambique (43.7) and Ghana (42.3) (Caritas-Migrantes, 2011).

take on new social and functional features, often becoming seen as *ethnic business district* (King, 1995), almost always for the people of the same ethnic origins.

Thanks to the presence of immigrants, in many abandoned spaces of Italian cities, businesses are born and daily activities and places are reinvented, practices of urban living abandoned by the natives are reactivated and a creative disorder is introduced, which goes beyond the pre-established grids and lattices of preconceived modernity (La Cecla, 2000). The resulting *ethnoscapes* do not yet comply to that process of 'territorialization of the memory' (Smith, 1996, p. 454), carried out by one or more cultural groups, which can be found in countries with the earliest immigrant populations and that can be seen, for example, in the historical Little Italy, China Town and Little Ireland of world cities (Knox, 1995)[4]. The otherness is most evident in the streets and squares, occupied by shops run by immigrants, giving rise to subtle dividing lines that produce a sense of foreboding not because of their current presence as much as for their *potential for social reproduction*, as Appadurai (1996) would say.

In Italy, in addition to the radical transformation of entire neighborhoods by the immigrants, as in the case of the Esquiline district in Rome, Porta Palazzo in Turin, or Palazzo Reale in Palermo, there is an increasing spread in the number of shops run by immigrants all over the territory of the cities, which do not have any external identifying ethnic signs, and can be identified as such only when one enters the shop. In Rome, as in other cities, in addition to the growing ethnicization of some neighborhoods (Cristaldi, 2002), which remains still below than other European and North American urban areas (Darden and Cristaldi, 2013), the gradual expansion of the businesses managed by immigrants is increasing, according to a specific ethnic distinction: immigrants from North Africa for vegetables and fruit, flowers and pizza; from China for bars, grocery stores, and clothing stores; from the Indian peninsula for call centers and laundromats. The change in management of many ethnic shops is accompanied by a radical change in the social practices of the neighborhood and in the extended meaning that these stores had for local communities, as a place to meet and exchange information, that is as a relational place, beyond the mere act of purchasing (Banini, 2010a).

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[4] "What is less often appreciated is that, to become national, shared memories must attach themselves to specific places and definite territories. The process by which certain kinds of shared memories are attached to particular territories so that the former become ethnic landscapes (or ethnoscapes) and the latter become historic homelands, can be called the territorialization of memory" (Smith, 1996, pp. 453-454).

Another Italian condition is that, unlike other European countries, where immigration has involved essentially cities and industrial areas, the presence of immigrants is found to a considerable extent even in small towns, thanks to the urbanization of lifestyles, along with the loss of specific cultural and traditional activities, which helped to create a local demand for work in agriculture, construction and person-related services also in rural areas. Of course, the presence of immigrants does not pass unnoticed in these rural communities, and it is much more than the official survey estimates, that 7.5% of the national average, according to data from ANCI (2010) and Caritas-Migrantes (2011) which in many areas reaches 30%, and can be directly experienced just looking at the large number of Romanian, Moldavian and Ukrainian *badanti* (carers) who are in homes to assist the elderly.

There is a peculiar ethnic mixture to be found in these small Italian towns, in the North and Centre as well as the South, where local development policies geared to the local specificities have often failed, and the only advantage of living there is the affordable cost of housing. Compared to the large cities, the presence of immigrants has much less visible effect on the territory; any commercial activity would be much less likely to be profitable. Unlike the cities, also, there are no specific spaces - at the railway stations, public gardens or places of worship – where immigrants of the same national or cultural community can meet each other. Instead, networks of intra-ethnic relationships are created, groups of solidarity with other immigrants and shared experiences that are not confined to specific places, and this opens up possibilities for interaction and openness towards the local population.

In these small towns, with their less hectic life-style, their more liveable spaces, their long-established practices of social conviviality, as well as the considerable presence of caregivers who work in families, or workers and masons in small local businesses, Italians are experiencing a daily contact with diversity. The sharing of space and time is helping the exchange of opinions, life stories, tales of the world and the sharing of recurrent practices, corroborating the idea, even in older people, that despite the diversity of the cultural forms and expressions, in the end, really, "it's the same all over the world".

Certainly, in the case of conflicts, minor or major, ancient prejudices and closure towards otherness can easily emerge; therefore we do not know whether this happy coexistence is only dictated by the need to maintain apparent peace and harmony, in the spirit of small communities. The question is legitimate in the light of the initiatives carried out in many small localities, which try to encourage inter-ethnic dialogue (perhaps because it is lacking),

with the birth of thematic associations (e.g. the Associazione Rieti Immigrant) and the organization of events (e.g. the 'Intercultural Festival' in the Piana del Sele, rather than the 'Weekend of integrating' in the province of Perugia). Particularly in rural areas, in addition, in a sort of space-time discrepancy, the exploitation, power and domination that characterized work in the countryside in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is still applied (especially in southern Italy) to immigrants, above all those from Africa, who now do the more difficult jobs, in conditions which no Italian would accept (Colloca and Corrado, 2013).

4. IMMIGRATION AS A SIGN OF UNSUSTAINABILITY

So many words have been written about immigration, in alarming and alarmed tones, in the benevolent and fraternal tones of the Catholic tradition, in the legal tones of citizenship, nationality and social rights, in those of cultural miscegenation, which has always existed in human history and now more intense as a result of globalization. The variety of topics, theoretical approaches and visions of the world is perhaps the most distinctive trait of the scientific literature devoted to migration flows, including those based on the reflections of Douglas Massey (1994; 1998), the migration-development nexus (Sørensen, 2012) and other works related to social theory, social change and development theory (de Haas 2010; van Hear, 2010). This variety has given rise to the drafting of a new theoretical framework, which is able to overcome the limitations of migration theory (Bieler Brettell and Hollifield, 2007), and to facilitate the scientific and political debate on the subject, or rather to elaborate the solution for the complex issues that immigration brings with it (Cohen, 1996; Castles, 2010; King, 2012; Portes and Dewind, 2007).

In the geographical context, the phenomenon of migration has been studied from different theoretical perspectives, from post-colonialism to feminist studies, from embodied geographies to mobility turn (Blunt, 2007) with reference to a vast number of different aspects. Several tools and methods have also been used (see Vargas Silva, 2012): from the narrative approach of ethnic studies to the elaboration of spatial statistics and thematic maps, from the analysis of archival documents to semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Overall, in the wake of the so-called 'cultural turn', there has been a further increase of interest in the issues related to migration, in line with the trend, characteristic of post-modernist and post-structuralist currents, to give priority to the studies dedicated to historically disadvantaged social groups - for reasons of ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic

status - that were excluded from the modern meta-narratives. The need to give voice to 'other' ways of thinking and experiencing the world, starting from the reflections of Foucault and Derrida, has been accompanied by the need to contextualize the research, especially on a suburban or urban scale, by going to the root of the social processes and narratives that create the places of social exclusion, highlighting the ways in which these processes take shape and interact with geometries and structures of power.

However, a thread runs through almost all of the scientific literature on migration: the idea that it is an inevitable phenomenon, as can only be seen as such, which loses sight of the main reason why so many people from the South of the world move towards economically advanced countries, namely, the search for material well-being, the emulation of Western lifestyles; the main reason is not hunger, poverty or political reasons which actually prevent many people from escaping from their countries. In Italy, for example, immigrants who come from the poorest countries, that is, with annual per capita income of less than $ 1,500, are fewer than 2% of the total. The biggest immigrant communities are from countries with much higher incomes: Romania (968,576 immigrants), Albania (482,627), Morocco (452,424), China (209,934), Ukraine (200,730). These are people with higher education levels than the respective national averages, but despite having a diploma or a degree (54.1% of all immigrants) they work in unskilled occupations (73.4%) (Caritas-Migrantes, 2011).

It has been pointed out, in this regard, that continental migration affects the poorest families, while intercontinental migration involves relatively well-off ones, in response to the opportunity of accumulating wealth in Europe (Wouterse and van den Berg, 2011). The well-known distinction of Bauman (1998) between 'globalized rich' and 'localized poor' therefore rings true, or rather that global mobility on the one hand continues to define the status of economic well-being, being the prerogative of the less poor, and on the other becomes more and more a factor of social mobility. International and especially intercontinental migration from underdeveloped countries, in fact, requires resources and networks of relationships that are not available to everyone. This means that no direct link can be established between international migration on the one hand, and poverty, economic development, population growth and social and political change on the other; emigration cannot therefore be considered as a strategy for the reduction of poverty (Sørensen, van Hear and Engberg-Pedersen, 2002).

In another contribution (Banini, 2010b) it has been said that in considering migration as an inevitable, recognized phenomenon, that is taken for granted,

without questioning its roots, prevents us from looking at immigration in its real terms and its effective contents, which facilitates the proliferation of ethnocentric contradictions: for example, between the great importance placed on the development of the indigenous base (especially in the EU) and the emphasis placed on multiculturalism at the local scale, which in turn conflicts with the emphasis given to cultural specificity and diversity. Here, anticipating the conclusions of the article, we want to briefly highlight other considerations related to the growing global movement of goods and people, because there is a basic problem in this regard, due to the implications that the spread of the meta-consumerist culture, which is the basis of most migratory movements from the South of the world, has in terms of the integrity of the ecosystem and social equity, which are the cornerstones of sustainability, together with economic efficiency.

The current socio-economic global configuration is based, as we know, on a substantial inequality in access to the resources of the Earth: this has been demonstrated by calculations of the ecological footprint (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996), by the calculation of national material and energy flows (Material Flow Accounting), by the data on commercial exchanges with the countries of the South, but also through direct experience, although not perceived in society, when we note the amount of agricultural products and manufactured goods, or rather of matter and energy, that circulates in the North of the world.

In this respect, the presence of immigrants in Italy, as in the other economically advanced areas, reproduces at the local scale the profound global inequality in access to natural resources, with immigrants carrying out the work rejected by the native population and holding lower socio-economic status. This confirms the way in which the conventional economic model is based on structural inequality, at each spatial scale: an inevitable process while development is continually perceived as economic growth, and well-being is seen as the individual accumulation of goods, because they are nothing but matter and energy, and in a finite system of resources like that of the Earth, if there is accumulation on one side, there is subtraction on the other; if the economy grows on one side, the other must decrease, rather similar to the law of communicating vessels (Banini, 2010c).

In other words, assuming that the Earth is a closed system that exchanges energy but not matter with the outside, and that 20% of the global population consumes 80% of the resources (Worldwatch Institute, 2004; Myers and Kent, 2004), there is a problem of principle and future trajectory, because it means that 80% of the global population will never be able to acquire the

opulent standard of living of the 20%, since there are not enough resources for everyone, nor can the already hard-pressed ecosystem assimilate all the waste products of output and consumption. In this sense, it has been said that more than 80% of people's income is determined at birth, because it depends on citizenship and the economic conditions of the birth family, and the other 20% depend on factors such as sex, race, or age (Milanovic, 2011); but international migration can't solve the problem of global inequality, and economically advanced areas can't defend their privileges by erecting more or less visible barriers: differences in income are so high that an increasing number of people will move towards the Eldorado of the world.

If this trend should continue, what kind of scenario can we expect to see unfold: a North of the world as a patchwork of many different cultures and home to new social divisions, and a South of the world as a deposit of resources, waste, and people excluded from the great race for consumption?

Immigrants from the South testify with their presence not only to the environmental and social injustice that has been perpetuated on the planet Earth for at least four centuries, but also that the seductions of the North have become global. The situation is worsened in the case of Italy, where people are accustomed to the clear distinction between public and private, or rather, the widespread circumvention of the laws and rules, and where a good part of this migratory movement acquires undertones of the underground, if not of illegality and crime (Nocifora, 2011); without taking into account that this world-wide aspiration for western standards of living goes hand in hand with the loss of symbolic meaning associated with objects, places and social practices, and the corresponding increase in the commercialization, glamorization and virtualization of cultural specificities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

International migration due to global socio-economic imbalances has reached its most extreme form in Italy, precisely because it began in coincidence with the spread of a meta-consumerist culture of global dimensions. The fact that the flow of immigration has followed the trends of the changes taking place in families and local areas gives Italy the opportunity to assess immigration in a more authentic and sensible way, compared to other countries which have considerable experience of the phenomenon, and to identify the difference between a conventional and more long-sighted means of interpreting it.

The global in the local, in the end, is nothing more than the transfer of matter from one local to another local, by means of global transport and communication networks, i.e. using energy, and non-renewable fossil fuels. Also, global migration flows are nothing more than a consequence of social and territorial imbalances that this transfer of matter involves. Such an important and large scale movement of matter and energy does not exist in the natural world, nor would migration of this magnitude exist at all if the inhabitants of the world were given the chance to live a good life in their places of origin, regardless of the myth of material wealth and the environmental, social, political and economic effects that it involves.

If for more than three decades national and international policies talk of the need to create sustainability starting from local territories, that is, exploiting the environmental, historical and cultural characteristics and attitudes of each context, as well as social participation in decision-making, which in a humanistic sense means *taking care of the territory*, is because ecosystem processes and cultural specifics possess at the same time both local and global value. In this sense, what Saskia Sassen has defined 'the centrality of the place' - an alternative political discourse opposed to "an academic rhetoric and policy context in which place is seen as neutralized by global communication and the hypermobility of capital" (Sassen, 1998, p. 21) - means not only to embrace the principles set out in all international documents from Rio de Janeiro onwards, but also to revitalize or to start economic and social activities that have their origin in the places themselves, even in the South of the world, and in a transcalar perspective, that is to say without any essentialist or self-referential ideas, in the perspective of a *cosmopolitan localism* (Sachs, 1992).

The current global economic crisis may be an opportunity to re-examine consumerist behavior from the vantage point of the relationship between human beings and the natural world, to re-assess the horizontal and vertical relations with which geography has always concerned itself, in the light of new scientific and value-oriented concepts. This is because, viewed from an environmental perspective, the world takes on an entirely different aspect, and there emerge basic paradoxes and discrepancies that jeopardize any scientific investigation of social, cultural, political or economic circumstances based on first premises.

A conceptual re-definition of migration flows from the South of the world is part of this perspective, given that the goal of achieving effective well-being, freed from any consumerist affectations, must be attainable by every inhabitant of our planet. It is to be hoped that, in any future definition of a theory of migration, as well as the various 'ingredients' suggested, account will be taken of some of these more unusual ideas.

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