

# CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF THE MIGRATORY ITALIAN WAVES IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> – 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

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**Abstract:** *The phenomenon of the Italian migration proved to be intense and diverse as regards the territorial origins, but also social diversity. Migration is the process involving people of different social status and economic, cultural, religious changes in the society accepting it. The abandonment of the original area by people in order to settle in other areas depended on political, economic or natural factors. The Italian migratory process became a great migration to America, Australia and mainly in Europe. Searching for a safer or better future, Italians came to Romania as well, establishing steady communities.*

**Key words:** *permanent migration, seasonal migration, expatriations, demographic evolutions, migratory flows, individual and collective migration.*

## 1. Introduction

Understanding migration as a component of the economic and social life of each state leads to the idea that orderly, well managed migration can be beneficial for individuals and societies as it generates ethnical and religious syntheses, economic changes and regional and overall readjustments of power relations, involving acculturation and exchanges of values (Bocancea, 2011, p.3).

## 2. Causes of Italian migration

In the context of the economic changes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that led to the decline of old artisan crafts and domestic industry, Italian migration intensified. Given that the effects of the industrial revolution in Europe were causing increased agricultural productivity and urbanization, the rural labor force turned to urban activities. Migration was constant in the peninsular life before and after the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the political, economic and religious crises they faced determined the displacement of population in urban and rural areas. It is not easy to determine migration causes, but most times there were various reasons triggering the displacement from a familiar place to unknown territories. Natural causes

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often determined the mass displacement of migrants who fled climate changes, natural disasters caused by volcanoes, floods or earthquakes (Available at: <http://doc.studenti.it/appunti/storia/flussi-migratori.html>.)

The main causes of emigration were geo-political that concerned territorial proximity, ease of mobility, but also social, causing displacement as result of wars, military invasions, religious persecution (Nicolae, 2009, p. 29). Only in Western Europe, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were hundreds of military conflicts and related battles and the Italian states were also involved in the unification fight for changing political order. The political component of migration corresponds to the unification process, which led the Mazzinians and liberals into exile. The process of political migration would be continued in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by socialists and anarchists, especially since many of the migrants who returned to Italy, in particular those from Germany, „had learned what a union was, how to go on strike” (Procacci, 1975, p. 371). The transition from a mainly rural world to one of technical innovations developed from the Northern Europe to Northern Italy mutual organizations of charity initiative that helped workers. In Italy, Mutual Organizations (*Società Operaia di Mutuo Soccorso ed Istruzione-SOMSI*) appeared in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and aimed to keep away from policy, but starting with the 1890s the social problem triggered in the Northern Italy the establishment of the first worker unions (Francesconi and Tomasella, 1965, p. 29).

There was deemed that the highest impact on migration was caused by economic causes, intensified during the great agrarian crisis from 1873-1879 that aligned with the worldwide crisis and the economic crisis from 1881-1894 (Dorojan, 2013, p. 31). Given the demographic growth, the pursuit was for growth opportunities, a better socio-economic level because the agrarian crisis had covered the European states and, in particular, Italy. The gravity of the crisis was reflected by the poverty of the soil caused by the exhaustion of farming lands through long exploitation and insufficient capital. Thus, the prices dropped on the national market because of the massive imports of American and Russian wheat and in the South, the small peasant property could not compete with the large estates.

Overall, the farming and husbandry production dropped from 28,308,000,000 (in lira in 1938), as it was in 1880, to 25,916,000,000 in 1887 (Procacci, 1975, pp. 369-370). The authorities proved incapable of managing the population exodus, begun in the late decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century given that migration was also caused by accidental factors such as drought, high taxes and epidemics. The investigations of the Italian officials showed that the Northern and Southern villages faced malnutrition, malaria, pellagra which increased the number of victims “by the thousand each year” (Procacci, 1975, pp. 369-370).

The journey of Italians worldwide meant “pursuing the bread that the country could not provide” (Pellegrini and Perissinotto, 2010, p. 3).

### **3. The effects of the Italian migration**

Italian historians differentiated migration and called the migration from the European area internal migration and the migration overseas – external migration. Post-unification Italy did not manage to settle the economic dualism between the developed North and the retrograde South. Most areas of Italy were affected by the financial deficit, by the agricultural crisis and by an industrial sector congregated only in the north of the country.

Piedmont was an area that offered growth opportunities because of its liberal policies, infrastructure investments, organization of the banking system and reforms in the textile industry, but the pattern was undertaken only by the provinces Liguria and only partially by Lombardy – Venice. Therefore, certain areas experienced severe imbalances between available resources and population needs and these led to the increase of migratory flows. Before and after the unification of the state, Italy underwent the migratory process which transformed into the great migration both in Europe and towards the Americas and later towards Australia.

The mirage of the New World determined millions of people to leave the country, and this process was enabled by the progress of the industrial revolution. If ships were the only transportation to America, with journeys lasting around 40 days, in Europe, millions of people travelled by train, seeking a safer present and a better future (Available at: <http://www.emigrati.it>). The phenomenon of the Italian migration proved to be intense and diverse in terms of territorial origin and social background. The history of the Italian migration spans over a significant period of time, with the following stages: 1861-1876, 1876-1915, 1916-1940, 1946-1970; therefore more than half of the Italian population was involved in the migratory process (Toninato, 2011, p. 19).

Both the continental and transatlantic migrations were mostly composed of men (81%) and the destination of the seasonal migrants was mainly towards European countries, in particular France and Germany and gradually the extra-European migration prevailed. Seasonal migration manifested mainly in Europe, inclusively in the Romanian territories after 1860, but only as secondary direction. An increasingly larger number of people from Piedmont, Liguria and Veneto gradually chose this destination and the great Venetian migration to Romania became a route of seasonal migration of specialized workers, who acted as agents in the modernization of the country and most of whom settled here, establishing solid communities. Migration is a phenomenon of worldwide demographic dimension, which could be temporary or permanent; depending on the temporary duration and the distance between the place of origin and destination, the differentiation is made between temporary or seasonal migration and permanent migration. Based on the distance covered and while the transportation developed in the second half of the 19th century, migrations could be regional, international or intercontinental. In terms of duration, there could be differentiated between permanent or temporary migration and, within it, seasonal migration was differentiated, which involved a definite period for professional activities conditioned by seasons (Negruți, 1991, p.16). From 1875 to 1915 mesmerized by the dream of the New World more than 20,000,000 people out of the 40,000,000 people from Italy left, which meant “not only several Italians, but half of the people” (Martin, 2009, p. 31, 57).

The migration's effects proved diverse and caused economic, cultural, linguistic transformations in Italy and for the Italians involved in the *great migration* both for those who left and for those who stayed home. Migration was a choice involving dramatic changes, displacement from communities, from families, hard jobs abroad and generated changes in the Italian society. Foreign and Italian agents tried to take advantage of the ignorance of migrants as those recruited paid a fee for their journey and the employment received. There were usually organized groups of workers from the same region of Italy and the journey and settlement in the region of destination were the entrepreneur's responsibility (Kisilewicz, 2010, p. 20). The hardships of a migrant also included the limited possibilities to communicate and they were often labeled as illiterate in the

countries of adoption. For many migrants the feeling of nostalgia and sadness fed the thought of returning home. In some communities the only ones left were most times the children, elderly and women who were called at the time the white widows (Toninato, 2011, pp.28-29), which caused the disintegration of families. Such effort of Italian migrants helped however to redress the unified Italy as the money sent back contributed not only to the survival of the families that could pay their debts, but also to start small investments. The acclimatization in these countries was not always easy, there were conflicts between the workers in the countries of adoption and Italian migrants were accused of selling their employment under regular wages and of being the “Europe’s Chinese” (Procacci, 1975, p. 371).

The Italians are no longer the lice from the 16th century, but in France denigrating labels were used to describe them as Bedouins, Zulu, Burs, meant to describe Italy as the Africa of Europe, thus labeling Italians as poor, retrograde and ignorant (Toninato, 2011, pp.28-29). Even in the United States, the Italians were despised, they were not considered of the white race and were assimilated to the Chinese, Afro-Americans, Mexicans and many articles from New York papers called them robbers, bandits, beggars or even worse the Italian man was presented as a “significant criminal”, “a tensed person, who is agitated when sober and angry after a few drinks” (Toninato, 2011, p. 29).

The stereotypes of the violent, ignorant and lazy Italian were most time economically related, were connected to the accusation that they were in unfair competition with local workers, strike breakers, that by accepting work below the market level triggered a decrease in salaries and a large part of liquidities left the countries as wages were sent to Italy. The result of this negative image was violent incidents, as the lynching from New Orleans on March 14, 1891 or the massacre from Agues Mortes on August 17, 1893 with victims among the Italian migrants (Toninato, 2011, p. 30).

Refusals and conflicts were also recorded in the South and East of Europe, but the migration was not as significant as in the West. In Romania, feelings of admiration and solidarity were recorded as regards Italy, arising from linguistic kinship and Latin conscience. All the writers from the first half of the 19th century built a bright image of Italy in the Romanian intellectual and literary environment, as Italy was seen as the land of ancestors, an area of romantic adventures, the country of great masters and scholars (Kisilewicz, 2010, p. 15).

The contacts were stimulated by the socio-political similarities between the situation of Romanians and Italians given that the second half of the 19th century found the Romanians and Italians in full process of establishment of unitary and modern states. From the Europe of empires, the political French, German, Italian migrants, participants in various revolutions or anti-empire movements often chose migration and came even in the lands from the north of the Danube. Here, they were given the right to practice liberal, artistic and, in particular, didactic professions (Siupur, 2009, p. 68). Marco Antonio Canini, Garibaldian journalist, banished from Italy in the 7th decade of the 19th century, launched an appeal to his countrymen: “Italian citizens, instead of crossing the ocean to America and to see that magnates do not integrate you and you will starve, better come to Romania, a rich country with a welcoming people, of Latin origin like us” (Kisilewicz, 2010, p. 36 and Tomi, 2003, pp. 395-401).

The Italian migration in Romania at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century played a secondary role, but occurred in all social fields. In those years,

Romania seemed to many as the new America on this side of the ocean, with riches, farming land and that needed specialized labor (Ricci, 2008, p. 60).

Most migrants came from the Italian territories of the Habsburg Empire or from the Adriatic regions and were involved in fields of specialized labor. The migration statistics from 1883 showed that the qualified migrants of Italy chose Serbia, Romania, Greece and Turkey as country of destination.

For the Romanian territory, it was indicated that in 1877, the actual number of migrants was 1371 (1.38%) and in 1878 the migration dropped to 949 (0.99%). In 1897, the actual number was 2156 (1.80%) and in 1880 it was estimated at 1189 (0.99%). The number of migrants in 1881 was estimated to 1436 (1.06%), while in 1882 was kept to 1512 (0.91%) and increased in 1883 to 3839 (2.27%) (Statistica della Emigrazione Italiana Anno 1883, 1884, p. XIX). The same statistics estimated that, according to the age criterion, the male population was between 64-79% of the migration. (Statistica della Emigrazione Italiana Anno 1883, 1884, p. X). The largest part of this Italian migration in the Romanian territory, from the second half of the 19th century up to 1918, was temporary or seasonal. The term usually refers here to smaller or larger groups of workers of different specializations, who left Italy at the beginning of spring, in March-April, and returned home either at the end of autumn, in November, or at the beginning of winter, in December ( Scagno and Tomasella and Tucu, 2008, p. 420). There were also exceptions when the temporary migration covered a longer period of time, several years for instance, as stipulated under the employment contract. In such cases, seasonal migration differentiated from temporary migration as it occurred periodically while temporary migration, although for a longer or shorter period of time, did not presume the obligation to return to Romania (Dorojan, 2009, p. 133).

Since the 60s of the 19th century, hundreds of workers from Italy worked throughout the regions of Romania, building railways, bridges, streets or important public constructions. The arrival of the Italian workers on the Romanian employment market matches the period of the beginning of the Romanian state's modernization (Focacci, 2009, p. 4).

Italian companies operated in Romania in collaboration with the Romanian state, such as Società rumena di costruzioni e lavori pubblici, Bucharest, Nifon Palace; Società veneta per imprese e costruzioni pubbliche, Bucharest, 5 Vamei Str.; Pellerin, Bucharest, 3 Piața Amzei; Società Five-Little, Bucharest (Scagno and Tomasella and Tucu, 2008, p.40). The companies employed qualified labor from Italy, in particular from Veneto and especially from Udine, but later workers from the south of Italy or from the provinces of the Adriatic Sea came to Romania (Drăgulin, 2011, pp. 14-15). The experience of the Italian companies on the Romanian market allowed them to win auctions, dominating the sector of public and private constructions, determining the Italian minister from Bucharest, Emanuele Beccaria Incisa to state that from 1890 to 1895 the total amount of these works had reached 21.5 million of French francs (Dinu, 2007, p. 425).

Most Italians from Romania were young people, masters of their crafts, who walked sometimes for weeks and in Romanian settlements they were waited for craftsmen or entrepreneurs who had promised employment (Grosaru and Tarabega, 2012, p.18). Most of them were of modest origin and their crafts were only the traditional ones in the Italian provinces, respectively masons, hewers, artisans of artistic finishing, such as stucco, wherefrom the name of stucco craftsmen, and experts in wood processing and exploitation. At the end of the 19th century, the Italian masons dominated numerous

urban centers given their abilities and technical skills. Inspector Di Palma estimated that the “Italian mason was the one who could work the largest number of bricks (around 800) and could work with the highest precision compared to masons of other nationalities” (Kisilewicz, 2010, p. 22).

The minister of Italy in Bucharest, Beccaria Incisa wrote in 1892 that: „...the wages our workers receive in Romania are satisfactory and much higher than those in their country.” (Kisilewicz, 2010, p. 15) In 1912, inspector Di Palma, from the Italian Inspectorate of Migration showed that the amounts saved by Italian workers in Romania were around 3-4 million of lira per year. This was one of the negative issues of migration in Romania since it meant that important capital left the country (Negruţi, 1991, p. 106). Since the 6<sup>th</sup> decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Italian migration from Romania represented a peninsular migratory flow that lasted a century. The *Small Romania*, united and independent, was in the situation of a state, where everything “was to be made” according to Jules Michelet (Pop and Cârja, 2011, p. 110). Romania offered multiple opportunities that Italians enjoyed because, after all, the motivation behind their migration to Romania was mostly economic. The arrival of Italians in Romania corresponds to the beginning of great investments and the modernization of infrastructure from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Generations of Italian migrants found in Romania a region capable of offering possibilities of social, economic and professional growth, proving a second country for many of them (Scagno and Tomasella and Tucu, 2008, p. 5). The Italian seasonal migrants came from underdeveloped urban and rural areas where labor was scarce. Stimulated by the possibility of income and the hope for a better life, some Italians came to the Romanian Principalities even since the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Italian migration was featured by constant growth, followed by several decreases in the years of crisis. Communities of Italians settled around the whole country and Italian workers were appreciated in Romania for honesty and competence. Italians were hewers in Dobrogea, processed wood in Valea Jiului and Oltului and built from Modova to Oltenia railways, bridges, garrisons and palaces. They also contributed to the transformation of Bucharest into the most populated and important city in the country. In this city on the banks of Dambovita, Italians felt at home, were respected and appreciated by a people with whom they were united by the same values of Latinity.

The pro-Romanian Italian, Roberto Fava, following a journey in the territory from the north of the Danube, wrote enthusiastically about how the Romanian society had accepted Italians: “Thus it makes sense how the Italian population living in large numbers and thriving in the capital of Romania and in other cities of the small kingdom could find an identity in the ideas, habits, feelings and hopes of the Romanian people so they seem to have merged with it” (Fava, 1894, p. 104).

#### 4. Conclusions

The approach of the Italian migration can be made from the perspective of some characteristics related to typologies, causes and directions of evolution. The analysis focuses on the impact on the areas of immigration by settling colonies in Romania, in particular in Bucharest, where Italians established the largest community.

The exodus of Italians into the unknown is labelled as the most significant from the modern history given that in 1861 more than 24 million departures were recorded in all the regions of Italy. The typology of migration comprises two forms, seasonal migration

accompanied by temporary migration and permanent migration that led most times to settlement in the new territories by establishing solid communities. Since the 60s, large masses of people left Italy and mostly went to North America, South America and Europe. Trans-Atlantic migration was permanent while European migration was seasonal and permanent. The Italian migration in Romania, compared to the countries of the Western Europe, was not significant in numbers, but important by its consequences. This migration contributed to the social-economic development of Romania and the cohabitation of Romanians and Italians was a factor that favored the process of the country's modernization.

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