

# Dwelling in Subaltern Spaces. Contemporary Representations of Italian New Mobilities

---

Caterina Romeo

## Abstract

This essay presents a reflection on the spaces of recent Italian outgoing migrations (generally referred to as “new mobilities” in the national debate) and on how the ontological condition of recent “expats” is defined by the way in which they dwell in these new spaces of mobility. An analysis of the terminology of impermanence deployed to refer to recent outgoing mobilities reveals how such terminology is intended to create a discontinuity with historical Italian emigration and with the subaltern positions that Italian emigrants have come to occupy both in their country of origin and in their countries of destination.

Through the analysis of three case studies – a blog that has also become a book, *Donne che emigrano all'estero. Storie di italiane nel mondo* (2016), the documentary *La Deutsche Vita* (2013), and the web series *Italianers* (2015-2016) – the essay examines how the anxiety associated with a possible inherited subalternity resurfaces in recent narratives of relocation.

## Keywords

Italian emigrations, Italian new mobilities, Expats, Migration studies, Representations, Subalternity.

# Dwelling in Subaltern Spaces. Contemporary Representations of Italian New Mobilities

Caterina Romeo

## Introduction

The third millennium has witnessed an unprecedented interest in studies on Italian emigrations, a phenomenon systematically ignored in Italy until the turn of the twenty-first century (Matteo Sanfilippo 2015: 9-10)<sup>1</sup>. One of the reasons for this increased interest is certainly related to the fact that, after being a country of emigrants (1870s-1970s) and before becoming a country of emigrants *again* (2000s), Italy has become – and still remains – a destination country for incoming transnational migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. The proximity of these immigrants' bodies – as opposed to the remoteness of emigrants' bodies – has prompted a reflection on the significance of Italy's many diasporas (Gabaccia 2000) and the ways in which they have shaped Italian history and culture. These bodies, which often do not conform to the Italian national or to the European somatic or chromatic norm<sup>2</sup>, were and continue to be a constant source of «preoccupation»

---

<sup>1</sup> The first monumental history of Italian emigration in the world was published in Italy in 2001-2002. The two volumes – one devoted to departures and one to arrivals – span 150 years of Italian emigration from the first decades of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, and analyze Italian emigrant histories and cultures from the vantage point of Italy (*Partenze*) and of a number of destination countries (*Arrivi*). The last sections in both volumes are devoted to the construction of collective imaginaries through representations of Italian emigrations in Italian literature and cinema (*Partenze*) and in the cultural productions of people of Italian origins in countries such as the United States, Brazil, Argentina (*Arrivi*). See Bevilacqua - De Clementi - Franzina 2001, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> For the notion of “somatic norm”, see Puwar 2004. For the notion of “chromatic norm”, see Romeo 2012.

(Fiore 2017) that keeps both newcomers and original inhabitants' lives «in tension» (Ricatti 2018)<sup>3</sup>. Such preoccupation and tension become structural and escalate if the myth of an “invasion” is created and spread both at a political and at a media level.

This rhetoric of emergency obfuscates what constitutes a more serious source of preoccupation for Italy, that is, its increasing outgoing – *not* incoming – migrations<sup>4</sup>. The *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo*, issued yearly by the Fondazione Migrantes, in the past (almost) twenty years has illustrated a consistent growing trend: according to AIRE (Anagrafe degli Italiani Residenti all'Estero) data, the number of Italian residents abroad has increased by 91% since 2006<sup>5</sup>, when Italians registered with AIRE were approximately 3,100,000 (5.3% of a total Italian population of 59,131,287) (Fondazione Migrantes 2006), while in 2023 they were 5,933,418 (10.1% of a total Italian population of 58.8 million people) (Fondazione Migrantes 2023)<sup>6</sup>.

Other relevant considerations that corroborate the data presented above arise from the comparison between the *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2018* and *2023* and the *Rapporto italiani nel mondo 2018* and *2023*. The data contained in these reports indicate that in 2018 the number of foreign residents in Italy was 5,144,000 (8.5% of the Italian population) (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS 2018) and the number of Italians who were registered with AIRE in that same year was substantially the same (5,114,469, 8.5% of the Italian population) (Fondazione Migrantes 2018). The same data referred to 2023 indicate that the number of foreign residents in Italy was 5,050,257 (8.6% of the Italian population) (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS 2023), while

---

<sup>3</sup> Both authors play with homophones to underline ontological characteristics of migrations that evoke undesirability (see Romeo 2023). Teresa Fiore has defined migrant spaces at the same time as “pre-occupied” (they have been previously occupied and are therefore already inhabited) and “preoccupied” (imbued with the preoccupation of both the original inhabitants and the migrants). Francesco Ricatti has argued that migrants have “intention” but they also live “in tension” (the two expressions share the same etymology).

<sup>4</sup> On recent Italian mobilities, see, among others: Tirabassi - Del Pra' 2014; Centro Altretalia 2011; Gjergji 2015; Pugliese 2018; Alberio - Berti 2020.

<sup>5</sup> 2006 marks the year in which the *Rapporto italiani nel mondo* was issued for the first time.

<sup>6</sup> It is also relevant to consider that during the COVID-19 years there has been a slight decrease in the number of registrations with AIRE. For a reflection on how COVID-19 pandemic has altered outgoing mobilities from Italy, see Tirabassi - Del Pra' 2020.

the number of Italians who were registered with AIRE in the same year was 5,933,418 (10.1% of the Italian population) (Fondazione Migrantes 2023). These data must be combined with other data in order for the general overview to be accurate, but they clearly indicate an undeniable growing trend in Italian outgoing mobilities<sup>7</sup>. While Italian governments have implemented and continue to implement protectionist and securitarian policies to contain immigration<sup>8</sup> and the “integration” of migrants and subsequent generations (through strategies such as the failure to reform the law on the acquisition of Italian citizenship that still privileges the claim of bloodlines over that of birthplace and everyday life), little attention is paid to social and economic policies that can contribute to preventing such a population drain. Although this «fenomeno silenzioso» (silent phenomenon) (Pugliese 2018: 24)<sup>9</sup> – in a country that has a solid history of emigration – is already

---

<sup>7</sup> According to the AIRE data elaborated in the *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo 2023*, the most numerous communities of Italians abroad are in Argentina (921,000), Germany (822,000), and Switzerland (639,000), followed by Brazil, France, the United Kingdom (Fondazione Migrantes 2023: 12). It is important to observe, however, that the increasing number of Italian residents in a given country is not only the result of new expatriations, but also of generations of Italians born abroad and of descendants of Italian emigrants acquiring Italian citizenship.

<sup>8</sup> On November 6, 2023, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama signed an agreement that would lead to the building of two repatriation centers (CPR) for migrants and asylum seekers placed on Albanian territory but under Italian jurisdiction. The first center, located in Shengjin, is expected to deal with the operations of landing and identification, while the center of Gjader is expected to function as a repatriation center (migrants will be detained there before being expelled). The building of the two centers of Shengjin and Gjader has been entirely financed by the Italian government. On October 14, 2024, the first sixteen migrants were transferred to the centers and they arrived in Albania on October 16. This process of externalization of Italian frontiers, which reveals the government’s concern for the defense of national borders, rather than the well-being of migrants, has been harshly criticized by Italian parliamentary opposition and humanitarian institutions, such as Emergency and Amnesty International. See Loguercio 2024; “C’è una prima nave” 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Recent outgoing mobilities have been difficult to trace because, although registering with AIRE is mandatory, many Italians residing abroad often fail to comply with the registration (Tirabassi - Del Pra’ 2014; Cucchiarato 2011). As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, failure to register has become punishable with a fine of 200 and up to 1000 Euros per year (max. 5 years, not retroactive). See: [https://conslondra.esteri.it/it/news/dal\\_consolato/2024/02/nuove-sanzioni-per-la-man-cata-iscrizione-allaire/#:~:text=213%20del%2030%20dicembre%202023,un%20](https://conslondra.esteri.it/it/news/dal_consolato/2024/02/nuove-sanzioni-per-la-man-cata-iscrizione-allaire/#:~:text=213%20del%2030%20dicembre%202023,un%20)

producing visible consequences in terms of demographic structures and economic and cultural impoverishment, it remains severely underestimated and understudied. Such a lack of consideration by Italian institutions has emerged in Chiara Cucchiarato's analysis from 2010, in which she defined «generazione nessuno» (generation nobody) a generation, for the most part of educated 25 to 44 year-olds, whom the Italian government, Cucchiarato claimed, was unable to keep track of and care for (Cucchiarato 2010)<sup>10</sup>.

The literary transposition of the existential anxiety generated by such invisibility in the (trans)national Italian context has found a literary representation in Florinda Klevisser's narrative included in the volume *Monaco d'autore*, a collection of short stories written by twelve Italian authors who have relocated to Munich, Germany, edited by Gabriella Kuruvilla and published in 2016<sup>11</sup>. This short story, significantly titled "Il fantasma del consolato" (The Phantom of the Consulate), is centered on the presence of a ghost in the Italian consulate and on his lost sense of identity: «Era ormai passato tanto tempo da quando aveva smesso di ricordare chi fosse e, a dire il vero, non se ne preoccupava quasi più»<sup>12</sup> (Klevisser 2016: 86). The text – which begins with the epigraph «Racconto basato su più realtà di quanta si possa sospettare»<sup>13</sup> (*ibidem*) – can be read as a metaphor for the

---

massimo%20di%205%20anni. Whether this change will have an impact on the visibility of outgoing mobilities from Italy remains to be seen.

<sup>10</sup> Michele Colucci has identified six groups of recent Italian expats, and the second one of them resembles, for some aspects, Cucchiarato's «generazione nessuno». See Colucci 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Eleven out of twelve Italian authors included in the anthology have relocated to Germany. Editor Gabriella Kuruvilla – who has also contributed a story – lives in Italy. Interestingly, Kuruvilla, who was born in Milan of an Italian mother and an Indian father, has been for decades one of the most prominent authors in Italy to represent incoming migrations and is one of the liveliest presences in Italian postcolonial literature. Since 2005, Kuruvilla has populated her memoiristic and fictional short stories as well as her novels with migrant and second-generation people of color in Italy and with their stories of marginalization, there including her Indian father's racialization in 1960s Italy and her own growing up in Milan from the 1970s onward. Even though the issue is not addressed in the collection, through *Monaco d'autore* Kuruvilla has created a cultural connection between incoming and outgoing migrations.

<sup>12</sup> Trans.: «A long time had passed since he had stopped remembering who he was and, in all honesty, he no longer cared». All translations from Italian into English are my own.

<sup>13</sup> Trans.: «Short story based on more reality than can be imagined».

condition of anonymity and invisibility of emigrants (old and new) as well as the freedom that such condition affords («Se non so chi sono, posso essere chi voglio»<sup>14</sup>, Klevisser 2016: 93), but also, more in general, as a starting point to interrogate the practice of inhabiting transnational and transitional spaces of mobility for Italians who have recently relocated abroad.

The present essay analyzes the spaces of Italian recent outgoing migrations (generally referred to as “new mobilities” in the national debate) and on how the ontological condition of recent “expats” is defined by the way in which they dwell – and represent themselves as dwelling – in these new spaces of mobility. An analysis of the terminology of impermanence deployed to refer to recent outgoing mobilities highlights how such terminology is intended to create a discontinuity with Italian historical emigration and with the subaltern positions Italian emigrants came to occupy both in their land of origin and in their destination countries<sup>15</sup>. Through the analysis of three texts produced in the 2010s – a blog which has also become a book, *Donne che emigrano all'estero. Storie di italiane nel mondo* (2016); the documentary film *La Deutsche Vita*, written and directed by Alessandro Cassigoli and Tania Masi (2013); and the web series *Italianers*, directed by Adolfo Vico (2015-2016) – I will examine how the anxiety connected to a possible inherited subalternity resurfaces in recent narratives of relocation, while at the same time reflecting on the kinds of images these texts project of Italy and Italians abroad.

## Terminology of Impermanence

*Donne che emigrano all'estero* is one of the many blogs on the subject of new outgoing migrations, started with the idea of creating a network of women around the world, who can share not only practical information about their destination countries and their lives there, but also more intimate feelings and concerns about processes of migration and relocation<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> Trans.: «If I do not know who I am, I can be whoever I want».

<sup>15</sup> Robert Viscusi has utilized the terminology of postcolonial discourse to expose the double subalternity characterizing Italian American culture in respect to both Italian “metropolitan” and US mainstream cultures (Viscusi 2010).

<sup>16</sup> In 2019, the authors of the blog have also published a book of fairy-tales, titled *Favole dal mondo Expat* (Fairy Tales from the Expat World), centered on the importance of inclusion. *Donne che emigrano all'estero* has also organized a literary prize for short stories on expatriation. A number of these short stories has been

In 2016, the creator of the blog, Katia Terreni, collected the stories of 34 women in a book by the same title as the blog, in which women expats narrate their own experience of migration, sharing information about their professions and the reasons why they decided to leave Italy. In these texts, they analyze the sense of independence and self-confidence that migration has fostered in them, but also confess their feelings of frustration, vulnerability, and uprootedness. Many of the narratives subtly denounce the structural sexism of Italy as one of the possible reasons that make leaving the country desirable. The underlying idea of the blog first, and later the book, is to create a virtual space for intimate as well as practical self-narratives, and to construct a transnational community of mutual support for present and future women expats. As the back cover of the book reads, “questo libro rappresenta un ponte tra le donne che vivono all'estero e quelle rimaste in patria: un intreccio di mani, un susseguirsi di consigli, un invito a seguire il loro esempio”<sup>17</sup> (Terreni, back cover). The aim of the website and blog as well as the book is to establish a community of women, both in Italy and abroad, who have already relocated, or plan to do so, or are still hesitant; this community of mutual support is intended to promote solidarity among women, while at the same time acknowledging women's pivotal roles in migratory processes.

Blogs and websites such as *Donne che emigrano all'estero* play a crucial role in contemporary experiences of migration that is similar to the role played by national associations of mutual support abroad during historical mass emigrations, but with some important distinctions in relation to the kind of community- and solidarity-building processes that they engender. According to sociologist Enrico Pugliese, in the narratives of Italian expats emerges «il crescente ruolo dei social network nel generare un circuito di informazioni tra immigrati e potenziali migranti»<sup>18</sup> (Pugliese 2018: 96). While in traditional associations abroad «domina un [sic] tendenza ai legami con un forte senso di appartenenza, di solidarietà e sostegno reciproco ma con un grado di apertura più limitato e un più modesto accesso a cono-

---

collected in a book titled *Espatrio, le paure e il coraggio delle donne* (Expatriation, the fear and courage of women) and they were published in 2017. See <https://donnecheemigranoallestero.com/>.

<sup>17</sup> Trans.: «This book represents a bridge that connects women who live abroad and women who have remained in their motherland: a joining of hands, a sharing of advice, an invitation for other women to follow their example ».

<sup>18</sup> Trans.: «The growing role of social networks in generating a circulation of information between immigrants and potential migrants».

scenze e nuove relazioni»<sup>19</sup>, on the web new migrants «hanno facile accesso a informazioni e contatti utili per molte esigenze [...] [m]a manca l'elemento di continuità e l'aggregazione intorno a nucleo [sic] stabile che esprima e pratici la solidarietà»<sup>20</sup> (*ibid.*: 97). The different processes of community building in older emigrations and more recent mobilities is also the result of the different temporality and the condition of impermanence that characterizes recent emigrants' ways of inhabiting foreign spaces. Such impermanence is highlighted in the terminology utilized to define these processes of relocation and the actors involved in them, generally referred to as "new mobilities" (nuove mobilità) and "expats" (expat).

On the difference between the terms "migration" and "mobility" Enrico Pugliese claims:

Pensiamo al termine mobilità: inteso tradizionalmente come termine a carattere più generale comprendente tutti i tipi di spostamenti territoriale (sic) di individui e gruppi, esso viene ora usato e preferito da chi intende contrapporlo a quello di emigrazione inteso come fenomeno indotto dalla necessità e dal bisogno. Più precisamente si designa con esso una scelta sostanzialmente volontaria non dettata da necessità e senza il progetto di un trasferimento definitivo, mentre emigrazione è il termine usato alla maniera tradizionale per definire il fenomeno storico determinato da motivazioni economiche ma non solo. Mobile è chi può decidere se partire e dove andare, migrante è chi, spinto dalla mancanza di reddito e di lavoro, cerca una soluzione per la sua sopravvivenza o per migliorare la propria condizione in un altro territorio nel proprio paese o all'estero<sup>21</sup>. (*Ibid.*: 61)

---

<sup>19</sup> Trans.: «there is a preponderance of ties that express a strong sense of belonging, solidarity, and mutual support, but a more limited open-mindedness and a more modest access to new knowledge and new relationships».

<sup>20</sup> Trans.: «have easy access to information and contacts that might prove useful for different needs [...] [b]ut lack an element of continuity and aggregation around a stable group of people who express and practice solidarity».

<sup>21</sup> Trans.: «Let's consider the term 'mobility': traditionally intended as a general term comprising every kind of territorial relocation of individual subjects and groups, this term nowadays is used and preferred by those who intend to juxtapose it to 'emigration' intended as a phenomenon induced by necessity and need. More precisely, this term designates a voluntary choice not prompted by necessity and not characterized by a permanent relocation; emigration, on the contrary, is the term traditionally used to define a historical phenomenon urged by economic reasons, but not only that. A mobile subject can decide whether to



The ontological difference between migrations and mobilities – and the temporality of permanence and impermanence associated with them – also rests on the ability to control space (or on the lack thereof) and on the privilege to freely relocate at will (which is tied to one’s citizenship and passport):

[L]a migrazione è raccontata come la perdita di ancoraggio territoriale e la faticosa ricerca di una nuova forma di localizzazione [...] Al contrario, la mobilità parte dal presupposto di un ancoraggio. [...] Paradossalmente, è proprio la garanzia di un’appartenenza territoriale sancita a livello formale a permettere, a livello simbolico, che tale appartenenza perda di importanza a favore di una prospettiva cosmopolita. I lavoratori mobili sono innanzitutto *cittadini* – la mobilità è espressione di un estremo, dettagliato e minuzioso controllo sul territorio<sup>22</sup>. (Raffini - Giorgi 2020: 79, my emphasis)

While migrations are prompted by needs that produce a loss of connection with a given territory, the possibility of being “mobile” rests on the assurance of a formal connection (generally citizenship) that is perceived as so strong that it can be overlooked in order to privilege more cosmopolitan forms of dwelling.

The question of terminology is presented in the very first sentence on the website of *Donne che emigrano all'estero*, which introduces older migrations and new mobilities as both in continuity and discontinuity with each other: «Siamo Donne Italiane, viviamo all’Estero, siamo le moderne migranti che oggi chiamano expat»<sup>23</sup>. The need to conceptualize a difference between “emigrants” and “expats” in some of the narratives included in Terreni’s blog and volume reveals a social and national anxiety to dis-

---

leave and where to go; a migrant subject, driven by a lack of work and wages, looks for a solution in order to survive and improve their own condition in another territory, either in their own country or abroad».

<sup>22</sup> Trans.: «Migration is conceived as a loss of territorial anchorage and an extenuating research of a new form of localization [...]. On the contrary, mobility is grounded in the notion of anchorage [...]. Paradoxically, it is precisely the guarantee of an official territorial belonging that, at a symbolic level, allows for this belonging to lose importance in favor of a cosmopolitan perspective. Mobile workers are first and foremost *citizens* – mobility is the expression of an extreme, detailed, and meticulous control over a given territory».

<sup>23</sup> Trans.: «We are Italian women, we live abroad, we are the modern migrants nowadays called expats».

tance Italian contemporaneity from a fairly recent emigrant history of subalternity that has never been fully incorporated into the national narrative but that is nonetheless part of the national collective imaginary. As Enrico Pugliese emphasizes in his analysis of new mobilities (Pugliese 2018), the term “expat” – regularly used to refer to recent emigrants – in the 1970s and for some decades afterward designated specialized workers and highly educated employees who temporarily worked for Italian companies abroad (*ibid.*, 32-33). The same term is now often associated with the expressions “nuovi mobili” and “nuove mobilità”, and suggests the urgency to exert a certain control over the present and the future – since being an expat is perceived as a transitory condition. Recurring themes in these women’s narratives include the sense of freedom they feel in their expat lives and their confidence in the future. Some of them, however – especially if they are part of the so called “brain drain” or if they chose to migrate because of the job market crisis – reveal a strong resentment toward the Bel Paese’s corrupted system where personal merit is seldom rewarded. They also often address social themes and denounce the structurally sexist, racist, and heteropatriarchal nature of the Italian nation, claiming that not representing the desirable “norm” as far as gender, color, and sexual orientation are concerned can be far less problematic in other (European) countries than it is in present-day Italy.

## Ontologies of Subalternity

The two visual texts analyzed here represent in vastly different ways (the first one is a documentary, the second one a web series) the life of recent Italian expats in two of their favorite destinations: Berlin and London. Both texts depict the adventurous nature of the male protagonists who relocated in search of an opportunity to lead an artistic life. They both enjoy a strong territorial anchorage with their country of origin, and their life conditions do not in any way resemble those of Italians during mass emigrations; however, in both texts the memory of Italian emigrants’ subalternity resurfaces at an unconscious level and circulates in the main narratives, infused with traditional (at best) gender and race representations that, in turn, project a retrograde image of Italy and Italians abroad.

The documentary film *La Deutsche Vita*<sup>24</sup> (2013) is based on an idea

---

<sup>24</sup> The title is a play on words between Fellini’s *La dolce vita* and the adjective

by Alessandro Cassigoli and Tania Masi, screenwriters and directors, who explore the lives of Italians in Berlin at the beginning of the third millennium. At the outset, the voice-over narrator concedes that he has been having a Berlin crisis – he moved to Berlin in 2006 after obtaining funds to make a film and he is still there in 2013 – related to his realization that he is now in every respect an immigrant.

In order to feel less displaced and lonely, while attempting to «frenare la nostalgia, respirare un po' d'Italia»<sup>25</sup>, he has decided to connect with the Italian community by filming their lives and interviewing them. From the beginning, both Italians and Germans are depicted according to stereotypes: the film poster shows a man eating spaghetti, which reminds the audience of the condition of subalternity of Italian emigrants in Germany and of the many negative epithets – like “Spaghettifresser”, devourers of spaghetti – used by Germans to refer to them. Italians are defined as people who are warm, hospitable, inclined to depression when the sky is gray; people who enjoy food, music, and life in general. Germans are depicted as rational, prone to overanalyzing and dissecting every little detail; people who eat only to fill their stomachs but have no taste for good food or good coffee. Italians who are interviewed in the documentary mostly belong to older generations, while there is little mention of more recent migrations and little analysis of why Italians have become one of the largest foreign communities in Berlin, in spite of the city's high unemployment rate<sup>26</sup>.

One of the people interviewed is Gino – a restaurant owner and one of the older migrants who moved to Berlin over thirty years before (and thus over forty years ago) when Berlin was not a favorite destination for emigrants. He has been working on an artistic project for years: photographing Italian migrants in Berlin. The first part of the project was completed many years before and is shown to the director and the audience: a book of photographs taken in the 1980s, when Italian immigrants consisted mostly of «studenti, cuochi, e qualche avventuroso»<sup>27</sup>. Gino has

---

*Deutsch* (German). While this title projects a fantasy about living the sweetness of a decadent life in Germany, it in fact reveals a failure to do so.

<sup>25</sup> Trans.: «curb [his] nostalgia, breathe in a little bit of Italy».

<sup>26</sup> In 2011, Stefano Luconi observed that Berlin had a high unemployment rate even before the economic crisis in 2008 (Luconi 2011). Alvise Del Pra' had previously remarked that in 2006 approximately one third of Italian expats in Berlin had temporary jobs or were unemployed (Del Pra' 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Trans.: «Students, cooks, and some adventurous guys».

now undertaken a second phase of the same project and is photographing recent Italian expats in Berlin, acknowledging that the typology of migrants has changed and that young Italians migrating to Berlin in 2013 are in large numbers so called “creativi” (“creative people”)<sup>28</sup>.

“Creativi” in the film are represented as Italians who enjoy Berlin’s diversity and plurality and experiment with alternative lives as artists in the city, but who are forced to make ends meet through different, non-creative activities, such as selling bruschetta in street markets. One of them, Max, who is also one of the main characters in the film, dreams of being an actor but, in fact, works in Italy in the summer as a tourist guide and survives off his summer income for the rest of the year in Berlin. He defines himself as a “vitellone,” but none of the Fellinian fascination is in the air.

One of the recurrent tropes running through the film, which introduces the existence of a continuity between older Italian emigrants and recent expats, is a sentence that Max pronounces repeatedly from very early on in the film as a way of rehearsing the lines for a casting audition. In the metanarrative of the audition – which functions as a play within the play and thus reveals the “real” narrative – Max overplays his role of Italian director a la Fellini and plays the fool, unleashing a strong gestural and verbal violence that exceeds the scene. Over and over again, he says “Fucking Germans”, and, although the line will have to be uttered only in English in the audition, he rehearses it also in Italian and in German: *tedeschi di merda, fottuti tedeschi, Scheissdeutsche*. Repeated numerous times, this line reveals a latent sentiment that pervades the film. Although most of the Italians interviewed claim that they would not go back to Italy and that they are proud of their German achievements, there is an underlying resentment towards Germans. The audience is led to wonder whether such resentment is connected to the subalternity – past and present – of Italian emigrants and expats, and to the position of power Germany occupies – and Italy does not – within the European Union.

The last scene in the film acts as a mirror image of the film itself:

---

<sup>28</sup> The importance of this project – although not discussed in the film – appears to be crucial as the project constructs and makes available a visual history of a phenomenon that, as stated above, is underestimated and understudied. In particular, this project represents Italian migrants in Berlin from the 1980s and 1990s – when this destination was not a popular one – to the third millennium, when Berlin became one of the favorite destinations for Italian expats.

as in a Dantean “contrappasso,” the stereotypes, which have been deployed throughout the documentary are finally used against Max, who is rejected because, according to the production, he does not look Italian enough. In this scene, the audience is reminded of the subaltern positions Italian emigrants came to occupy in Germany during mass migrations in the 1950s and 1960s and of the fact that subaltern subjects are defined by hegemonic ones to their own detriment and to others’ advantage.

The idea of dwelling in spaces of expatriation as subaltern subjects also permeates the web series *Italianers*, directed by Adolfo Vico, the pilot episode of which first appeared on YouTube in December 2015. *Italianers* – a combination of the terms “Italians” and “Londoners” that is also reminiscent of Joycean “Dubliners” and of their condition of existential paralysis – is the first web series by and about Italians in London<sup>29</sup>. The main character of the series is Eduardo Giuliani, an Italian young man who moves to London hoping that the city will offer him the opportunity to fulfill his dreams and become a writer, and that he will be able to achieve independence. Eduardo is partly depicted according to the traditional stereotypes that for decades have identified Italian emigrants: he is good-hearted, naïve, and does not appear to be particularly smart; his English is basic at best, and he seems to be genetically incapable of arriving on time. The series portrays rather traditional gender roles and types of masculinity. Every task Eduardo undertakes – whether interviewing for a job or securing accommodation– is sabotaged by the appearance of one beautiful woman or another, which makes him unable to concentrate and likely to start daydreaming of possible seductions. Women, for their part, are depicted almost exclusively as objects of desire<sup>30</sup>, with the exception of Eduardo’s friend Giovanna, whose character, however, reinforces traditional gender roles rather than interrogating them. The series’ approach also appears to be extremely conservative when it comes to intersectional representations of race and gender. Among Londoners there appears to be little or no difference in color: the assumed chromatic norm of Italy is projected onto the population of the United Kingdom.

---

<sup>29</sup> The Pilot Episode was followed by Episode One and Two in 2016.

<sup>30</sup> In Episode Two, Eduardo, disappointed for being excluded from the interviewing process through which he could have secured a job, drinks an espresso in a café and ends up being hired by the owner, another Italian expat, as the result of the complicity the two men quickly establish through discussing women in terms of “tette e culo” (tits and asses).

This signals an erasure of non-white bodies that, as Sara Ahmed claims, «do inhabit white spaces» but «are made invisible when we see spaces as being white» (Ahmed 2007: 159). The only exception in the series is Carmen, a Latina woman whom Eduardo meets in the apartment where he is being interviewed to rent a room. In a scene that unleashes repressed colonial fantasies, while the agent who is showing him the apartment calculates how much money Eduardo will have to make available for advanced rent and deposit, Eduardo misunderstands that the money will be used to gain possession of the girl, rather than the room. Eduardo decides to take the room while also hoping to develop some kind of romance with Carmen but, at the end of the episode, he discovers that she is the cleaning lady and will not be coming back for another month. The imaginary deployed in this episode suggests that the non-white woman can only be equated with a colonial object of desire in the British (or rather the Italian?) post-Empire, and that she can only provide care and domestic work in postcolonial London.

Radical differences between Northern and Southern Italians are also at the core of the room rental interview scene. Eduardo's interviewer, Italo, who is from an unspecified Northern Italian location, is portrayed as a political radical with an outlandish personality. While Italo is efficient, precise, demanding, and authoritative, Eduardo (who is from Rome and shares some of the "simplemindedness" of the Southern man) is first distracted by Carmen's presence and later intimidated by Italo. In one of the most humorous scenes, Italo's interview with Eduardo is conducted as an academic oral examination and is shot with alternating close ups reminiscent of duel scenes in Sergio Leone's spaghetti Western films. At the end Eduardo obtains the room because he does not know who Margaret Thatcher is – which his interviewer finds non-conformist, rather than ignorant.

The series presents a skillful deployment of cinematic techniques also utilized to produce comic relief. The extradiegetic music in the initial scene of the Second Episode – in which rock music and Vivaldi's *Spring* from *The Four Seasons* are juxtaposed – combined with a rapid editing, suggests the internal turmoil of the job seeker who is running to an interview on the one hand, and, on the other, the perfect calm of the British interviewer who does not cease smiling even when he politely asks Eduardo to leave because he is five minutes late. This scene, as well as the whole series, clearly aims at providing some comic relief to the anxiety that Italians in London feel about the uncertainty of their future. By illustrating the difficult steps "Italianers" need to take in order to start

a new life in the metropolitan space of London, the series functions as a guide for absolute beginners, while it also suggests different ways of transforming potentially dramatic situations into comic ones, thus diffusing the anxiety connected to the act of migrating. This process, however, is often reflected through the representation of discriminatory mindsets and behaviors, which project regressive imaginaries about the ways Italians inhabit national and transnational spaces.

## Conclusions

Italy has a long history of diasporas, migrations, and mobilities that have deeply characterized its history and processes of national formation. In the past twenty years, outgoing mobilities have become significant again after almost forty years in which Italy has been mostly a country of incoming migrations. The terminology utilized to refer to recent outgoing mobilities highlights the ontological difference existing between them and historical mass emigrations, between emigrants and expats, and between the temporalities of permanence and impermanence that migrations and mobilities imply. New expats' need to create a discontinuity between themselves and historical emigrants reveals a national anxiety about inheriting emigrants' history of subalternity, as appears in the analysis of the three cultural productions of new Italian expats selected as case studies.

Italian contemporary (trans)national space is shaped not only on the basis of old and new presences<sup>31</sup>, but also of old and new absences. In order to better understand the complex history of Italian migrations and mobilities, from a theoretical and methodological point of view it is fruitful to combine Donna Gabaccia's notion of "Italy's many diasporas" (2000), which highlights the continuity existing among Italian different migrations and mobilities, with Stefano Luconi's (borrowed) notion of «transmigrants» (Luconi 2011; Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995), which highlights migrants' rootedness in their destination countries and their simultaneous connections with their countries of origin. At the same time, it is crucial to apply a postcolonial and decolonial perspective, more attentive to how power relations enacted in the past are re-enacted in the pres-

---

<sup>31</sup> In 2022, anthropologist Vito Teti has theorized «la restanza» as a radical act of staying, as opposed to leaving, and a creative process that has the potential for regenerating both the places and the subjects who stay and inhabit them. See Teti 2022.

ent. Analyzing new mobilities as part of a continuum that includes Italian mass emigration, colonialism, intranational migrations past and present, contemporary immigration, and contemporary “new mobilities”, sheds new light on the ways Italians have dwelt and still dwell in transitional and transnational spaces and illustrates how mobilities and migrations constantly reposition hegemony and subalternity. At a time of massive transnational migrations, this theoretical approach can help not only to gain a fresh perspective on what kind of Italianness is disseminated around the world in contemporary times, but also to understand how Italian national identity is constructed through the inclusion, rather than the exclusion, of both incoming migrants and Italian emigrants.



## Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara, "A phenomenology of Whiteness", *Feminist Theory* 8.2 (2007): 149-168.
- Alberio, Marco - Berti, Fabio (eds.), *Italiani che lasciano l'Italia. Le nuove emigrazioni al tempo della crisi*, Milano, Mimesis, 2020.
- Bevilacqua, Piero - De Clementi, Andreina - Franzina, Emilio (eds.), *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana – Partenze*, Roma, Donzelli, 2001.
- Bevilacqua, Piero - De Clementi, Andreina - Franzina, Emilio (eds.), *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana – Arrivi*, Roma, Donzelli, 2002.
- "C'è una prima nave diretta verso i centri per migranti in Albania", *Il post*, 11 October 2024, <https://www.ilpost.it/2024/10/14/albania-persone-migranti-nave-marina-militare/>.
- Centro Altretalie, *Le nuove mobilità*, Special issue of *Altretalie. Rivista internazionale di studi sulle migrazioni italiane nel mondo*, luglio-dicembre, 43 (2011).
- Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, *Dossier statistico immigrazione 2018*, Roma, Idos, 2018.
- Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, *Dossier statistico immigrazione 2023*, Roma, Idos, 2023.
- Colucci, Michele. "Le nuove migrazioni italiane." *Oikonomia*, 13.1(2014), <https://www.oikonomia.it/index.php/it/2014-05-31-23-52-11/febbraio-2014?view=article&id=166:le-nuove-migrazioni-italiane&catid=48>
- Cucchiarato, Chiara, *Vivo altrove. Giovani senza radici: gli emigranti italiani di oggi*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2010.
- Cucchiarato, Chiara, "Guerra di cifre: perché è così difficile capire chi e quanti sono gli italiani all'estero?", *Altretalie*, 43, 2011, pp. 64-72.
- Del Pra', Alvise, "Giovani italiani a Berlino: nuove forme di mobilità europea», *Altretalie*, 33, 2006, pp. 103-25.
- Fiore, Teresa, *Pre-Occupied Spaces: Remapping Italy's Transnational Migrations and Colonial Legacies*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2017.
- Fondazione Migrantes, *Rapporto italiani nel mondo 2016*, Todi, Tau, 2016.
- Fondazione Migrantes, *Rapporto italiani nel mondo 2018*, Todi, Tau, 2018.
- Fondazione Migrantes, *Rapporto italiani nel mondo 2023*, Todi, Tau, 2023.
- Gabaccia, Donna, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2000.
- Gjergji, Iside, *La nuova emigrazione italiana. Cause, mete e figure sociali*, Venezia, Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2015.
- Klevisser, Florinda, "Il fantasma del consolato", *Monaco d'autore*, Ed. Gabriella Kuruvilla, Milano, Morellini, 2016: 86-104.

- Kuruvilla, Gabriella (ed.), *Monaco d'autore*, Milano, Morellini, 2016.
- Loguercio, Laura, "I centri per migranti che l'Italia sta costruendo in Albania sono ancora molto indietro", *Il post*, 24 May 2024, <https://www.ilpost.it/2024/10/11/centri-migranti-albania-pronti/>.
- Luconi, Stefano. "Nuove mobilità o nuove migrazioni?". *Le nuove mobilità*, special issue of *Altreitalie* 43(2011): 89-99.
- Pugliese, Enrico, *Quelli che se ne vanno. La nuova emigrazione italiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018.
- Puwar, Nirmal, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies out of Place*, Oxford, Berg, 2004.
- Raffini, Luca - Giorgi, Alberta, *Mobilità e migrazioni*, Milano, Mondadori Università, 2020.
- Ricatti, Francesco, *Italians in Australia: History, Memory, Identity*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Romeo, Caterina, "Racial Evaporations: Representing Blackness in African Italian Postcolonial Literature", *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, Eds. Cristina Lombardi-Diop - Caterina Romeo, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012: 221-236.
- Romeo, Caterina, *Interrupted Narratives and Intersectional Representations in Italian Postcolonial Literature*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.
- Sanfilippo, Matteo. *Nuovi problemi di storia delle migrazioni italiane*, Viterbo, Sette città, 2015.
- Schiller, Nina Glick, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration", *Anthropological Quarterly*, 68:1 (1995): 48-63.
- Terreni, Katia, *Donne che emigrano all'estero. Storie di italiane nel mondo*, Streetlib, 2016.
- Tirabassi, Maddalena - Del Pra', Alvise (eds.), *La meglio Italia. Le mobilità italiane del XXI secolo*, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2014.
- Tirabassi, Maddalena - Del Pra', Alvise (eds.), *Il mondo si allontana? Il COVID-19 e le nuove migrazioni italiane*, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2020.
- Viscusi, Robert, "The History of Italian American Literary Studies", *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*, Eds. Edvige Giunta - Kathleen Zamboni McCormick, New York, MLA, 2010: 43-58.

## Filmography

*Italianers*, dir. Andrea De Santis, web series, 3 Episodes, 2015-2016.

*La Deutsche Vita*, dir. Alessandro Cassigoli - Tania Masi, Schröder Media, 2013.

## Sitography

*Donne che emigrano all'estero*, Website and Blog, <https://donnecheemigrano-allestero.com/>

## The Author

### Caterina Romeo

Caterina Romeo is Associate Professor at Sapienza Università di Roma, where she teaches Literary Theory, Gender Studies, and Migrations Studies. She is the author of *Interrupted Narratives and Intersectional Representations in Italian Postcolonial Literature* (2023), and the co-editor of *Postcolonial Italy* (2012) and *Intersectional Italy* (2022). Her essays on postcolonial literature, Italian Blackness, and Italian American culture have been published in national and international journals and volumes.

Email: [caterina.romeo@uniroma1.it](mailto:caterina.romeo@uniroma1.it)

## The Article

Date sent: 30/05/2024

Date accepted: 31/08/2024

Date published: 30/11/2024

## How to cite this article

Romeo, Caterina, "Dwelling in subaltern spaces: Contemporary representations of Italian new mobilities", *The Public Dimension of Dwelling*, Eds. Clotilde Bertoni - Massimo Fusillo - Giulio Iacoli - Marina Guglielmi - Niccolò Scaffai, *Between*, XIV.28 (2024): 279-297, <http://www.between.it/>