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## 10 A Survey on Return Migration in Sicily During the Sixties

**Abstract:** This chapter was written using previously undiscovered archive materials gathered between 1964 and 1965, focusing on a sample of Sicilian emigrants who had returned from the Federal German Republic and another sample who remained abroad, with the aim to investigate whether these emigrants served as agents of change upon returning to three rural villages near Enna. At the beginning of the 1960s, the theme of human capital and how it could be enhanced by processes of community empowerment had started to attract the attention of the European Community, who decided to support a pilot study on the socioeconomic situation and agricultural prospects in some backwards areas such as Sicily. These materials show us the pioneering effort made by the sociologists to apply a multilayered approach in exploring the emigration phenomenon in Sicily, but also reflect a conventional sociological interpretation of Southern Italian society (and Sicilian society too) quite widespread in those years.

### Introduction

In the years between 1948 and 1973, the relocation of the Italian workforce started up again: a one-of-a-kind mobility defined as “essenzialmente economica non solo nelle motivazioni, ma anche nei suoi modi di sviluppo: totalmente trainata e plasmata dalla domanda di lavoro all'estero, e quindi altamente sensibile alle sue fluttuazioni.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 Federico Romero, “L'emigrazione operaia in Europa (1948–1973),” in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, vol. I, ed. Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina (Rome: Donzelli, 2001), 400 (“essentially economic not only in its motivation, but also in its development: totally stimulated and shaped by the demand for work abroad, and therefore highly sensitive to its fluctuations”, our translation). See also Michele Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento. L'emigrazione italiana in Europa, 1945–57* (Rome: Donzelli, 2008); Andreina De Clementi, *Il prezzo della ricostruzione. L'emigrazione italiana nel Secondo Dopoguerra* (Rome: Laterza, 2010).

In short, it was a new migration wave<sup>2</sup> which privileged mid-range movements toward European destinations,<sup>3</sup> encouraged by various bilateral agreements signed by the Italian government from 1946 onward for unskilled labor transfer in exchange for energy resources.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1948 and 1973, a total of 6,781,065 Italians emigrated,<sup>5</sup> mainly towards France, Switzerland, and the German Federal Republic, where job offers were plentiful and salary and work conditions were better.<sup>6</sup> Here the industrial sector took off because of the positive economic conjuncture which unfolded with the reopening of the borders and the progressive liberalization of commerce and economic transactions stimulated by European integration.<sup>7</sup> During these years, Southern Italy and the Islands reached a total of 4,104,477 expatriates.<sup>8</sup>

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2 According to the classic definition also used by Antonio Golini, Flavia Amato, “Uno sguardo a mezzo secolo di emigrazione italiana,” in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, part I, ed. Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina (Rome: Donzelli, 2001).

3 Michele Colucci, “L'emigrazione italiana verso i paesi europei negli anni '60 e '70,” *Quaderni di sociologia*, no. 86 (2021), accessed August 2, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.4000/qds.4665>; Luigi Chiara and Francesca Frisone, “Immigrazione ed emigrazione in Italia, profili storici,” in *La condizione giuridica dello straniero*, ed. Giovanni Moschella, Luca Buscema (Rome: Aracne, 2016), 54.

4 With Belgium, from 1946; with Switzerland, from 1948; with Argentina, from 1948; with Brazil, from 1950; with France, from 1951; with Australia, from 1952; with the Federal Republic of Germany, from 1955; see Archivio Centrale dello Stato (from now ACS), Direzione Generale Occupazione Interna e Migrazioni – Div. IX, *Appunto per S. E. il Ministro, Riunione C.I.R., Emigrazione, Piano dei Finanziamenti all'emigrazione*, 1950. However, in the years between 1951 and 1955, a new peak in departures towards Latin America and Australia was registered, as explained by Matteo Sanfilippo, “Cronologia e storia dell'emigrazione italiana,” *Studi emigrazione*, no. 183 (2011).

5 This estimate does not consider the number of clandestine departures: Sandro Rinauro, *Il cammino della Speranza. L'emigrazione clandestina degli italiani nel secondo dopoguerra* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009); Paolo Borruso, “Note sull'emigrazione clandestina italiana (1876–1976),” *Giornale di Storia contemporanea*, no. 1 (2001); Matteo Sanfilippo, “La clandestinità è una storia vecchia: su alcuni aspetti dell'emigrazione irregolare di italiani,” *Giornale di storia contemporanea*, no. 2 (2001).

6 Massimo Livi Bacci, “L'emigrazione italiana verso l'Europa. Elementi per un bilancio sociale ed economico,” *Rassegna Economica Banco di Napoli*, no. 1 (1973); Jens Petersen (ed.), *L'emigrazione tra Italia e Germania* (Manduria-Bari-Rome: Lacaita, 1993); Maximiliane Rieder, “Migrazione ed economia. L'immigrazione italiana verso la Germania occidentale dopo la seconda guerra mondiale,” *Il Veltro*, no. 1–2 (2006).

7 Until the first half of the 1950s, the Italian government was not expecting a substantial flow of emigration towards European countries, which were close to job market saturation. Alternative solutions on a domestic and foreign policy level were considered; ACS, Ministero del Lavoro e della Previdenza Sociale, Comitato Interministeriale Ricostruzione, *Lineamenti di politica migratoria*, 17 gennaio 1952.

8 See ISTAT, Tavola 2.10.1, *Espatri e rimpatri per regione e ripartizione geografica – anni 1876–2014*; some data were re-elaborated by Luigi Chiara, Giovanni Moschella, *Italia paese di immigrazione. Storia e legislazione* (Rome: Aracne, 2020), 64–65.

In those regions the challenging issue of unemployment which particularly damaged the rural and mountain areas – where a substantial demographic growth was also registered – was not actually resolved despite massive government intervention to sustain development, which determined a substantial resumption of the departures.<sup>9</sup> Only Sicily had 445,306 expatriations.<sup>10</sup>

The labor market which fed this immigration turned out to be “highly cyclical or seasonal”; considering the proximity of the countries of emigration, an elevated turnover of the workforce was possible. This immigration was characterized by an increase in multiple departures and a high rate of repatriation. Return migrations towards the South and the Islands were circa 2,054,744 units, which was equivalent to half the number of expatriations.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the practices of intraregional and interregional mobility in Italy were consolidated. Due to their intensity and continuity over time, these practices represented a phenomenon “of an unprecedented and unequaled vastness in other European experience”<sup>12</sup> which – even more than migration abroad – deeply changed the urban, social, and cultural face of the country.<sup>13</sup>

The intense development of the “Industrial Triangle” had attracted the population interested in moving to the North of Italy, thus determining for the South and the Islands a difference between registry enrollment and cancellations of –2,260,630 units.<sup>14</sup>

In Sicily as well, the migratory balance regarding internal population movement was confirmed as negative (–513,118 units), a more alarming number if con-

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9 We are referring in particular to the ineffectiveness of the Agrarian Reform and of the interventions of “environmental infrastructure” which the Fund of the South provided for; Piero Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell'Italia meridionale* (Rome: Donzelli, 1993), 111; Luigi Chiara, “La Sicilia e la modernizzazione incompiuta (1880–1960),” in *La Sicilia nel Secolo breve. Modernità e sottosviluppo*, ed. Luigi Chiara, Luigi D'Andrea, and Michele Limosani (Milan: Giuffrè, 2013) and the bibliography therein quoted.

10 See ISTAT, Tavola 2.10.1.

11 The number of departures would start to decrease at the same time as the economic crisis of the 1970s. See Chiara, Moschella, *Italia paese d'immigrazione*, 66–67.

12 Ercole Sori, *L'emigrazione italiana dall'Unità alla Seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979), 456; Ercole Sori, “Emigrazioni all'estero e migrazioni interne in Italia tra le due guerre,” *Quaderni storici*, no. 29–30 (1975); Bruno Bonomo, “Il dibattito storiografico sulle migrazioni interne italiane nel secondo dopoguerra,” *Studi emigrazione*, no. 155 (2003).

13 Amalia Signorelli, “Movimenti di popolazione e trasformazioni culturali,” in *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, part II, Le trasformazioni dell'Italia. Sviluppo e squilibri, part 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).

14 Our elaboration from ISTAT, Tavola 2.11.1, *Iscrizioni e cancellazioni anagrafiche per movimento migratorio interno e saldo migratorio interno per regione e ripartizione geografica – Anni 1902–2014*.

sidered in relation to the increase in the average population of the region from 1951 to 1971, stable at 235,091 units; the balance of the population, although positive, was not able to compensate for such a mass departure from the island.<sup>15</sup>

Overall, considering the number of expats and the migratory balance for internal movement of the population, a total of 6,365,107 individuals departed from the South and the Islands both for destinations abroad and towards other Italian regions; around 958,424 people moved from Sicily, a number which affected the economic development of the region and reopened the critical debate on economic dualism.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the considerable effect projected by the departing migratory movements on society and on the Italian economy, along with their simpler (but inaccurate) quantification,<sup>17</sup> helped to relaunch historiographic interest in the study of emigration. Despite being long and closely linked to the success of socio-economic history or the so-called history of the subordinate classes,<sup>18</sup> and to the more general debate on Italian development, the study of migration policies, of demographic dynamics, and of the opportunities and disadvantages caused by emigration, have produced an abundance of literature.

Nevertheless, various working hypotheses were overshadowed, such as those relative to the professional training of peasants, and “bottom-up” modernization processes.<sup>19</sup> The latter would have found very useful the data relative to remigrations and its impact on the community of origin; although representing a constant over time in Italian mobility, this data were marginal to the historiography.

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15 Ibid.

16 See the book *Problemi dell'economia siciliana, inchiesta diretta dal Prof. Paolo Sylos-Labini*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1966), in particular 141–65; Giorgio Mori, “L'economia italiana tra la fine della Seconda guerra mondiale e il ‘secondo miracolo economico’ (1945–1968),” in *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, II, *Le trasformazioni dell'Italia. Sviluppo e squilibri*, part 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1995); Giuseppe Barone, “Stato e Mezzogiorno (1943–1960). Il primo tempo dell'intervento straordinario,” in *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, I, *La costruzione della democrazia. Dalla caduta del Fascismo agli anni Cinquanta* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).

17 Dora Marucco, “Le statistiche dell'emigrazione italiana,” in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, vol. 1; Sandro Rinauro, “Le statistiche ufficiali dell'emigrazione italiana tra propaganda politica e inafferrabilità dei flussi,” *Quaderni Storici*, no. 134 (2010).

18 Maddalena Tirabassi, Ercole Sori, “Le Marche fuori dalle Marche,” *Altretalite*, no. 15 (1997).

19 On this point Luigi Chiara and Francesca Frisone, *La modernizzazione “dal basso”. Lo sviluppo comunitario in Sicilia tra gli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta*, paper presented at the X<sup>o</sup> International Congress of Urban History *Adaptive cities through the Postpandemic Lens*, Turin 6–10 September, forthcoming publication.

In the same years, in the immigration countries, an interest in the problems generated by the processes of integration began to grow<sup>20</sup> (also based on studies carried out overseas),<sup>21</sup> focusing on the psychological dimension<sup>22</sup> and sociocultural context of the migrants.<sup>23</sup>

In Italy, it was not until the 1970s that an increase in interest towards the issue of return emigration finally emerged (that “situation where migrants return to their country of origin, by their own will, after a significant period of time abroad”<sup>24</sup> or “the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle”).<sup>25</sup>

The renewed interest within Italian historiography, in the wake of the French *nouvelle histoire*, had made it possible to open up to new historical research directions, using new sources and methodologies borrowed from social sciences.<sup>26</sup> Sociolo-

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20 Within this framework, for example, was the experience of “Progetto Sicilia” started at the Institute of Sociology and Ethnology at the University of Heidelberg between 1962 and 1970 by the anthropologist Wilhelm Mühlmann in order to explore the problems of European migration from south to north, and in particular the problems of adaptability of Sicilian migrants in Germany; Dieter Paas and Salvatore Costanza, *La Sicilia ad Heidelberg. Esperienze di un sodalizio di studi* (Trapani: Margana, 2019).

21 Regarding the reception of the studies by the Chicago School on the issue of urban disorder and integration of the immigrants in the city, and its impact in Italy, see Nicola Pizzolato, “Una situazione sado-masochistica a incastro. Il dibattito scientifico sull’immigrazione meridionale (1950–1970),” *Quaderni storici* 118, no. 1 (2005).

22 Consider the studies dedicated to the relationship between immigration and psychosomatic illness, or to the criminal behavior of foreigners, above all in FRG, or to the psychosocial and ethnomedical treatment of foreign patients; Emil Zimmermann, “Das einstmalige ‘Sizilienteam’ am Institute für Soziologie und Ethnologie der Universität Heidelberg und der Anfang der ‘Medizin der Gastarbeiter’,” *Journal Curare*, no. 34 (2011).

23 Katuscia Cutrone, “Italiani nella Germania degli anni Sessanta: immagine e integrazione dei Gastarbeiter. Wolfsburg, 1962–1973,” *Altretalia*, no. 33 (2006); Edith Pichler, “50 anni di immigrazione italiana in Germania. Transitori, inclusi/esclusi o cittadini europei?,” *Altretalia*, no. 33 (2006); Wilhelm Emil Mühlmann, “Soziologische und sozialpsychologische Probleme italienischer Gastarbeiter,” *Medizinische Sachverständige*, no. 63 (1992): 35–39.

24 Filiz Kunuroglu, Fons van de Vijver, and Kutlay Yagmur, “Return migration,” *Online readings in Psychology and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2016), accessed August 3, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1143>.

25 George Gmelch, “Return Migration,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9 (1980): 136.

26 Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution. The ‘Annales’ School 1929–1989* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

gists such as Cerase,<sup>27</sup> Rosoli,<sup>28</sup> Merico,<sup>29</sup> Reyneri,<sup>30</sup> and demographers such as King<sup>31</sup> and Livi Bacci,<sup>32</sup> were the first to develop a “structural approach” which looked at the motivation of those who repatriated<sup>33</sup> also in terms of how the latter decided to allocate financial and economic resources brought back to their country of origin or put aside during their stay abroad.<sup>34</sup> A large part of this research distanced itself from the “myth of a productive return to the area of exodus”<sup>35</sup> and contributed to the identification of specific categories of repatriation which were considered valid for many years: the return of failure, of conservation, of retirement, of innovation.<sup>36</sup> However, this type of approach revealed itself to be insufficient in order to understand the complex nature and permeability of individual motivations, family strategy, cultural framework, and the social network which influenced the decision to repatriate.

If overcoming the methodological and ideological rigidity which had until then influenced the debate on the “Southern question”<sup>37</sup> (and consequently studies on emigration<sup>38</sup>) had made it possible to evaluate mobility no longer as a product of

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27 Francesco Paolo Cerase, *L'emigrazione di ritorno: innovazione o reazione?* (Università di Roma La Sapienza: Istituto di Statistica, 1971); Francesco Paolo Cerase, “Expectations and Reality: A case study of Return Migration from the United States to Southern Italy,” *International Migration Review* 8, no. 26 (1974); Francesco Paolo Cerase, “L'onda di ritorno: i rimpatri,” in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, vol. 1.

28 Gianfausto Rosoli, “L'emigrazione di ritorno: alla ricerca di una impostazione,” *Studi emigrazione*, no. 47 (1977); Gianfausto Rosoli, *Ricerca sull'emigrazione meridionale nelle zone d'esodo. Rapporto di sintesi*, no. 19 (Rome: Ricerche e studi FORMEZ, 1977).

29 Franco Merico, “Il difficile ritorno,” *Studi Emigrazione*, no. 50 (1978).

30 Emilio Reyneri, *La catena migratoria. Il ruolo dell'emigrazione nel mercato del lavoro di arrivo e di esodo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979).

31 Russel King, Jill Mortimer, and Alan Strachan, “Return migration and Tertiary development: a Calabrian case-study,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (1984).

32 Massimo Livi Bacci, ed., *The Demographic and Social Pattern of Emigration from the Southern European Countries* (Florence: Dipartimento Statistico Matematico dell'Università di Firenze, 1972).

33 Corrado Bonifazi and Frank Heins, “Le migrazioni di ritorno nel sistema migratorio italiano: un riesame,” *Studi emigrazione*, no. 122 (1996).

34 An overview in Kunuroglu, van de Vijver, Yagmur, “Return migration.”

35 Gianfausto Rosoli, “Emigrazione e sviluppo,” *Studi Emigrazione*, no. 58 (1980).

36 Cerase, “Expectations and reality”; Cerase, “L'onda di ritorno,” 117–23.

37 A summary in Luigi Chiara, “Dalla scoperta sociologica del Mezzogiorno al nuovo meridionalismo. Intellettuali, società, istituzioni,” in *Università “contro”? Il ruolo degli atenei negli ordinamenti in crisi*, ed. Daniela Novarese, Enza Pelleriti (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2020).

38 Francesco Barbagallo, *Lavoro ed esodo dal Sud, 1861–1871* (Naples: Guida, 1973); Francesco Paolo Cerase, *Sotto il dominio dei borghesi* (Assisi-Rome: Carucci, 1975). An overview in Emilio Franzina, “Emigrazione transoceanica e ricerca storica in Italia: gli ultimi dieci anni (1978–1988),” *Altretalia*, no.1, 1989.

backwardness, but of transversal dynamism of social classes, of professions,<sup>39</sup> of different geographic realities, and of different historical moments,<sup>40</sup> then the studies on repatriation also required greater flexibility of interpretation and a multidisciplinary approach.<sup>41</sup>

At the end of the Eighties, in *Sozialhistorische Migrationsforschung*,<sup>42</sup> Klaus Bade suggested the development of a new methodology in which historic research, alongside the “structures” which influenced migration – and therefore economic, political, global tendencies – be open to study the system of values and the collective mentality, without which some phenomena could not be studied and understood.<sup>43</sup>

The adoption of a new model which privileged “less rigid opposition among economic, social and political causes”<sup>44</sup> was finally adopted (also in Italy) at the beginning of the new century, with publication of the volumes *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*,<sup>45</sup> which espoused suggestions deriving from the new methodological approach to the study of migration; this approach emphasized the planning ability of the individual, social relationships, the complexities of migratory spaces and transnationality.<sup>46</sup>

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39 Bevilacqua states that for the second part of the post-war period, not only did farmers partake in the wave of exodus but also “vast levels of the poor lower middle class, the class of office workers, individuals and groups from the lower middle-class professionals moved by a search for a higher standard of living for themselves and their children”; Bevilacqua, *Breve Storia*, 111–12.

40 Paola Corti, “L'emigrazione italiana e la sua storiografia: quali prospettive?” *Passato e Presente*, no. 64 (2005).

41 *Studi emigrazione*, no. 72 (1983).

42 It is social and historical research on migration; Klaus J. Bade, “Historische Migrationsforschung. Eine autobiografische Perspektive,” *Historical Social Research Supplement*, no. 30 (2018).

43 Klaus J. Bade, *Europa in movimento. Le migrazioni dal Settecento a oggi* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2001) and Grazia Prontera, *Partire, tornare, restare. L'esperienza migratoria dei lavoratori italiani nella Repubblica Federale tedesca nel Secondo Dopoguerra*, (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2009), 50.

44 Prontera, *Partire, tornare, restare*, 47; Tirabassi, Sori, “Le Marche.”

45 *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, ed. Pietro Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina, vol. I e vol. II (Rome, Donzelli: 2001 e 2002).

46 Gianfausto Rosoli, “Le popolazioni di origine italiana Oltreoceano,” *Altretalia*, no. 2 (1989); Gorge E. Pozzetta and Bruno Ramirez, eds., *The Italian Diaspora: Migration across the Globe* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1992); Emilio Franzina, “Emigrazione transoceanica e ricerca storica in Italia: gli ultimi dieci anni (1978–1988),” *Altretalia*, no. 1, 1989; Emilio Franzina, *Gli Italiani al Nuovo Mondo: l'Emigrazione Italiana in America 1492–1942* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1995); Rudolph Vecoli, “The Italian Diaspora, 1876–1976,” in *Cambridge Survey of World Migration*, ed. Robin Cohen (Cambridge, 1995); Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Danilo Romeo, “L'evoluzione del dibattito storiografico in tema di immigrazione: verso un paradigma transnazionale,” *Altretalia*, no. 23 (2001).



The broadly outlined reconstruction above seemed useful to us to introduce and contextualize the topic of return migration within the studies on Italian mobility. As underlined, few studies on the topic have embraced (as hoped) the multidisciplinary approach, or worked on the reconstruction of motivations of individuals and groups with regard to repatriation.

In this framework, the analysis here proposed was carried out on previously unknown archive materials collected between 1964 and 1965 and related to a sample of emigrants from the town of Troina (near Enna, in Sicily) who had repatriated from the Federal German Republic, and a sample of people from Troina living abroad,<sup>45</sup> to verify whether the emigrants had acted as agents of change when back at home.

The original research was unfortunately developed on a relatively limited sample, but it shows a scientific relevance – for the years taken into consideration and despite limitations – for the pioneering approach which explores the mentality and cultural framework of repatriation in relation to the possibility of a new development of the Sicilian agricultural sector.

## 2 The Survey on Sicilian Emigrants: In Search of “Human Agents of Change”

Until the first half of the Fifties, agricultural areas of the Southern hinterland had not yet been reached by the substantial “environmental infrastructure” interventions supported by the Fund for the South, experiencing instead ongoing sluggishness and a worrying rate of emigration. However, from 1957 onward, new development opportunities opened up due to the more inclusive range of actions of the Fund for the South,<sup>47</sup> as well as the relaunch of the Common Agricultural Policy<sup>48</sup> for these rural areas.

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<sup>47</sup> Possibly due to the effect of the new development objectives established by law no. 634 of July 1957; on this point, see Salvatore Cafiero, *Storia dell'intervento straordinario nel Mezzogiorno (1950–1993)* (Manduria-Bari: Piero Lacaita, 2000) and the special issue of Quaderni Svinez, *La Cassa per il Mezzogiorno. Dal recupero dell'Archivio alla promozione della ricerca*, no. 44 (2014).

<sup>48</sup> Among the CAP objectives was not only to increase agricultural productivity and improve the conditions and lives of the agricultural populations, but also to address the problem of structural and natural discrepancies among the different agricultural regions. Therefore, provisions for specific financial measures, such as the European Agricultural Orientation and Guarantee Fund were implemented, whose objective was the concession of financial assistance for the improvement or reconversion of agricultural production and for technological development. On this



These unique circumstances determined a renewed interest in alternative strategies aimed at integrating poorer agricultural areas as part of organic plans of development both in Italy and abroad.

In Italy, influenced by early pilot projects launched in the aftermath of World War II on the impulse of international organizations and private subjects,<sup>49</sup> some businessmen<sup>50</sup> and enlightened intellectuals proposed innovating the typology of social work and intervention in backward areas,<sup>51</sup> to enhance the natural vocations of the territory and capitalize on its human resources.

The issues of professional training, the centrality of the individual in the developmental process,<sup>52</sup> and the new courses that socio-educational intervention

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point see Rossano Pazzagli and Gabriella Bonini, *Italia contadina. Dall'esodo rurale al ritorno alla campagna* (Rome: Aracne, 2018).

49 I am referring in particular to those projects emerging from the collaboration between Unrra-Casas, UNESCO, and the Centro di Educazione professionale per Assistenti Sociali – such as the redevelopment of the Sassi of Matera (1950–1955) and the Abruzzo Project (1958–1962) – in which building construction and reconstruction went hand in hand with sociocultural promotion for the experimentation of self-regulating communities which become aware of their needs, identified the solutions, and took it upon themselves to implement them; Marilena Dellavalle and Elena Lumetta, “Il progetto UNRRA-CASAS: assistere e riabilitare attraverso l'edilizia,” in *Immaginare il futuro. Servizio sociale di comunità e community development in Italia (1946–2017)*, ed. Marilena Dellavalle and Elisabetta Vezzosi (Rome: Viella, 2018).

50 Consider Aldo Capitini and the experience of the Social Orientation Centres; Adriano Olivetti and his Community movement; Guido and Maria Calogero Comandini, founders of Cepas; Angela Zucconi; from another perspective also Manlio Rossi-Doria and the Agricultural School of the University of Naples, and the Svimez study Centers; Marco Grifo, *Le reti di Danilo Dolci. Sviluppo di comunità e nonviolenza in Sicilia occidentale* (Turin: Franco Angeli, 2021), 116–17.

51 The Professional Social Worker Training Centre was founded in 1946 by Guido and Maria Calogero Comandini, and entrusted to the direction of Angela Zucconi. The center was to train social workers who would propose teaching actions spread by social and community projects. Livia Romano, “Angela Zucconi e il Centro di Educazione Professionale per assistenti sociali (1949–1963),” *Rivista di storia dell'educazione*, no. 2 (2016); Giuseppe Certomà, ed., *Guido Calogero e Maria Comandini. Il servizio sociale in una democrazia moderna. Antologia di scritti 1946–1961* (Rome: Sensibili alle foglie, 2005).

52 Between 1954 and 1956, within the scope of the Section project for UNESCO social research on the effects of the agricultural reform in Italy, even the economist Manlio Rossi-Dori had begun to develop the conviction that an increase in cultural level constituted a decisive growth factor; Michele De Benedictis, “Rossi-Doria at Scandale: a borderline research project,” *QA-Rivista dell'Associazione Rossi-Doria*, no. 3 (2007); Michele De Benedictis, ed., *Un paese di Calabria* (Napoli: L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2007); Leandra D'Antone, “Manlio Rossi-Doria e la ‘politica del mestiere’,” *Meridiana*, no. 32 (1998); Simone Misiani, “Osso e polpa. Manlio Rossi-Doria e la Riforma Agraria,” *Storia economica*, XV (2012). Later, other projects were financed by Esso, Ford, the Rockefeller Foundation; on this point allow me to refer you to Francesca Frisone, “Sviluppo, emigrazione e fattore umano in Sicilia. Il caso della provincia ennese (1951–1961),” a paper presented

would have to introduce in the rural areas, were not yet in line with the State-planned programs, having remained the prerogative of those few intellectuals who had independently matured a more modern vision of rural development based on the idea of participative democracy.

Thus, one pioneering work, with the aim of identifying the levers of change and of social redemption, was that undertaken in Sicily by Danilo Dolci through “reciprocal maieutics,”<sup>53</sup> and later by Salvinus Duynstee, the Dutch sociologist working in the management of a Centre for Community Development in Palma di Montechiaro between 1960 and 1963.<sup>54</sup> The methodology of social work deemed useful in tackling conditions of underdevelopment and adopted in these experiences (despite their inherent differences) was community development,<sup>55</sup> a well-established principle in English-speaking area.<sup>56</sup>

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to the Conference *Migrazioni e sviluppo economico nell'Europa mediterranea in età moderna e contemporanea*, Department of Economics, University of Messina, April 21–22, 2022.

53 The “Borgo di Dio Centre” was founded in 1952. The experience of the Centre was surely one of the most significant examples of community development in Italy in the aftermath of World War II. The project was undersigned by representatives from disciplines such as town planners, architects, sociologists, agronomists, and economists, including Ludovico Quaroni, Carlo Doglio, Bruno Zevi, Edoardo Caracciolo, Giovanni Michelucci, Lamberto Borghi, Paolo Sylos Labini, Sergio Steve, Giorgio Fuà, Giovanni Haussmann, Carlo Levi, and others. Ilys Booker, “A Sicilian experiment,” *Community Development Bulletin*, no. 13 (1962); Gerrit Huizer, “Some community development problems in Partinico, one of the centres founded by Danilo Dolci in W. Sicily,” *Mens en Maatschappij*, no. 37.1 (1962); Enrico Appalecchia, ed., *Idee e movimenti comunitari. Servizio sociale di comunità in Italia nel secondo dopoguerra* (Roma: Viella, 2016); Marco Grifo, *Le reti*. For a different interpretation of these experiences, see Luigi Chiara, Francesca Frisone, “La ‘modernizzazione dal basso’. Lo sviluppo comunitario in Sicilia tra gli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta,” a paper presented to X° International Conference of Urban History *Adaptive cities through the Post-pandemic Lens*, Turin, September 6–10, 2022; Danilo Dolci, *La struttura maieutica e l'evolverci* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1996).

54 From a different point of view, we have Tullio Vinay's intervention in Riesi; Giovanni Leone, *Territorio e società in Sicilia negli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta, nell'esperienza di Danilo Dolci, Salvinus Duynstee e Tullio Vinay* (Palermo: Anvied, 1993).

55 According to UN, who defined the process in *Social Progress Through Community Development* (1955), “community development can be tentatively defined as a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest reliance upon the community's initiative”; Jim Lotz, “Community development – a world view,” *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, no. 62 (1971): 4.

56 One of the original examples was Norris Town, the American town created by Roosevelt with the TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) and designed to connect infrastructural development with moral and cultural rebirth of the town; Michelangelo Morelli, “Adriano Olivetti tra fabbrica e comunità,” *Pandora Rivista* (2020); Umberto Serafini, *Adriano Olivetti e il Movimento di Comunità* (Rome-Ivrea: Edizioni di Comunità, 2015).

The theme of human capital and how it could be enhanced by processes of community empowerment, with the aim of organic development of the rural areas, started to attract the attention of the European Community: based on contacts made with Salvinus Duynstee,<sup>57</sup> the Agriculture Division of the EEC decided to support a pilot study on the socioeconomic situation and agricultural prospects in three mountain towns of the province of Enna (Gagliano, Troina and Cerami), entrusting its writing to the International Centre of Social Research of the Gregorian University between 1964 and 1965.<sup>58</sup>

Although limited to three small towns, the survey (according to the researchers) could be confirmed as representative of typical conditions of the greater part of the Southern regions hinterland: absence of essential services, growing demographic pressure, progressive abandonment of the land, high levels of unemployment, and consistent migratory exodus.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to reconstructing the physical, demographic, hydrographic, and infrastructural characteristics of the three towns and the organization of their economic structure, the authors devoted great attention to the mentality and the material and immaterial needs of the population, in order to evaluate developmental potential.<sup>60</sup>

Nel corso delle indagini eseguite dal CIRIS negli ultimi due anni, un'accurata attenzione è stata sempre rivolta a raccogliere tutte le informazioni possibili sulla mentalità e sugli atteggiamenti della popolazione. Il motivo di tale interesse è già stato spiegato [. . .] non si avrà mai sviluppo di una comunità in nessun senso, se la mentalità delle persone non è incline

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57 By September of 1962, a delegation from the Agriculture Commission of the European Parliament had visited Palermo, Agrigento, Catania and its province with the objective of evaluating the principal problems of agricultural structures in relation to the future supply of European structural funds; on that occasion the EMPs visited Palma di Montechiaro: "Tous les membres de la délégation ont été très impressionnés par l'action altruiste du pere Duynstee ainsi que par celle de ses collaborateurs et collaboratrices; ils ont été bouleversés à la vue de la situation sociale de Palma de Montechiaro que l'on n'observe certainement pas seulement à Palma, mais certainement aussi, dans d'autres régions desservies par des routes moins bonnes"; Historical Archives European Union, issue Politique économique Régionale en Italie, vol. 1, (CEUE\_PRUC-171), 1961–1965 (from here on HAEU-Politique), *Projet de rapport de la délégation de la commission de l'agriculture du Parlement européen sur sa mission d'étude et d'information en Sicilie, novembre 1962*.

58 HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto sulla situazione socioeconomica, e le prospettive agricole in tre paesi montani della Sicilia. Studio intrapreso dal Centro Internazionale di Ricerche sociali (Ciris) per la Divisione Agricola della Comunità Europea su richiesta di S. Duynstee*, Rome, 1965.

59 The researchers outlined a general decrease in the resident population, indicated (for the decade 1951–1961) as –7.2 % for Troina and –4.5 % for Gagliano, while for Cerami the resident population remained generally constant; HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, IV/3, IV/17, IV/29.

60 HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, chapters XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, e XVII.

verso tale sviluppo o se non si mostra aperta ai cambiamenti [. . .] Difatti scoprendo i bisogni e gli atteggiamenti di una popolazione, sarà più agevole muoverne i componenti alla ricerca delle soluzioni per soddisfare questi bisogni, poiché ogni progresso di sviluppo economico e sociale è condizionato particolarmente dalle disposizioni o atteggiamenti dell'elemento umano.<sup>61</sup>

One of the elements the researchers chose to explore was the role played by the emigrants in these communities as agents of change, having verified a substantial impact of emigration in terms of demographics.<sup>62</sup>

About 150 emigrants from Troina and Cerami were contacted “who have migrated to Northern Europe and remain migrants”;<sup>63</sup> the majority of these were farmers, unskilled laborers (manual laborers and construction workers) and artisans, but only 34 filled out the proposed form. Despite this small number of successful interviews, one factor results as highly significant and a probably fair indicator of the context examined: the “extraordinary uniformity on all essential points” of the 34 interviews.<sup>64</sup>

Emigrants declared that the reasons for leaving their home were generally: lack of employment opportunities, other economic explanations (cost of farming too high), too low livelihood, and unfair work contracts. They left Sicily with the idea of earning enough by working outside the country to send back home savings to help those they left behind. All those interviewed viewed their emigration as a temporary situation, hoping to go back as soon as the local economy showed

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**61** “During the course of research carried out by CIRIS in the last two years, accurate attention has always been paid to collecting all possible information on the mentality and attitudes of the population. The reason for this interest has already been explained [. . .] there will never be community development in any sense if the mentality of the people is not inclined towards development or if it does not show itself open to change [. . .] Indeed by discovering the needs and attitudes of a population, it will be easier to move the components in the search for a solution to satisfy these needs, since all progress of economic and social development is particularly conditioned by the dispositions or attitudes of the human element” (our translation); HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, XIII.

**62** For the three towns which were indicated by the researchers as having a migratory balance (from 1951–1964), of 2,979 individuals for Troina; 1,364 for Gagliano; 734 for Cerami, calculated on an average population respectively, of about 13,435, 4,904, and 4,729 inhabitants. Relative to the definitive migratory or emigration balance, the authors claim to have extrapolated the data from the town registry office, not including any information regarding the destinations. Therefore, it is not known whether the authors are referring to migration abroad or nationally; HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, IV/11, IV/25, IV/35.

**63** HAEU-Politique, *Capitolo Decimo Settimo, Mentalità degli emigrati*, 1.

**64** Ibid.

signs of picking up; “an overwhelming 80 % indicated that they still intend to return home.”<sup>65</sup>

Among the 20 % who had the intention of not returning home, one possible reason indicated was “the hometown is unattractive.” They used the Italian word “spiacevole” to describe a culturally unsatisfactory situation they have learned to recognize: “a new awareness of the cultural deficiencies of a backward insular town, an awareness evoked by the experience of living in culturally advanced places.”<sup>66</sup>

Also interesting are the suggestions collected by the researchers regarding the quality of life of emigrants, who expressed the desire to return home even though their actual income was judged decent, the reception they experienced from their neighbors was “good or even excellent,” and they declared themselves to be earning enough to send savings home. Elsewhere, half of those interviewed described their work as “hard”; three quarters found the language a real difficulty; and the same number complained of the harshness of climate or customs, and poor housing conditions.<sup>67</sup>

Yet even more interesting, in terms of the originality of the survey, is the section which regards return emigration. The CIRIS interviewed 76 workers from Troina, of whom 30 had moved for work within Sicily, 30 to Germany, and 16 to the North of Italy. Of these, 37 % stated that before emigrating they were employed in agriculture, 35 % as manual laborers or construction workers or miners, 12 % as artisans, while the rest did not have a specific profession.<sup>68</sup> Those who moved within Sicily claimed to have continued to work in agriculture, while none of those who emigrated to the north of Italy worked in agriculture: lacking any type of professional qualification, they had found jobs as manual laborers or construction workers.

The choice to return home was attributed by the majority to reasons which were “essentially economic” (75 %); in other words, either because they were unemployed or because they hoped to find employment in their hometowns. Another 15 % returned for family reasons, and 5 % for “convenience.” It is interesting to note that only 5 % claimed to have returned because they “didn’t like the place.”

At this point, the researchers tried to understand whether the return of the emigrants could be considered definitive or not, and thus what plans they had for the future: “overall almost all of them did not intend to emigrate again. Only 10 % answered decisively that they intended to emigrate again.” It is significant that in

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, XVII/1.

comparison with the other interviews in Gagliano (not used as a sample in the Report), the researchers state that although unemployed, the returnees all planned to stay in their hometowns.

Overall, the opinion of the researchers on the impact of emigration was rather negative:

What light have we, then, on the question of whether emigration has been conducive to change? Not very much, and what we have seems to indicate that the emigrant responds just about the same way as the generality of the people and the present farmers do [. . .] those who did return perhaps they were not away too long enough for contact with the new to have left its mark upon them. And those whose emigration only brought them into Sicilian towns similar to the ones they had left behind would scarcely find anything to widen their horizons [. . .].<sup>69</sup>

What surprised the researchers in fact was that, despite the brief contacts with more culturally advanced places, these experiences had not determined any break for the migrants with their original values and social traditions, or any need for change: “[. . .] should there not have been more suggestion of the need for basic human education to community values and to cooperation? Perhaps their failure to provide even the slightest indication of this nature is the most unpromising element in the overall picture of our emigrants.”<sup>70</sup>

### 3 Studying Return Migration Today, Beyond Failure and Conservatism

According to CIRIS scholars, the data consulted were discouraging in view of the emigrants’ attitudes toward self-development and empowerment:

Here we had honestly to acknowledge, however displeasing the admission, that the quality of the human factor is not up to the tasks that confront it [. . .] If the pictures that emerges seems only to repeat an already familiar characterization of backward people, it is, at any rate, an accurate and empty [sic] documented portrayal of the people in question. One sure conclusion emerges. Whatever investments authorities may be willing to make of an economic nature, they will accomplish little if such investments are not accompanied by comparable ones destined to bring about improvement in the human factor.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The Report is in Italian and English. This part is in English. HAEU-Politique, *Report Phase Two*, 34.

<sup>70</sup> HAEU-Politique, *Report Phase Two*, 34.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 35.

Despite this dire assessment – that reflects the conventional sociological interpretation of Southern Italian society (and Sicilian society too) which was quite widespread in these years<sup>72</sup> – some elements can be clarified.

The scale we chose for studying mobility phenomena (continental, national, regional, local area, or family level) is an analytic variable of great importance in studies on migration and its effect on society. The interviews with people who emigrated in the aftermath of WWII collected by this Report represent too narrow a sample to evaluate their impact as “human factors of change.” If we analyze the Troinesi interviews in a structuralist way, it seems we are dealing with a typical hypothesis of “return of failure or conservatism”; staying abroad never changed the attitude or mentalities of emigrants, nor ever triggered a virtuous circle connected to the economic, social, or professional skills they had acquired.

But if we refer to the sample of about 21 emigrants who left Cerami in 1950 for Australia or Argentina and returned after 15 years (not included within the conclusions of the official Report), coincidentally these people declared they had returned home not for economic reasons, but for the “desire to see their families again. They had good means to support themselves because of the savings collected abroad and this is why they were truly convinced they would stay in Cerami for the future”;<sup>73</sup> in this case we thus have a perfect example of return of “innovation or retirement.”

Time and space seem to be crucial for evaluating the experience reported by emigrants, and we have no data about how long the Troinesi lived away from home. It is hard to establish the degree of integration they experienced, or to assess their ability to assimilate social and cultural models even if the scholars wrote:

about the hypothesis that the Sicilian emigrant does not know how to integrate himself into a new environment, it is generally connected with the short amount of time spent abroad, because they generally report good welcome from neighbors, and – about their permanence in Germany – they report they would become citizens of the Federal Republic if they could be allowed.

Indeed, in both cases, we find that these people had a good attitude towards change, with the low level of education and professional skills reported by the authors not representing a limitation to overcome the economic and cultural difficulties to integration met in the countries of immigration.

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<sup>72</sup> Chiara, “Dalla scoperta sociologica.”

<sup>73</sup> HAEU-Politique, *Rapporto*, XVII/2.



Putting aside the opinions on Sicilian emigrants expressed by the scholars, we can see that the remittances, and possibility to work far from home, played a key role in encouraging peasants to overcome traditional social relationships connected to the agricultural world.

They gradually became more independent from the long-standing control of the local “notabili” who gave them protection and jobs, in return for obedience. In the same way, as reported in the interviews, the remittances strengthened the local economies, mostly the real estate market and trades. All the savings sent home, if not invested in lands or households, helped to improve consumption for these families and the whole community. It is also significant that among 76 Troinesi, more than half decided to stay within the country because of the high level of internal movement of population brought on by urbanization processes, industrialization, and the service industry.<sup>74</sup>

To conclude, this report shows us the pioneering effort made by the authors to apply, at the beginning of the 1960s, a multilayered approach in exploring the emigration phenomenon in Sicily. They tried to focus on the themes of “active” or “bottom-up” modernization processes, based on the mobilization of civil society around the planning and execution of programs aimed at improving the quality of life of communities. They considered investment in the human factor to be an essential precondition for economic development.

Today in Italy, as the rate of emigration starts to climb again and scholars – even if more focused on studying immigration – notice a non-stop “brain drain,” the importance of the human factor is firmly back in the spotlight.<sup>75</sup> Governments are arguing whether the return of emigrants is advantageous in terms of skills obtained from an experience in another country, but the question is not so easy to answer. We thus wonder if it is still possible and productive – in the era of globalization – to talk about return migration as a single and independent phase of the mobility experience.<sup>76</sup>

As already stated, it is perhaps more appropriate to talk about transnational migration, due to the close ties that connect people with their country of origin,<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Bevilacqua, *Breve storia*, 111–18.

<sup>75</sup> Corrado Bonifazi, Frank Heins, and Enrico Tucci, “Dimensioni e caratteristiche della nuova emigrazione italiana,” *Quaderni di sociologia online*, no. 86/2 (2021): 9–30.

<sup>76</sup> This framework was substantially changed by Abdelmalek Sayad, *La doppia assenza. Dalle illusioni dell'emigrato alle sofferenze dell'immigrato* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina editore, 2002).

<sup>77</sup> “[. . .] the migrants were called transmigrants when they developed and maintained multiple ties, such as familial, institutional, religious, economic and political both with their country of origin and settlement.” Kunuroglu, van de Vijver, and Yagmur, “Return Migration.”

or circular mobility,<sup>78</sup> as a primary strategy of coping with temporary unemployment or underemployment in the South European countries without involving the issues of permanent settlement.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Anna Triandafyllidou, *Circular migration between Europe and its neighbourhood: choice or necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 217.

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