

# Immigration in Italy: Between Economic Acceptance and Political Rejection

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**Abstract** Italy, especially in its richer regions and cities, is experiencing a profound contradiction in its relationship with the immigrant component of its population: it is becoming even more multi-ethnic in terms of the number of residents (5.3 million), participation in the labor market (more than 3 million), transitions to self-employment (213,000 business owners), and immigrant students in schools (about 670,000). In their cultural representations, Italians tend to deny this reality. They do not want multi-ethnic cities. Faced with the widespread use of a workforce of regular and irregular immigrants, in families and enterprises of the urban economy, the prevailing opinion rejects the idea of giving a place to immigration in the nation's social organization, and this position is strengthened by political forces and media that reflect and exacerbate the reaction. Immigrants seem to be accepted, perhaps, on an individual plane, where they have a name and a definite place in society—helpful, modest, possibly invisible. They are frightening when they become visible communities, when they settle in urban settings, when they look for places and opportunities for socialization. Italian society, as a result of tensions between markets, politics, and culture on the issue of immigration, is facing a dilemma: how to reconcile interests and feelings, head and heart, individuals and communities: how to rebuild sufficient social cohesion in a society that is increasingly differentiated and heterogeneous.

**Keywords** Immigration · Italy · Labor market · Migration policies · Integration · Xenophobia

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Foreign immigration in Italy is caught between an economic demand that has been very dynamic over the past 20 years and policies that in principle, especially recently, have sought to block entrance and stop the multi-ethnic transformation of society, but which have been forced to come to grips with economic actors' demands and practical transgressions of labor market regulation.

One can therefore frame the insertion of immigration in Italian society and in the Italian labor market in terms of two concepts. The first and more general one is that of "reluctant importers," a concept put forward in the work of Cornelius et al. (1994). The other, more specific, one is that of the "Mediterranean" (or "South-European") social and economic model, especially with a view to immigration management (Baldwin-Edwards and Arango 1999; King and Ribas-Mateos 2002).

Southern European countries have become a major destination for international migration in the last 20 years. This is due not only to porous borders and proximity to the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, as was initially thought, but also to the specific demands of their economic systems. It was then thought that this kind of market required irregular labor, from which it could obtain the greatest advantages. But all these countries have approved wide-ranging regularization measures (International Centre for Migration Policy Development ICMPD 2009), and while regularized immigrants have continued to find jobs, at least until the recent economic recession, and also after, irregular immigration has not ceased. So one must analyze the southern European version of reluctant importation of immigrant labor better, and understand more deeply the "Mediterranean model" and its relationship with immigration. To illustrate this point I will offer an analysis of the Italian case, attempting to make a comparison between the economic acceptance of immigration, on a practical level, and the political rhetoric of growing hostility and apparent closure, which inevitably collides with reality at a certain point.

### **Implicit Openings: Discrepancies Between Markets, Civil Society, and Policies**

What is most striking, analyzing the phenomenon of migration in Italy, is how fast the country has changed its status from a place of emigration to one of immigration. To date, according to statistical sources, Italy has about 5.3 million residents of foreign nationality, 540,000 of whom are estimated to be undocumented (Fondazione Ismu 2011).

The transition came about in a way that was largely spontaneous, unexpected, and loosely regulated: it arose "from below" in the labor market and in local societies, and was acknowledged only later—reluctantly—by public institutions and legal regulation.

In the 1980s, when it became clear in the public sphere that Italy was becoming a country of immigration, the phenomenon was considered essentially pathological: a new social problem had fallen upon an already troubled country, plagued by high unemployment and showing deep inequalities from one region to another. Meanwhile, in a quiet and fragmented way, the labor market (firms, but also families) and some social actors (associations, unions, churches, etc.) worked in another direction: that of economic integration. The trend was informal, at first, but it was increasingly formalized over time, as it came to focus on the richer and more

developed regions where the gap between labor supply and demand was deeper and more evident. The political regulation of this situation came only later, starting with the Martelli Law of 1989, which allowed immigrants to participate in the private labor market freely and on equal terms with Italian workers.

But the gap between market realities and immigration policies has reopened time and again over the years. Not by chance, regularization laws have been the mainstay of immigration policy. Several have been passed—six in 22 years, the most recent one in September 2009—to which one must add a certain number of hidden regularizations made through the system of quotas for the admission of workers into the country.<sup>1</sup> In this matter there is a surprising continuity in Italian immigration policies irrespective of which party is in power.

It should be noted that Italy, with its annual quota system for the admission of foreigners for reasons related to work, and not only seasonal or highly skilled work, is more open to immigration than most European Union countries. But the labor market (firms and families), with its workforce demand, has exceeded the conservative forecasts for the recruitment of foreign workers each year, forcing lawmakers to realign legislation retrospectively to match actual market dynamics. In Lombardy, it has been calculated that two out of three immigrants who are regular today have been irregular to various degrees at some time during their stay in Italy (Blangiardo 2005). The percentage is even higher among working immigrants, as most of those who have been regular since arrival to join family members. In the “career” of immigrants to Italy, as in Greece (Glytsos 2005) and Spain, the “paperless” stage is considered almost normal—sometimes long, certainly difficult, but surmountable.

It could be said that, as for other aspects of the workings of the Italian economy and Italian society, a sort of micro-social do-it-yourself approach has filled the void left by weak institutional arrangements, and has even actively thwarted the normative closures against the entry and settlement of new immigrants.

In this process, certain actors have taken a leading role in the social construction of the encounter between (Italian) labor demand and (immigrant) workforce supply. Employers, in order to face the labor shortages, began to hire foreigners who they did not previously know: voluntarily or not, probably driven by competition and profit seeking, they started to overcome prejudices and to open some doors in moves towards integrating immigrants into reluctant local societies. Families, as employers, represent a special but very important case (Ambrosini 2008a, b): despite a political and cultural attitude that is mostly hostile to or suspicious of immigration, families have hired hundreds of thousands of women and men, for housework, childcare, and especially home care for seniors. Ethnic networks have been the main means of communication and interaction between labor supply and demand: because of weak public regulation, the function of networks as placement devices for immigrant workers is important; the action of networks has produced Italy’s numerous ethnic specializations, and can explain the different success rates among national migrant groups. People involved in organized solidarity (labor unions, NGOs, associations, church-related institutions, etc.), in turn, have helped to fill the void left by public

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<sup>1</sup> Four “amnesties” were implemented between 1986 and 1998 involving 790,000 people; 630,000 regularisations were granted in 2002 alone and about 300,000 applications are still being processed after the last regularization in 2009.

institutions in accommodating immigrants, have supported campaigns for regularization, and have countered xenophobic reactions.

Even in the acknowledgment of certain social rights, society has preceded the state and its institutions, promoting from below health care for irregular migrants and the acceptance of their children in public schools.<sup>2</sup> The Framework Law of 1998 (known as the Turco-Napolitano law, because of the ministers who proposed it, members of the center-left government then in office) in many cases recognized the equality of treatment between legally resident foreigners and Italian citizens, in line with European standards, though it restricted access to certain social rights (such as disability pensions) for immigrants residing for more than 5 years, in possession of official right of permanent residence (the “*Carta di soggiorno*”) equivalent to that of *denizens*. With time, the recognition of the economic role of migrants creeps in. This has become the main factor of political legitimacy of their presence in the country. The center-right governments that have ruled the country for the last 12 years, except for the brief interlude of 2006–2008, elected it as a discriminating criterion and interpreted it in a restrictive way. The Bossi-Fini Law (law 189/2002) introduced a closer link between residence and work in 2002, while fighting irregular immigration in a more emphatic and vigorous manner. The law requires the immigrant to have a long-term work contract in order to be able to renew her/his stay permit for a 2-year period. This provision is in contrast with the reality of the labor market which offers temporary work contracts especially in the sectors where immigrants are predominantly employed such as construction, agriculture, tourism, catering, and cleaning services. But the entry of new immigrants for reasons related to non-seasonal and unskilled labor has continued. Even in this approach, the immigrants’ contribution to the Italian economy is implicitly acknowledged: the immigrant worker has a right to sojourn and to accede to a range of social rights: health, education, pensions, family reunification. Despite some restrictions, the center-right governments have not been able to radically change this ground rule, which complies with European standards.

### Looking Back: National Identity and Its Borders

The issues in which Italy is still reluctant and linked to its past as a country of emigration lie in dealing with national identity and citizenship status. The citizenship code (almost unanimously approved by Parliament in 1992, at a time when immigration to Italy began to increase on a large scale) continues to link citizenship to birthright: it enables the grandchildren of former Italian emigrants to maintain and to acquire citizenship, and remains very strict towards non-EU foreigners who want to access Italian identity. The law requires 10 years of residence, processing the application takes 4 years, and the administration’s discretionary response is negative in most cases. In contrast, becoming

<sup>2</sup> An example: in a town on the outskirts of Milan, the local government has formally granted the use of certain premises it owns to the Catholic organization Caritas for the establishment of a surgery “reserved for irregular immigrants.” An interesting example of an Italian pragmatic solution: public authorities give premises to a civil society organization, so that it achieves what they know is necessary, but cannot do officially.

Italian by marriage is easier than in most other developed countries, which is why, even as late as 2008, more than 60% of (the relatively few) naturalizations were awarded following a marriage.<sup>3</sup> Zincone (2006) spoke of a “familial” concept of citizenship, which one could also define as “ethnic.”

The right to vote has followed more or less the same fate. Only since the national elections of 2006 have Italian emigrants been able to vote without returning to Italy, to elect members of Parliament to represent them<sup>4</sup>; long-term foreign immigrant residents have not yet gained the right to vote in local elections. The center-right political majority remains opposed to any opening on these two issues, and the center-left forces, when they were in power, failed to reach an agreement on the matter.

This reluctance has a clear symbolic dimension—Italy finds it difficult to redefine itself as a multi-ethnic nation—but it also has social and political consequences: without the possibility of accessing citizenship and voting rights, foreign immigrants must struggle to claim more social rights (and sometimes civil rights, such as freedom of worship) to which they should have access, or from which they may benefit.

A field where ethnic conflict is obvious is that of rights and social services, as in the case of housing. Several local governments in northern Italy, such as Milan’s, have restricted access to publicly owned social residences, introducing criteria related to official residence seniority<sup>5</sup>. In recent years, as we will see, many local governments have developed a policy of exclusion of immigrants, motivated by security reasons, of priority for national citizens for access to various social benefits and of defense of the cultural identity of the territory (Ambrosini 2011b).

Nevertheless, research on local policies shows that stated policies and performed policies do not coincide, and that the rhetoric of exclusion is often ignored or circumvented in the concrete behaviors of the actors providing services for immigrants (Campomori 2007). Several elements of continuity, at the local level, have been preserved notwithstanding efforts to the contrary.

The last center-left government (2006–2008) failed to pass the announced reforms and faced strong opposition from the majority of public opinion over any idea of improving the condition of immigrants. One of the most frequent and insistent accusations has been that of opening the doors of the country and compromising Italian people’s safety. Under pressure after its failure in partial municipal elections in 2007, the center-left has finally embraced the law-and-order positions of its opponents, particularly on the issue of the control and expulsion of Romanian immigrants, who had become European citizens. Mr. Veltroni, who was mayor of Rome at that time, has distinguished himself in this regard.

On the other hand, the management of “flow decrees” regulating entry permits has reinforced the tendency to seize the opportunities for hidden regularization that

<sup>3</sup> In 2009, for the first time, naturalizations by residence exceeded naturalizations by marriage: 22,968 out of 40,084 (57.3%) (Caritas-Migrantes 2010).

<sup>4</sup> In this case too, Parliament’s vote was almost unanimous. The center-right government of 2001–2006 marked a difference in creating the new Ministry for Italians Abroad, without providing an under-secretary for foreign immigrants in Italy.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that the public housing stock in Italy is scarce, compared to the European average, and has hardly increased over the last 20 years. As immigrants are often housed in highly precarious and often unauthorized accommodations, it is difficult for them to prove formal and continuous residence in the territory of a given municipality.

such instruments provide. Then, the regularization of September 2009, carried out by the new center-right government despite its ideological positions, fit right into the now-familiar logic. It is as though Italy wished to continue to acknowledge immigration only after the inclusion of immigrants in the labor market, with a bare minimum of rights and citizenship.

To conclude on this point, immigrants in Italy are known to be a necessary workforce, in different sectors and occupations, and to bring benefits to the economic system (and to the state's coffers), but they are still not recognized as legitimate components of society. Having received hands, Italy still has to receive people.

### Security Policy and Its Shortcomings

The election campaign of spring 2008 and then the new center-right administration's initiative were developed along this concept. In Italy, as an analysis by the Pavia Observatory has shown, news concerning criminality and violent crimes dominates the information given by public and private television that has no match in the rest of Europe (Diamanti 2011). It reached its highest intensity in the period 2006–2008. Italians were convinced that they lived in a very dangerous country, and that their personal safety was threatened less by the mafia domination of certain regions of the south, than by the remission of prison sentences approved by the center-left government, by growing immigration, and especially by so-called illegal immigration (Valtolina 2010). Major newspapers and left-wing politicians, too, gradually adhered to this vision, which thereby became hegemonic. In such a climate, the story of a woman in Rome killed by a Romanian immigrant during a rape attempt succeeded in provoking a political cataclysm, with street demonstrations against immigrants, demands for special laws for the protection of citizens' security and the expulsion of "illegals," even those from the European Community.

After the rapid fall of the weak government led by Mr. Prodi at the beginning of 2008, the country had to organize early political elections. Issues of security and the struggle against illegal immigration dominated the campaign and contributed considerably to the overwhelming victory of the center-right, which promised "no more clandestine immigrants on the doorstep."

After the victory, the new administration went to work, conferring responsibility for security and immigration on Mr. Maroni, a representative of the Northern League, who was appointed Minister of Home Affairs. The *Legge*, in effect, dictated the government line in this matter for the entire period. A series of measures taken or announced endeavored to communicate to the public opinion the idea of a critical hardening of the government's attitude towards immigrants. Protests by the opposition, humanitarian organizations, the Catholic Church, and some international institutions only confirmed, in the eyes of most Italians, the seriousness of the new severity exhibited by the government.

A quick summary of the measures taken mainly in the two security laws (Law 125/24 July 2008 and Law 94/15 July 2009) might include: a census of gypsy minorities living in unauthorized camps in the surrounding areas of Rome, Milan, and Naples; the deployment of troops on the streets of major cities and critical neighborhoods for law-enforcement purposes; the introduction of clandestinity as an aggravating circumstance

in trials concerning immigrants prosecuted for other crimes; the definition of unauthorized presence in the country as a crime; the prohibition of all administrative acts, including marriage, for undocumented immigrants; the introduction of the possibility of territorial surveillance by citizens' associations (the so-called patrols)<sup>6</sup>; reduction of the fund for immigrants' integration to 5 million Euros, shifting resources to the fight against "illegal" immigration; agreements with Libya for the repression of migrants and refugees arriving by sea, which are always and without distinction defined as illegal, and the rejection of 900 people in the summer of 2009 without allowing them to apply for asylum; the extension, to 6 months, then to 18 months (summer 2011) of the detention time in the "Holding Centers," which were renamed "Identification and Expulsion Centers": even the language that was used played an important role in this story.

On the other hand, the government reigned in workplace inspections, as did the struggle against the underground economy, letting it be understood that in times of crisis it is unwise to put too much emphasis on regular recruitment.

This approach met with undeniable domestic success, as was shown by the regional elections in March 2010, which mainly rewarded the *Lega Nord*<sup>7</sup>: the majority of Italians are convinced they are safer, approve tougher immigration laws, rally on the side of local governments opposing the construction of worship centers for Muslim immigrants, want to reserve certain social rights for Italians alone and are happy to limit the rights of immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

But immigration policy as a security and law-and-order issue has its contradictions, managed so far with oscillations and contortions of the political discourse, but mainly thanks to the mastery of the media.

I will point out four of these contradictions.

First Italian policies arouse concerns and sometimes protests among European and international institutions, such as the United Nations High Council for Refugees. For the first time since World War II, Italy has come into conflict with the United Nations. If this has no real importance for domestic public opinion, a government that wishes to keep good international standing is obliged to explain and soften its positions, at least outwardly.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that most of these measures have been abolished by the verdicts of the Constitutional Court or by the European institutions. But their rhetorical impact has remained strong: immigrants are identified as a danger to Italian society and its security. The Italian government repeatedly entered into a debate with the judiciary bench on this point, standing up for the safety of its citizens.

<sup>7</sup> The local elections of spring 2011, which involved major cities like Milan, Turin, and Naples, marked a change in trend, with the victory of the Left-wing parties. However, we cannot talk about a change of attitude of the majority of Italian public opinion on the issue of immigration.

<sup>8</sup> For example, in Brescia (Lombardy, Northern Italy), the local government has banned cricket games in public parks, a provision focusing on the sport practiced by Pakistan immigrants; it has granted financial aid to families who have a child, but only if they are Italian. In another municipality in Lombardy, the mayor has forbidden immigrants from passing within a few meters of the parish church. In a third, the mayor has sent city police to immigrant residents' homes to check their residence permits. It should be noted that almost always these provisions are defeated when brought to court by immigrants' advocacy groups, but the goal is to offer public opinion a specific image of local government. In the case of aid for families having newborns, after the verdict that struck down its decision, the local government announced that it would withdraw the provision, denying aid to Italian families, too.



- Second In some cases, riots have broken out in symbolic places like Rosarno, in Calabria, and Padova street, in Milan. In the first case, immigrants, especially Africans exploited in picking oranges, housed in deplorable conditions amid public indifference, and after two of them were wounded by gunfire, revolted and burned cars and shops. In reaction, the following night they were hunted down by Italian residents, probably guided by elements of the powerful local mafia, the Ndrangheta. In Padova street, located in a sensitive neighborhood that was the first to see the army in its streets, a brawl that broke out for trivial reasons between Latin-Americans and Egyptians left a man dead in the road and was followed by car burnings and the smashing of shop windows, which caused panic among residents. Some began to wonder whether the repression of illegal immigration was a sufficient response, or whether it might be wise to think about integration policies, as well. The government promised the implementation of new integration projects within a fortnight.
- Third After the approval of the law on security, hundreds of thousands of Italians have been perceived as guilty of aiding and abetting illegal immigration by housing and giving work to irregular immigrants as domestic workers. A political campaign for a quick fix started within the center-right political majority, and ended with a regularization law, restricted to housework and family support with certain limitations, primarily concerning income. Despite these limitations, almost 300,000 applications were submitted before the 2009 September 30 deadline. If one adds them to the 630,000 approved in 2002, it appears that the center-right Italian governments are the biggest *regularizers* of undocumented migrants in Europe. For the political forces that have made the fight against illegal immigration a major issue in their campaign, it is a rather odd result.
- Fourth In 2009, Italy expelled about 14,000 immigrants (Caritas-Migrantes 2010). In the whole country, 1,800 places were available for the detention of undocumented immigrants, and the expulsion rate of those who were kept there was 38%, a reduction in comparison with the previous years. If one thinks that in 2008 the number of undocumented immigrants was estimated at between 700,000 and 1,000,000 (indeed, 740,000 presented admission applications following the decree on quotas), the expulsion rate is in fact around 2%. Even assuming a complete halt to new arrivals, about 50 years would be required to expel all undocumented immigrants.

It appears clear then, besides the needs of the labor market, another fundamental reason for the persistence of illegal immigration and for the need for periodic adjustments, is the staggering outlay of economic and human resources that would be necessary to contrast it effectively. The issue does not concern Italy alone, but it is particularly serious in a country where the underground economy is so important. Government action thus shows its true purpose: to reassure Italian voters, and to scare off would-be immigrants. The latter target is increasingly hard to hit, given the forces that attract this labor force—the first among which are Italian families.



## Why the Economy Is Challenging Politics: The Labor Market and Foreign Immigration

Fitting into this contradictory framework is the astonishing rise of foreign immigration in a country still affected by a heavy legacy of domestic unemployment and long-standing territorial imbalances. In order to better understand why the economy is challenging politics and, from time to time, bending it to its demands, we must recall the drop in internal migration, particularly on the south–north axis, despite some recovery in recent years (Pugliese, 2002). This phenomenon can be explained by the high reliance on the family to protect unemployed and temporarily employed people (young people live with their families much longer than the European average: in 2008, about 60% of people aged between 18 and 34 years, against a European average of 46%: Eurostat 2010a). More generally, the social protection system in Italy as in the other south-European countries is implicitly based on the role of the family, with a social expenditure that consists—more than the European average—mainly of income transfers (including pensions) to families (Esping-Andersen 1999). On the other hand, we have to note the rapid rise in the education levels of young people (more than 3 out of 4 now obtain a high-school diploma, after 13 years of school: ISTAT Istituto italiano di statistica 2010) which increases selectivity of the jobs offered by the market.

This is the context into which foreign immigration falls, providing the labor market with the workforce that is still required by many sectors and activities where manual labor is necessary, but where working conditions, social status, and wages no longer attract Italian workers. In Italy, as in other developed countries (Castles 2002), one of the greatest illusions of our time is the idea that the new economy has abolished “three-D tasks”: *dirty, dangerous, demanding*. In this respect, Calavita (2005) has spoken, with reference to Italy and Spain, as well as Mexicans in the USA, of an “economy of otherness”: considering immigrants as “different” justifies their confinement to certain sectors and jobs that become “ethnicized.”

I in turn have suggested the concept of subordinate integration (Ambrosini 2011a): immigrants are relatively well accepted in the labor market and, gradually in society too, as long as they remain at the lowest levels of the social and professional scale, ready to perform the least pleasant tasks. Carchedi, Mottura and Pugliese (2003) have noted a revival of “slave labor,” whereas Reyneri (2006) spoke of an *occupational downgrading*, despite the significant education levels of many immigrants. In general, in Italy as in Southern Europe, the unemployment rates of immigrants are low, but their jobs require few qualifications (Reyneri and Fullin 2011).

Moreover, one can say that this foreign labor demand is firmly embedded in the functioning of the Italian economy and Italian society, and is shaped by a give-and-take between local socio-economic systems and the immigrant labor supply, played out by employers, governments, the national labor supply, unemployed people from less-developed regions, their families, etc. The complementarity that economists often cite is the result of a complex social construction.

It is not easy to calculate the number of immigrant workers in Italy, even if they are regular. Istat (the National Statistics Institute) noted in 2009 (second quarter) 1,930,000 foreign citizens employed in Italy, but the count excluded seasonal work and especially workers who live with their employers, thus wiping out hundreds of

thousands of women employed in domestic services and home care (estimated at 1 million people: Ismu news, 17.12.2010). According to Inail (National Institute for Insurance against Workplace Accidents), employed immigrants in 2009 are thought to be more than 3 million (3,087,023), including seasonal workers, whose number was probably overestimated, but counting only a small part of the domestic workers, even those who were regular (Caritas-Migrantes 2010). The economic crisis has certainly affected these employment levels, especially in sectors such as construction and small-firm manufacturing, but it has not reversed the picture of a segmented labor market where the least attractive jobs are given to immigrants.

Let us now analyze in detail the geography of immigrant workforce placement. A first observation: immigration is more substantial, better placed on the labor market, and more stable in the wealthiest and most industrialized regions of Italy: according to Istat data, in 2009, 62.2% of regular immigrant employment was concentrated in the north, 27.5% in the center, 10% in the south<sup>9</sup> (Caritas-Migrantes 2010). Specifically, 80% of immigrant employment can be found in six regions of the center-north. Adding smaller but dynamic areas of the center-north (Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Marche, Umbria), the picture becomes clear: there is a relationship between economic development and the use of foreign labor, and it is stronger than the relationship between developmental delays and use of immigration to sustain weak and less efficient economic activities.

Nowadays, immigrants represent 7.5% of total employment, but this figure reflects deep differences among sectors and jobs with high immigrant concentration, and public or professionally qualified sectors, from which immigrants are still excluded: compared to the average, there are twice as many immigrants in the building trade and five times more in family services. The rate is high in hotels and restaurants, too with a concentration in lower skilled levels

However, immigration in Italy is not only related to agriculture, domestic work, and low-skilled services, but has a significant industrial component: according to Istat, 40% of immigrants work in industry (including construction), against 29% for Italians, with a share of 8% at the national level and 11.8% in north-eastern regions. Moreover, unlike most countries with both long-standing and recent immigration, including Spain and Greece, immigration in Italy is not just a metropolitan phenomenon, but is also widespread in several areas of the provinces, especially in local economies based on SMEs and specialized industrial districts in the center-north. The polycentric structure of the Italian economy is also reflected in the settlement of the immigrant population.

Provinces having the highest immigrant employment rate are also, generally, those with the lowest unemployment rates: the provinces of eastern Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia, and Tuscany, which have a rich industrial SME web, a mixed economy, lively mid-sized towns, and high incomes. These are the territories that have formed the core of the Italian economy in the last 20 years. The characteristic mix of old and new, typical of the Italian economy, and often also of its most dynamic components, forms the most favorable environment for the economic reception of foreign immigration. This is an important point because the literature on the “Mediterranean model” of immigration has linked immigrants’ work mainly to the underground economy, agriculture, domestic work, street-vendors: in other words, to economic backwardness and exploitation of a

<sup>9</sup> It should be recalled that only half of employed Italians live in the north, 30% in the south.

workforce that has no alternative. Italy's complex economic geography on the other hand reveals a correlation between the work of immigrants and dynamic local economies, mainly represented by industrial areas. Therefore, it does not appear that the use of immigrant labor represents an alternative to investments in new technologies or the repositioning of the companies in more complex and advanced production processes: it seems rather to hold up the displacement of mature production to countries with lower labor costs (Luciano et al. 2007). In other cases, by facilitating the outsourcing of secondary activities (cleaning, movement of cargo, warehouse management) or lower-technology, it strengthens the competitive capacity of enterprises and defends the employment of Italians committed in core activities and skilled jobs. More controversial still is the relationship between Italian and immigrant workers in the informal economy: here, where laws and collective agreements do not operate, the use of immigrants tends to lower remuneration and worsen working conditions. Cases such as those of Mediterranean agriculture and construction can be cited in this regard (Carchedi, Mottura, and Pugliese, 2003).

It should be noted, however, that families are important employers of irregular immigrants, in the domestic sector and in the care of the elderly. Families have played a major role in the numerous regularization campaigns that have taken place, as we have already seen. We can say Italian women's emancipation and their entry into the labor market have been fostered and accompanied by their substitution, in household tasks and care, by foreign women (and men) (Andall 2000). The lack of reliable official data in this sector is a true black hole in Italian statistics, and shows a tendency to ignore this phenomenon.

### **Differentiated Territorial Models**

On the basis of statistical data and local research results, one can define four territorial patterns of migrant worker employment (Table 1). The first is that of the industrial provinces of the center-north (especially north-eastern ones), where for years the typical image of the immigrant worker has been that of a factory worker, employed in an SME throughout the chain of sub-contracting, or in services related to industrial production. Increasingly, women find jobs in the domestic or care sectors. In these contexts, one now finds many immigrant families and a growing number of children in schools: Emilia is the top region in the country in terms of the number of students of foreigner origin (12.7%), almost double the national average (7.0%) (Caritas-Migrantes 2009; Ministero dell'Istruzione 2009). But it is mainly in these regions that the industrial sector employment crisis has hit immigrants, restraining the integration process, and causing unprecedented feelings of competition between Italians and foreign workers.

The second model is that of metropolises, led by Rome and Milan, where immigrants' fates are more varied but are included in a range that goes from building and restaurants to cleaning and transportation. The most famous and now-familiar image is that of the woman who works in a family, takes care of the house (on a fixed or, more commonly, an hourly basis), or is responsible for the care of the elderly who are becoming less self-sufficient. In Milan, and to some extent in Rome, in Turin, and in other major cities in the center-north area, immigrants' stabilization is confirmed by the

**Table 1** Four territorial models of immigrant integration on the Italian labor market

	SME model	Metropolitan economies model	Seasonal activities model (southern regions)	Seasonal activities model (center-north regions)
Territories concerned	Lombardy, North-East, Center	Major cities (mainly Rome and Milan); spreading towards mid-sized towns	Agricultural (and tourist) provinces, places of transition to more developed regions	Tourist (and agricultural) Provinces
Employers	Industrial SMEs and services to industry	Low-skilled services, personal services, construction, families	Farm businesses, families, hotels	Hotels, services (farms)
Immigrants' jobs	Relatively stable factory work; more recent spread of domestic and care work	Service workers (cleaning, transport, etc.); builders; many domestic and care workers	Agricultural products harvesting (seasonal and daily employment) labor for tourist seasons	Labor for tourist seasons and services; agriculture: seasonal work but mostly regular
Types of immigrant concerned	Men, young people, often with unrecognized degrees; increasing number of women	High number of women (in some national components they represent the majority)	Men in agriculture; growth of female employment in the domestic sector	Mixed composition; immigrants with seasonal work permits
Weight of the underground economy	Somewhat important (sub-contracting chains; care...)	Important (care, domestic work, cleaning, construction...)	Very high, especially in agriculture and in the domestic sector	Generally lower, but diversified depending on the area (care, street trading, etc.)
Trends	Stabilization and family recomposition; signs of improvements in work conditions, but also insecurity and loss of employment because of the crisis	Growth of independent employment; formation of an economic and intellectual elite; family recomposition	Displacement towards other regions Partial emersion of "black" labor (especially concerning women employed by families)	Diversification and stabilization
Problems	Difficulties in the recognition of qualifications and in the transition to higher roles; effects of the crisis on the building and industry sectors	Difficulties in careers, especially for women; trends towards the formation of "ethnic" neighborhoods; effects of the crisis (construction)	Employment maintenance and stabilization. Escaping the harshest forms of exploitation. Access to social rights	Difficult transition to more stable and "family" immigration

number of family recompositions and immigrant children who enter school (in this regard, Milano is the leading city in Italy, 14.2% of foreign students). Here again, the economic crisis is restraining the integration process (e.g., home purchases).

The third model is the temporary employment model of the south, which initially, in the 1980s, was the gateway for many immigrants. The south remains a starting point and a stepping stone towards more developed regions in the country. The jobs it provides are mostly temporary or irregular, and many workers do not have a regular status. The best known sector is the harvesting of Mediterranean agricultural products, and the typical figure in this context is that of temporary and exploited employees in “cash-in-hand” agricultural labor positions, recruited and hired through the illegal mediation of “foremen”: it is a well-known but officially ignored phenomenon, which led, in January 2010, to the riots of Rosarno in Calabria. But the tourism and building sectors have also begun to offer employment opportunities (mostly again in the informal economy). Women’s employment in housekeeping has become considerable in southern regions too, as revealed in the two last regularizations. But stabilization is still very limited: the rate of foreign students in these regions’ schools is about 2% (Ministero dell’Istruzione 2009).

There is, finally, a fourth model, represented by the center-north provinces that attract significant flows of seasonal workers, employed in summer by the tourism industry and in autumn by fruit harvesting. Here the rates of regular employment are much higher. The emblematic case is that of the small Alpine region of Trentino-Alto Adige (Süd Tirol), the only one where an efficient importation system of seasonal labor works, employing about 30,000 people each year, especially in agriculture in Trentino and in hotels in Alto Adige. In this region irregular employment is less frequent, many workers now are European citizens coming from Eastern Europe (Romania, Poland); but the arrival of women employed in home care has increased the submerged part of immigration. However, thanks to the regularization of these situations, in addition to seasonal employment, one can see non-seasonal inclusions and processes of stabilization.

### **Blocked Social Mobility and Passages to Self-Employment**

Immigrants’ careers in hierarchical organizations remain difficult, although some local studies have noted some signs of progress, especially at the level of factory workers’ careers (Ortolano and Luatti 2007). It is still rare to find immigrants in the role of managers or even employees in Italy (Reyneri and Fullin 2011): according to Istat, in 2009 only 10.1% of immigrants occupied an intermediate or high-level position, and it should be considered that this same category includes workers from developed countries and self-employed workers (Caritas-Migrantes 2010).

The two areas where we found most of the immigrants who occupied skilled jobs are hospitals, where there is a major shortage of nurses in northern Italy,<sup>10</sup> and the

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that in Italy only national citizens can be civil servants. Foreign nurses are hired by private hospitals, but they also enter public hospitals by the expedient of service cooperatives.

very specific and little regulated sector of so-called of “intercultural mediation” activities.<sup>11</sup>

Self-employment, on the other hand, has quickly become the most important alternative to subordinate immigration. We should emphasize that this solution is consistent with Italy’s social history, where self-employment is still important (22.7% of employees in 2010, against an average for the EU-15 of 14.1%: Eurostat 2010b) and the transition to self-employment has been, and probably remains, the most accessible means of promotion for the lower classes.

Once again the data varies, but according to the sources, this phenomenon concerns about 213,000 immigrants who have opened independent activities (Caritas-Migrantes 2010), with the regional and local differences that we have already noted. According to this source, which is quite restrictive, 50,000 immigrants can be counted at the head of an autonomous activity in Lombardy (23.3% of the national total); 26,000 in Tuscany (12.4%), 24,000 in Emilia and in Piedmont (11.4%), and 21,000 in Veneto (10.0%). The most numerous are Moroccan immigrants, with 35,308 business owners (16.6% of the total), followed by Romanians (32,452: 15.2%), Chinese (30,976: 14.5%), and Albanians (22,611: 10.6%), even though significant local differences can be noted: e.g., in Milan Egyptians are in first place, followed by Chinese.

One can note, in this regard, a very rapid growth of this phenomenon, especially after the Turco-Napolitano Law of 1998 and the almost contemporaneous (partial) liberalization<sup>12</sup> of the commerce sector. In many of the major provinces, such as Milan, Rome, and Turin, it is only because of immigrants’ entry that it is possible to register a (low) increase in the number of firms in recent years.

The activities tend to cluster in two sectors: construction (38.1%) and commerce (34.8%) (Caritas-Migrantes 2010). Not all these positions correspond to real businesses. There is also the phenomenon of “fake companies,” i.e., individuals who are driven to open a position of self-employment by their employers, who can thereby save on payroll taxes this way (e.g., in construction). In addition, we can observe a phenomenon of recourse to self-employment as a refuge-solution against the difficulty of finding employment, which could explain the increase of immigrant entrepreneurs in the last 2 years despite the economic crisis (+22,000 in 2009; +26,000 in 2010: Caritas-Migrantes 2010).

On the other hand, however, there is an evident effect of “ecological succession,” with the entry of immigrants into activities (the most burdensome and least profitable: street commerce, bakery, masonry, etc.) that have been abandoned by aging Italian employers who have retired and who had no successors: it is a process that repeats, in Northern Italy, what immigrants from the south did in the past. Furthermore, in the towns, forms of “ethnic markets” spread, selling products and

<sup>11</sup> Again, as the employer is often public, immigrants cannot enter as officials, but they work with a variety of solutions that circumvent the law.

<sup>12</sup> The two laws were promoted by a center-left government. The Turco-Napolitano law (framework law on immigration) abolished the reciprocity clause for individual companies: previously only foreign citizens from countries that grant the same right to Italians could take up economic activities in Italy: mainly, the countries of long-standing Italian emigration. Trade liberalization (Bersani Law) abolished a number of restrictions on the granting of new business licenses in the local area, such as the definition of product sectors, the distance between businesses in the same sector, the minimum size of stores.

services requested by immigrant populations (e.g., express couriers toward the countries of Eastern Europe, electronic money transfers) and the trade of goods, in food and nutrition, but also in cultural production (music, videos, newspapers, etc..) linking immigrants to their country of origin (what Orozco et al. 2005, called “nostalgic trade”), thereby creating increasingly important transnational circuits (Ambrosini 2009).

From this perspective, we can see, in Italy as abroad, the expansion of self-employment as a way of seeking alternatives to scarce social mobility: self-employed immigrants often stay in the country for a long time, possess a higher level of education than their Italian counterparts, and come from independent lower-middle-class families; those who achieve some success become the elite of immigrant populations and tend to assume public roles and engage in advocacy and political mediation (Ambrosini and Castagnone 2008). But this trend is subjected to the influence of state regulation and of the political weight of some Italian professional associations: in the most protected sectors, such as taxis or tobacco sales, there are almost no immigrants who own the business; where regulation is looser, as in small-scale transport or in the restaurant industry, they get in quickly; in a sector such as telephone services, where small shops have flourished, regulation, as already noted, has almost expelled immigrants and their activities in several cities and regions.

The opinion of the receiving society and its institutions on the growth of economic ventures of migrants remains ambivalent: buyers and consumers often benefit from low prices, high flexibility, new products that the self-employed migrants launch on the market. Some Italians find work or new clients (accountants, lawyers, consultants for salaries, and taxes). Others, however, such as weaker Italian operators in construction or sub-contracting chains, complain about the competition from newcomers, accuse them of unfair practices, ask loudly for greater controls and inspections. Chinese small businesses especially are the object of fear, rumors, and protests.

### **Conclusions: Immigration, Post-industrial Markets, and Political Contradictions**

We have seen how Italy, a land of emigration and unemployment, has become a foreign labor importer. This change came about largely in a spontaneous way, thanks to economic actors (including families), ethnic networks, and certain social forces (including unions) inspired by ideas of solidarity. The Italian version of “reluctant importation” of foreign labor (Cornelius et al. 1994) has therefore been based on an attitude of formal closure, of substantial tolerance (if not absolute, at least widespread enough), and of a posteriori recognition of immigrant workers’ entry and inclusion, more than on an attitude of strict control and selection of candidates.

In this way, demand for immigrant labor has focused on low-skilled, manual jobs for which the recruitment of Italian workers was difficult and internal mobility in the country was insufficient.

Researchers have often spoken, in recent years, of a Mediterranean migration model (Baldwin-Edwards and Arango 1999; King and Black 1997; King and Ribas-Mateos 2002), or of a Southern European model, as opposed to the Northern



European migration model: legal and regulated immigration, well placed in the formal economy and endowed with social rights, on the one hand, versus largely spontaneous and irregular immigration, positioned in the informal economy, without social protection or union rights, on the other.

Our analysis suggests that immigration in southern Europe is not homogeneous, and that even within one of the countries concerned, Italy, one can find several types of migration and, if one will, several models of integration, linked to the industrial districts, to the metropolitan areas and to the agricultural and tourist industry areas which in turn are differentiated by varying levels of institutional regulation.

Moreover, the comparison with Northern Europe should take into account the different timeframe in which immigration has taken place and therefore the different structure of the labor market: there immigration entered mainly in the period of reconstruction and industrial development; in Italy and in Southern Europe immigration has arrived in a more contradictory post-Fordist era. In addition, one should ask whether newcomers who can now easily enter Northern Europe are better received at a social level and if they are better integrated economically (see, e.g., Bloch et al. 2011).<sup>13</sup> It seems to me, on the contrary, that the forms of inclusion and the demands for labor that are offered to immigrants in Southern Europe are typical of the less noble part of the new post-Fordist and post-industrial markets, and therefore reveal a more common and transnational future than one would like to admit (Rea 2010). Italy is the mirror of a consistent part of the new labor demand in the developed economic systems.

Where Italy is concerned, this phenomenon shows marked regional and occupational concentrations. Whereas in most developed economies it is highly concentrated in cities, in Italy it is widespread in the center-north provinces. It relates not only to agriculture and less qualified services, but it also has a significant industrial component (although with a strong bias towards the construction sector). It certainly has an underground area of “cash-in-hand” labor and irregularities, but this is just one of the components—a large but minority one—of an inclusion system that is concentrated in the regions and provinces where unemployment is lower and incomes are higher. On the one hand, immigrants must deal with the demand for employment flexibility and the use of seasonal, fixed-term, and temporary work; on the other, with forms of relatively stable but subordinate employment, situated at the lower levels of hierarchical scales. The current economic crisis has reduced but not overturned this tendency. While the construction and manufacturing industries have had to fire many workers, low level services, and families continue to need the work of immigrants (see Caritas-Migrantes 2011).

Today we can say that a growing number of industrial “made in Italy” products are not manufactured in Italy, or are not manufactured by Italians. In some cases, the use of immigrants makes it possible to keep some forms of production in Italy that would otherwise cease or be taken abroad; in others cases, it delays foreign outsourcing.

<sup>13</sup> It has been believed and repeated for years, for example, that using foreign women as domestic help was specific to Italy and south-Europe. Studies such as those of Anderson (2000), Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2001), Parreñas (2001), Lutz and Palenga-Möllnbeck (2010), and van Valsum (2010) have shown that this is a worldwide phenomenon, but that it is not easily accepted.

There are also jobs that were created specifically as a result of the arrival of a large immigrant population seeking work: an example is home care, which hardly existed before immigration. This is a very interesting case for economic sociology, showing a labor supply creating its own demand. From a social perspective one can speak of a post-industrial society that retrieves and revitalizes pre-industrial labor relations. Social modernization relies on pre-modern forms of organization, especially in a family context (for a larger overview on European trends, see Kilkey et al. 2010). The hiring of immigrant women enables Italian women to continue their professional careers while maintaining their traditional roles as family managers, compensating for the shortcomings of public support services and of the sharing of housework (Ambrosini 2008a, b; Triandafyllidou and Kosic 2006). Note that when they work in the domestic field, illegal immigrants are accepted without any particular problems. Rarely are they controlled and punished. Socially and institutionally, they are not even perceived as illegal residents, guilty of a crime.

In other words, the family remains the core personal care organization, but it must resort to the market, included the black market, that is to say it has to hire foreign workers, to fulfill the mission with which it is culturally entrusted.

In the quest for emancipation, too, immigrants' projects seem to reproduce traditional paths. As is the case for lower-class Italians, self-employment remains the main route to upward social mobility. Some sectors, such as construction and small-scale retailing, are beginning to witness a substitution of traditional operators with immigrants. In other cases, immigration creates new markets and creates employers to serve them. Moreover, immigrants' economic initiative satisfies the demand for new products, food, services, and leisure activities expressed by the most innovative and curious Italian clientele (for an international parallel, see Rath 2007).

This patchwork of old and new, of traditional and modern, is one of the chief factors that make the economy and society of Italy work today. The crisis does not seem to have upset this state of affairs, though it does complicate the process of immigrants' integration and adds weight to the arguments to the supporters of exclusion. The truth is, Italians have not gone back to doing the jobs they had left to immigrants.<sup>14</sup> One does not see many educated young people seeking employment as laborers in the building trade, or young girls who want to assist elderly people night and day. And one does not even see large numbers of immigrants who, having lost their jobs, sadly go back to their countries of origin.

Italy, however, especially in the richer regions and cities, is experiencing a profound contradiction in its relationship with the immigrant component of its population: in fact, the country is becoming more and more multi-ethnic, in terms of the number of residents, participation in the labor market, transition to self-employment, mixed marriages, and the origin of students in schools. In their cultural representations, Italians tend to deny this reality. They do not want multi-ethnic cities. Faced with the widespread use of immigrants, regular and irregular, in families and enterprises of the urban economy, the prevailing opinion rejects the idea of giving a place to immigration in the nation's social

<sup>14</sup> A tendency was recently noted of the return of Italian women to hourly domestic work. But not in the most crucial sector, that of continuing assistance to the elderly, and not to the extent of reversing the prevalence of foreign workers (mostly women, but increasingly also men).

organization, and this position is strengthened by political forces and by media that reflect and exacerbate the reaction.

Tensions between political pettiness and economic openness towards new immigration arise throughout all developed countries. Under democratic regimes, promises to fight unauthorized immigration, more often defined as “illegal,” to the death come up against the practical impossibility of fully carrying them out. In one way or another, forms of tolerance and measures of regularization are widespread. Today in the Italian case, these contradictions seem to touch the highest levels: the definition of immigration as a problem of safety and public order, the tightening of rules that aim to fight irregular immigration, backlash against cultural and religious differences became central aspects of the prevailing political discourse. However, as we have seen, the actual practices do not correspond to the rhetoric: the six amnesties in 22 years speak of a labor market that in the end has always forced politicians to recognize the de facto inclusion of unauthorized immigrants in the economic system. Moreover, Italy has strengthened what have been called “fencing strategies,” actively targeting illegal migrants in order to arrest and then expel them, especially the external controls on maritime borders. The implementation of the “gate-keeping strategies,” aimed at restricting practical legal access to the nation and its institutions continues to be weaker and more contradictory, in particular with regard to the control of the black economy (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011; see also Vogel 2000). Without greater commitment, greater realism towards the relationship between politics, economy, labor market needs, and human rights, and a different public rhetoric on immigration, the country will continue to flounder dangerously in the tension between aversion on principle and de facto evolution towards a multi-ethnic future that is full of contradictions.

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