

# *Italian Emigration in the Post-Unification Period (1861-1971)*

## **1. The Periodization of Italian Emigration**

Emigration has been a constant feature of Italian population movements. Even if we limit our study to the post-unification period, that is, from 1861 onward, we can say that, save for the difficult years of the First (1917 to 1918) and Second (1941 to 1942) World Wars (when emigration fell to a negligible level) Italian migratory movements were never insignificant.<sup>1</sup>

During the entire period under study, a flood of men, women, and children, with fluctuating degrees of intensity, left their native country to move abroad, to Europe or elsewhere, in search of better working and living conditions.

Between 1861 and 1971, about 25 million people emigrated from Italy and, even though the greater part subsequently returned to their home country, about 9 million individuals settled elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

The constancy of the phenomenon can, perhaps, partly be explained by the entrepreneurial legacy bequeathed by the Italian merchants of the Middle Ages – those of Amalfi, Pisa, Genoa, Siena, Venice, etc. – who ranged widely across the Mediterranean and traded to and from North Europe; or by the spirit of adventure and curiosity of countrymen such as Marco Polo and the Vivaldi brothers, who, as Dante recalls, became lost in the Atlantic while searching for new sea routes; or to the likes of Christopher Columbus, the Cabots, Amerigo Vespucci, and Pigafetta, who went in search of new routes to the Indies. All this may well have exerted an influence.

A decisive role, however, was undoubtedly played by the imbalance between population and resources, which was to become more acute in time. For Italy is the European country where, notwithstanding the constant migratory movements just mentioned, the population grew at a pace in the last century second only to that of Great Britain; moreover, this occurred without Italy's economic resources developing, at least up to the last war, at the same rate as Britain. From about 22 million inhabitants in 1861, at the moment of unification, the resident Italian population rose to 35 million in 1911, to about 47 million in 1951, and to more than 54 million in 1971; thereby almost trebling in the period 1861 to 1971.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The number of emigrants fell from 142,364 in 1916 to 46,496 in 1917 and 28,311 in 1918; and from 51,817 in 1940 to 8,809 in 1941 and 8,246 in 1942. Cf. *Sommario di statistiche storiche italiane. 1861-1955*, (Roma: ISTAT, 1958), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Livi Bacci, *La trasformazione demografica della società europea*, (Torino, 1977), pp. 251-256.

It is important to appreciate that the continual rise in population was not accompanied by a corresponding rise in the rate of emigration, a sign that the country was able – and has been able – to absorb a not insignificant part of the demographic surplus, thanks to the progressive creation of job opportunities. There have been, however, three periods when, above and beyond the normal phases of rise and fall in the migratory cycle – related in some way, even if inversely, to the Italian economic cycle – emigration has reached such notable levels as to be considered remarkable.

Two of these periods embrace respectively the years following the First and the Second World Wars. During the period 1919 to 1923 the economic, social, and political crisis that Italy underwent can be taken as the principal cause of a renewed increase in emigration, which would have been even greater if the United States had not put a limit to the migratory flow. Emigration, which had risen from 253,224 persons in 1919 to 614,611 in 1920, fell, in fact, to 201,291 in 1921, thereafter to increase gradually to 389,957 in 1923.<sup>3</sup> In reality, even if the imposition of national immigration quotas in the United States had the effect of increasing emigration from Italy to France and Argentina, it seems to have led to the overall reduction of Italian migration. Post-war emigration continued to decrease rapidly, with a final boost at the beginning of the 1929 economic crisis, when between 1929 and 1931 about 596,000 people emigrated, the majority going to France.<sup>5</sup>

While the period 1919 to 1923 followed a war from which Italy, together with the Allied Powers, had emerged victorious, the period 1945 to 1960 followed in the wake of a harsh and heavy defeat. Italy had been the theatre of military operations throughout her territory, from Sicily to the Po Valley, and had suffered wide-spread destruction both to her infrastructure and to her industries and cities. Therefore, in the aftermath of the war, she did not appear to offer great hopes for the unemployed masses. Consequently, emigration began to rise again, with an expatriation of more than 308,000 Italians already in 1948. This migratory flow continued in the following years, and 2,937,406 Italians emigrated during the decade 1951 to 1960. After slowing down for a short while, emigration started to increase again rapidly, and during the decade 1961 to 1970 the number of outflow reached 2,646,994.<sup>6</sup> In the following years, however, not only did emigration progressively decrease, but an increasing number of emigrants returned to their homeland.<sup>7</sup>

If, in the period following World War I, the United States and Argentina attracted about 50 percent of Italian emigration, in the post-Second World War years, the

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix *Table A1*.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix *Table A2*.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix *Table A3*.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix *Table A4*.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix *Table A5*.

flow was principally orientated toward Europe.<sup>8</sup> France, demographically impoverished by her neo-Malthusian policies, continued to be one of the favourite countries for Italian emigrants. Later, however, France was overtaken by Switzerland.<sup>9</sup> There also began to be substantial Italian emigration to Belgium and, above all, to Germany.<sup>10</sup> Outside Europe, Argentina continued to attract a certain number of Italian emigrants, as did Brazil.<sup>11</sup> Emigration to Canada and Australia, on the other hand, which had been virtually insignificant up till then, intensified, while emigration to the United States continued at a modest level.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to post-First World War emigration, when peasants formed the principal nuclei of migrants, emigration in the period following World War II favoured industrial labourers; moreover, whenever the supply of the latter was insufficient, peasants were expected to, and did, turn into factory workers, miners, etc. It is necessary to add that, while in the period following World War I, emigration affected, above all, Northern Italy, in the post-Second World War period the regions of Northeast Italy (the Veneto, Friuli, Emilia), and especially the South of Italy and the islands, were mostly affected. While the Southern regions had not begun to close the gap separating them from the North, in spite of government intervention, the regions of Northern Italy had not only managed to protect their industries during the war, but they had embarked upon a rapid and intense process of industrialization immediately after the end of the conflict, absorbing a large part of the population surplus that had been created in agriculture, then undergoing total mechanization.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, however significant the migratory flow of the aforementioned period was, undoubtedly the great era of Italian emigration must be considered the period between the 1880s and the eve of World War I. Between 1881 and 1910 alone, 10,720,527 Italians emigrated, at a rate that progressively intensified with the passing of every decade: 1,879,201 in the period 1881 to 1890; 2,834,726 in the period 1891 to 1900; and 6,026,690 in the period 1901 to 1910.<sup>14</sup> This era of grand exodus was determined, on the one hand, by the extraordinary economic progress taking place in several countries in Europe and the New World; on the other hand, by economic changes occurring during the same period for Italian workers abroad, lured largely by the prospects of high wages, stability, and the general improvement of the standard of living, both for themselves and for their children. We must remember that this was also the period of the Italian "take-off." Moreover, it should be underlined that such a "take-off" had been preceded by a radical transformation of the model of Italian economic development. Between

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix *Table A6*.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix *Table A7*.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix *Table A8*.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix *Table A9*.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix *Table A10*.

<sup>13</sup> L. De Rosa, *La rivoluzione industriale in Italia*, (Bari, 1981), pp. 77 ff.

<sup>14</sup> M. Livi Bacci, *Trasformazione*, p. 253.

the end of the 1870s and the end of the 1880s, Italian economic policy radically altered. From a period of free-trade policies in which the state assumed a largely neutral position in industrial questions, there was a change to a period of protectionist tariffs and of increasing state intervention in the economy.<sup>15</sup>

This state intervention was determined by the need to protect the interests of domestic industries in the sectors of iron and steel, naval-engineering, and military defence.<sup>16</sup> The instruments were government orders and the granting of special subsidies. During the period 1881 to 1888, as has been shown, the greatest progress was made essentially in four industrial sectors: metallurgical, mechanical engineering, chemical, and textiles, with growth rates that, at least until 1913, were never again attained, except for the mechanical engineering and textile sectors.<sup>17</sup>

The magnitude of the industrial progress and of the technical modernization that had taken place emerges clearly from the information we have about the consumption of energy in that period.<sup>18</sup>

The crisis that occurred in 1888 with the intensifying of protectionism, with the application of the new customs tariff, and with the breakdown in commercial relations with France, caused by the early rescinding of the trade treaty binding the latter country to Italy, signalled a temporary arrest in the industrial growth of the country. This growth, however, was to return around the middle of the 1890s with even greater vigour than before. Progress was made in all the industrial sectors, as was demonstrated not only by the increase in both the number of engines employed in industry and the amount of horsepower they were able to generate, but also by the multiplication of the number of joint-stock companies operating in industry and the increase in their capital. After 1898 the electrical and electro-mechanical industries also rapidly developed.<sup>19</sup>

## **2. The Geographical Origins of Italian Emigrants**

This industrial development, which led to the urbanization of great masses of peasants, especially in the Genoa-Turin-Milan triangle, not only modified the town-countryside relationship, but it also brought about a notable development in the building, food, furniture, and clothing industries. On the one hand, this widened the country's industrial base; on the other, it reduced the agricultural work force.

<sup>15</sup> De Rosa, *Rivoluzione industriale*, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> L. De Rosa, *Iniziativa e capitale straniero nell'industria metalmeccanica del Mezzogiorno*, (Napoli 1968), p. 136 ff.; L. De Rosa, *Rivoluzione industriale*, p. 158 ff.

<sup>17</sup> A. Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), in translation *Il problema storico dell'arretratezza economica*, (Torino, 1965), p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> L. De Rosa, *Rivoluzione industriale*, p. 32 ff.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

The consequent rise in wages had the effect of reducing, rather than increasing, the number of employed as the landowners set about replacing manual labour with agricultural machinery, which was undergoing continual improvement and was now being produced at continually lower costs by the country's advancing mechanical engineering industry.

In reality, even though the phenomenon was more widespread in the north, agriculture lost workers all over Italy. Below we will consider the main reasons contributing to the expulsion of the population from southern agriculture.

**Table 1 Emigration from Italy's Major Regions**

Area	1876-1880	1881- 1890	1891- 1900	1901-1910
Northwest	250,060	589,340	506,753	1,139,550
Northeast	186,140	635,441	1,166,947	1,313,127
Central	37,821	130,253	216,783	757,702
Total	474,021	1,374,990	1,383,730	3,210,379

**Table 2 Emigration from Northwestern Regions**

Region	1876-1880	1881- 1890	1891- 1900	1901-1910
Piedmont	137,718	311,393	259,965	556,289
Lombardy	90,198	221,128	207,774	513,936
Liguria	22,144	56,783	39,014	69,325
Total	250,060	589,304	506,753	1,139,550

In the meanwhile, it should be kept in mind that, so far as the active population is concerned, the percentage of agricultural workers fell in the northern regions from 34.8 percent to 26 percent between 1871 and 1911, while the percentage of industrial workers rose from 12.2 percent (1871) to 14.7 percent (1911).<sup>20</sup> For those who found themselves expelled from agricultural work, and for whom the towns were unable to offer an adequate alternative, emigration appeared to be the only concrete and convenient prospect. In short, the industrialization of Northern Italy produced an emigration incentive.

The phenomenon is evident not only for the regions of Northeast, but also for those of Northwest and central Italy. The following figures speak for themselves.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>21</sup> M. Livi Bacci, *Trasformazione*, p. 254.

Of course, not every region made an equal contribution to emigration. If we also take into account the population sizes of the respective regions, we can see that the Northwest of Italy, Piedmont and Lombardy, were the regions with the greatest rate of emigration.

Above all, it was the populations of the pre-Alpine and Alpine areas that provided the biggest contingents of emigrants.

As far as the Northeast of Italy is concerned, the region with the highest emigration rate was the Veneto, especially in the pre-Alpine and Alpine areas of this territory, as the following figures reveal:

**Table 3 Emigration from Northeastern Regions**

Region	1876-1880	1881- 1890	1891- 1900	1901-1910
Veneto	77,555	286,798	576,358	597,816
Friuli Venezia Giulia	88,466	301,063	457,543	383,771
Emilia	20,119	67,580	133,046	331,540
Total	186,140	655,441	1,166,947	1,313,127

**Table 4 Emigration from Central Regions of Italy**

Region	1876-1880	1881- 1890	1891- 1900	1901-1910
Tuscany	35,909	109,850	144,397	312,014
Umbria	141	870	7,855	101,301
The Marches	1,481	19,369	49,200	221,519
Latium	290	209	15,331	122,868
Total	37,821	130,253	216,783	757,702

With regard to Central Italy, it was Tuscany that provided the greatest number of emigrants, above all the Apennine zones.

The greatest contribution, however, came from the southern regions. The *agrarian inquest* of the 1880s had already brought to the fore the precarious conditions of life of the peasants, together with the backwardness of the type of agriculture that prevailed there. Impoverished by excessive taxation, lacking sufficient capital for the purchase of state-owned land and of the land confiscated from the church and offered for sale by the state, and lacking adequate infrastructures, South Italian agriculture remained in a depressed state. It consisted, on the one hand, of small peasant holdings that, in the majority of cases, did not go beyond a subsistence economy, and on the other hand, of the latifundia, for the most part given over to extensive farming, particularly to the cultivation of cereals. Nevertheless, part of the South's agricultural classes had made great efforts to take advantage of the

free-trade policies adopted by the central government. A restricted group of small and medium landowners, made up for the most part of lawyers, doctors, magistrates, engineers, high-ranking civil servants, etc., had dedicated themselves to replacing the unproductive cultivation of wheat with horticulture, fruit-farming, and vine-growing; the latter stimulated by the pressing demand for wine suitable for blending in France, where the vineyards had been devastated by phylloxera.

This transformation stimulated considerable industrial development and brought notable benefits to several southern regions, such as Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, and Sicily. It came to a sudden halt with the adoption of the protectionist tariff of 1887 and above all – so it is presumed – because of the customs rupture with France, following the early cancellation by Italy of the commercial treaty between the two countries.

Deprived of a market for its most lucrative agricultural products, and unable to recover the capital invested in that sector (capital that had been procured thanks to the contracting of very large bank loans), the South of Italy relapsed into a terrible crisis, that was not only agrarian in nature but also financial. Public demonstrations and clashes with the police typified popular reaction to the decline in employment and to the bankruptcies of landowners and banks. The industrial tariff of 1887 set a high duty on imported cereals in order to deal with the competition of American grain, safeguarding the interests of extensive farming to the detriment of intensive farming (represented by market gardening and fruit farming). This policy took every prospect of economic and occupational improvement away from the southern peasantry. In the following years it became increasingly apparent that emigrants from the South of Italy, who in the past had left their native country to work temporarily abroad, were now leaving in growing numbers and with no intention of returning. The banking and farming crisis of 1888 provided the impetus for a massive exodus to foreign countries, depopulating entire villages and agricultural centres, especially in the hilly and mountainous inland regions. To grasp fully the dimensions of this movement, a glance at the following data will suffice.<sup>22</sup>

A more detailed examination of this phenomenon in terms of specific regions reveals that Campania, Calabria, the Abruzzi, and Puglia (in that order) supplied the largest number of emigrants. It is important to note, however, that the lesser figure that emerges for Basilicata is misleading. In fact, considering its population size, the rate of emigration (and also that of the Abruzzi and Molise) by percentage is even higher than that of the other regions.<sup>23</sup>

In all, Italian emigration increased more than tenfold between the years 1876 to 1880 and 1901 to 1910 (from 543,248 to 6,026,690).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 5 Emigration from Southern Regions**

Area	1876-1880	1881-1890	1891-1900	1901-1910
South	65,028	451,811	766,986	1,985,643
Sicily	4,832	50,955	170,662	774,096
Total	69,860	502,766	937,648	2,759,739

**Table 6 Emigration from the Regions of Mainland Southern Italy**

	1876-1880	1881-1890	1891-1900	1901-1910
Total	65,028	451,811	766,986	1,985,643

### 3. The Destinations of Italian Emigrants

The enormous number of emigrants headed for numerous destinations in every continent; however, 90 percent of them preferred Europe and North and South America. Until 1883, Europe assimilated more than 50 percent of Italian emigrants, a figure that, except for the years between 1898 to 1900, was never reached again, even though Europe continued to play an important role by assimilating more than 33 percent of Italian emigrants during that period. This percentage, however, is related to a total migratory movement, which, during this same period, increased from 157,103 (1885) to 872,508 (1913): in other words, emigrants to Europe increased from 78,232 (1885) to 307,627 (1913).<sup>24</sup> A substantial part of this emigration was not of a permanent nature. Some workers changed locations temporarily, often because of seasonal employment or because of the construction of public works. Nearly all European countries were involved. Although there was no dearth of Italian emigrants to Russia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Great Britain, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and the Benelux countries, and to eastern Mediterranean and Balkan countries such as Greece, Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria, Rumania, and Turkey, the vast majority went to Central European countries such as Austria-Hungary, Germany, Switzerland, and France.

In the period immediately following the unification of Italy, most emigrants went to France. From the end of the 1880s, however, this preference switched to Austria and Hungary. By the end of the century, Germany, and especially Switzerland, began to attract a growing number of Italian workers, whereas their influx into Austria-Hungary decreased.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Annuario statistico della emigrazione italiana dal 1876 al 1925*, Commissariato generale dell'emigrazione, (Roma, 1926), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89 ff.

As mentioned above, most of this emigration was temporary. Nevertheless, it was not uncommon that emigrants successfully adapted to their new countries and remained there permanently. One thing is certain in that the numbers of Italians abroad showed an increase: from 155,278, resulting from the censuses of Italians in European countries for the year 1871, to 380,352 in 1881, 470,118 in 1891, 649,095 in 1901, and 910,568 in 1911. In the central empires of Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Italian immigrant residents increased from 30,862 in 1871 to 192,301 in 1911.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, in France the increase went from 244,170 in 1881 to 426,434 in 1911.<sup>27</sup>

From the end of the last century, Italian emigration to the Americas intensified; even before that, large numbers of emigrants had been heading for the New World. In 1879, for example, 30.04 percent emigrated to the New World: the largest part (11.01 percent) went to Argentina, 6.67 percent to Brazil, while the remainder went to the United States (2.60 percent), Central America (3.91 percent), and Uruguay, Paraguay, etc. It is important to emphasize the fact that, from 1881 onward, a sizeable increase in emigration was to the Americas. The major destinations for Italian emigrants were the United States, Brazil, and Argentina.

Until 1889, before the beginning of its economic crisis, Argentina assimilated the largest number of Italian emigrants, as many as half of all emigrants to the Americas. From 1887 onward, however, Brazil emerged as the main destination, also absorbing over half of the total Italian emigration to the Americas. After 1897, this interest in Brazil decreased due to both the working conditions of the Italian immigrant and to the fall in coffee prices. The coffee industry was then the primary factor in the rapid colonization of the country.

Italian emigration to Brazil never again attained noteworthy levels and, although emigration to Argentina showed an upward trend after 1903, it was the United States that began to receive the majority of Italian emigrants when emigration to the Americas was rapidly increasing.<sup>28</sup> The phenomenon becomes evident if one compares the data of the migratory flow toward the Americas and the United States during the same period.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1533.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1534.

<sup>28</sup> For Italian emigration to Brazil, see L. De Rosa, "Emigrazione italiana in Brasile: un bilancio" in *Emigrazioni europee e popolo brasiliano*, G. Rosoli (ed.), (Roma, 1987), pp. 153-167; for Italian emigration to Argentina, see L. De Rosa, "L'emigrazione italiana in Argentina: un bilancio", *Rassegna Economica* no. 6 (1986), p. 1213. See Appendix *Table A11*.

Italian emigration to Argentina:

1907	107,227
1908	104,718
1913	111,500

Source: *Annuario Statistico*, p. 88.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix *Table A12*.

Censuses of Italians residing abroad indicate an extraordinary increase in the Italian population in the Americas, from 87,026 in 1871 to 579,335 in 1881, 1,426,446 in 1891, 2,782,225 in 1901, and 4,698,793 in 1911.<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting that this Italian presence was considerable in Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, not negligible in Canada, Chile, Peru, Mexico, etc., and massive in the United States, where it increased from 170,000 in 1881 to over 2,000,000 in 1911.

The migratory phenomenon involved all the regions of Italy, and all the above-cited continents and countries received Italians from all regions, especially from the South and the Central North. It has been ascertained, however, that emigration to America was primarily characteristic of the southern regions of Italy. Only Argentina and Brazil had a noteworthy percentage of emigrants from the north of Italy, which itself was nevertheless overshadowed by emigration from the south. More specifically, the largest groups of emigrants to the United States and Canada came from Sicily, Calabria, and the Marches. Most of the emigrants to Brazil came from the Veneto, Campania, and Calabria.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4. After Migrating from Italy: Economic Achievements**

The majority of adult males who emigrated came from agricultural centres and villages and were essentially employed in jobs related to agriculture. Skilled workers, artisans, and merchants were in the minority, as were professionals, artists, and domestics.<sup>32</sup> As to emigrant females, the majority of these were also employed in agriculture at the beginning; thereafter, the number employed as domestics increased.<sup>33</sup>

When this extraordinary migratory movement was directed toward transoceanic destinations, and not toward European countries, which could be reached by train, the departure points were several large Italian ports. Of the three major embarkation ports (Genoa, Naples, and Palermo), Naples was the most important in terms of the number of emigrant departures. All the major shipping companies, both national and foreign (English, German, French, Spanish, etc.), that transported emigrants, were based in Naples. Many emigrants, however, left from ports such as Le Havre, or other French or German ports, in order to avoid Italian police control or perhaps under the illusion that leaving from a foreign port facilitated entrance into the United States.

In the Americas the principal landing ports of Italian emigrants were New York (which received 90 percent of Italians migrating to the United States), Boston, and Philadelphia. As most immigrants only possessed limited financial resources, they generally settled around these port areas. Thus, there

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1535.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix *Table A13*.

<sup>33</sup> See Appendix *Table A14*.

soon arose conspicuous Italian communities in coastal cities of States such as Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. At the turn of the century, for instance, New York could almost be considered one of the largest Italian cities, with several hundred thousands Italian residents. Many Italians subsequently were attracted by the employment opportunities generated by industrial development in Chicago, by the mining industry in Denver, Colorado, by the sugar industry in Louisiana, and by the rapid urban growth of San Francisco, both before and after the 1908 earthquake. Italians were eventually to be found in nearly every State of the Union.

In Brazil, there were two principal ports of entry for immigrants: Rio de Janeiro and Santos; Porto Alegre was less important. Italian communities of considerable size sprung up along the coast, but the majority of Italian immigrants went to the southern states (Espírito Santo and Minas Gerais) and chiefly to the capital of Sao Paulo, a city characterized by a predominantly Italian population.<sup>34</sup> The main ports of arrival in Argentina were Buenos Aires and Rosario, and many Italians settled there permanently. A sizeable proportion of the population of the capital was Italian, and considerable numbers of Italians were also residing in Rosario, Cordoba, Mendoza, and even in Salta and Jujuy.<sup>35</sup> In general, although most immigrants were of peasant origin, they preferred to settle in the cities (as was the case in Brazil), even if their initial destination had been the countryside. City neighborhoods thus acquired an Italian or even regional Italian flavour. If there were no industrial jobs available in the cities, the Italian immigrants generally preferred commerce, especially the kinds more closely related to their farming origins. In the United States, selling vegetables became a typically Italian occupation: often beginning with a simple stand. With luck one could hope to open a shop, then a chain of stores, and finally to control a share of the fruit and vegetable market.

The hotel and restaurant business also employed a large number of Italians. In both North and South America it was not rare, however, to find Italians involved in higher-level commerce (e.g., jewellery, textiles, mechanical engineering products, import-export, etc.). It was also common, especially in South America, to find Italians in industry (mechanical engineering and textiles), farming (mills, macaroni, and biscuit manufacturing), as well as in banking. In Argentina and Brazil, Italian immigrants, in fact, participated in the creation of banks, which were quite successful.

One of the most characteristic, and constant, aspects of Italian emigration was the fact that the emigrants sent financial help to family members left behind.<sup>36</sup> The volume of this aid increased along with the volume of emigration. The

<sup>34</sup> L. De Rosa, "Emigrazione italiana in Brasile."

<sup>35</sup> L. De Rosa, "Emigrazione italiana in Argentina."

<sup>36</sup> L. De Rosa, *Emigranti, capitali e banche*, (Napoli, 1981); L. De Rosa, "Emigrantes italianos, Bancos y remesas: El caso argentino" in *La Inmigración italiana en la Argentina*, F. Devoto and G. Rosoli, (eds.), (Buenos Aires, 1985), pp. 241-70.

statistical data (although controversial because of the criteria with which these were elaborated or interpreted) are sufficient proof that these remittances increased rapidly after the beginning of the century, from 9 million lire in 1902 to approximately 85 million lire in 1914. Obviously, the major contributions came from the United States, followed by Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and other countries; the order of which confirms the geographical distribution of the Italian diaspora.

The constant and increasing flow of funds, while ameliorating conditions for family members left behind, was also an important factor in the balance of payments, and this was a vital contribution to the strengthening of the lire. This enabled the Italian government, at the beginning of this century, to abandon the forced currency regime, which until then had been imposed on the lire, and to restore its convertibility to gold.

Indirectly, then, emigration contributed to improving the Italian monetary system. Moreover, as many emigrants returned home after having worked several years in foreign factories and other sectors, it is hardly necessary to point out that they brought back considerable "know-how," new initiatives, and, most important, an open outlook, providing a general stimulus for progress. The repatriated emigrant was usually called "the American," and in his native town he or she became a source of experience and knowledge. On the one hand, the returned emigrant contributed to the promotion of the myth of America as the land of opportunity, wealth, and work - a myth that became even more fascinating and attractive at the end of World War II, when thousands of Italians emigrated. On the other hand, the returned emigrant also contributed to providing those who had remained in Italy with new stimuli and conceptions of products and techniques, which were inevitably useful to national progress.

It is necessary to add that the Italian state hardly remained indifferent toward the migration phenomenon in the case of the countries receiving Italian emigrants, and subsequently passed legislation imposing restrictions and setting hygiene, health, moral, and economic requirements for these immigrants. Up until the last decade of the last century, in fact, the attitude of Italy's government was on the whole unfavourable toward emigration. This was prompted by the landowners, representing the principal electoral base of the democratic government set up in 1861. The central government was sensitive to the worries of these landowners about a possible depauperization of the labour market. Thus, the state sought to discourage emigration, creating difficulties in issuing passports.

The intensification of emigration, however, appeared to benefit the Italian economy, and a lively political debate arose regarding this issue. Emigration began to be considered less of an evil and more of a benefit. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, there was a general feeling that the state could no longer remain insensitive to this issue and that it should not abandon the

emigrants, particularly in the light of the growing number of cases of abuse against emigrants, being recorded both in Italy and abroad. In 1901 a law was passed setting up the General Commissariat of Emigration ("Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione"), charged with assisting the emigrants at the ports of departure, during their journey as well as in the country of arrival. The Commissariat was authorized to exercise control over the navigation companies and their agents, only authorizing the transport of emigrants on ships that satisfied the necessary requirements and offered guarantees with regard to accommodation of the passengers, to hygiene and sanitary conditions, and to the diet and the quality of food prepared. A representative of the Commissariat, and a doctor employed by the same, were to travel with the emigrants in order to ensure that the navigation company observed these conditions and to make a report for the Commissariat. At the embarkation ports, the Commissariat arranged for the setting up of offices, for the purpose of giving assistance to the emigrants and, at Naples and Palermo, for the setting up of an emigrants' hospice, where emigrants could stay at little expense while they were awaiting embarkation and could thereby avoid falling victim to exploitation by hoteliers and roomletters. At the main landing ports, the same Commissariat organized other assistance offices, as well as offices that acted as job agencies. It also sent its own inspectors to the prospective countries of Italian emigration in order to gather information about opportunities and working conditions.

The state also concerned itself with the protection of the emigrants' savings and safeguarding the transfer of these savings to Italy. This had become necessary as the emigrants had become victims of numerous cases of abuse and fraud. With another law of 1901, one of the Italian note-issuing institutes, the Banco di Napoli, was empowered to see to the safeguarding, or to the remission at low expense, of the emigrants' savings through the issuing of a special certificate, the "emigrants' voucher" (*vaglia dell'emigrante*). Correspondents and representatives were appointed in those countries with a considerable number of Italian emigrants.

In view of its operations in the south of Italy (the area with the greatest rate of emigration), the Banco di Napoli was subsequently induced to open its own branch in New York – the first Italian bank in the United States – and, later, also one in Chicago. In addition, it opened a branch in Buenos Aires for the same reasons.

When Italian emigrants later improved their economic position and began to embark on their own industrial and commercial enterprises, other Italian credit institutions were induced to open branches in the various countries of Italian emigration, or to acquire shares in local banks. Before World War I, such banks included the Banca Italiana di Sconto, the Banca Commerciale Italiana, and the Banco di Roma. In this way, it is possible to say without exaggeration that the Italian migratory flow carried with it a financial flow,

controlled by the emigrants, which was not only based on the emigrants' remittances, but also resulted from the importations demanded by the emigrants from Italy, as well as from the emigrants' gradual involvement in more substantial and advantageous economic activities abroad. In the year following World War I, with the slowing of Italian emigration, the General Commissariat of Emigration ceased to exist, and the Banco di Napoli no longer enjoyed a monopoly over the safeguarding and transfer of the Italian emigrants' remittances. Moreover, the second and third generation of emigrants no longer had the same interest in assisting relatives left behind in Italy as their fathers and grandfathers once had. Thus, the Banco di Napoli began to take on the same function as the other Italian banks abroad, little by little widening its activity beyond the limited scope of the Italian overseas communities and extending it to the entire local financial market. At least from the beginning of 1901, another migratory flow began to interest Italians: the flow of capital.

## *Appendix*

### *Italian Emigration in the Post-Unification Period (1861-1971)*



**Table A1 Population at each Census (figures rounded off to thousand)**

1861	22,182,000
1871	27,303,000
1881	28,953,000
1901	32,965,000
1911	35,845,000
1921	38,449,000
1931	41,652,000
1936	42,994,000
1951	47,516,000
1961	50,624,000
1971	54,137,000

Source: *Sommario di statistiche storiche dell'Italia, 1861-1975*, (ISTAT: Roma, 1976), p. 11.

**Table A2 Emigration from Italy**

1918	28,311
1919	253,324
1920	614,611
1921	201,291
1922	281,270
1923	389,957
1924	364,614
1925	280,081
1926	262,396
1927	218,934
1928	149,967

Source: *Sommario, 1861-1955*, p. 65.

**Table A3 Emigration from Italy**

1930	280,097
1931	165,860
1932	83,343

Source: *Sommario, 1861-1955*, p. 65.

**Table A4 Emigration from Italy**

1946	110,286
1947	254,144
1948	308,515
1949	254,469
1950	200,306
1951	293,057
1952	277,535
1953	224,671
1954	250,925
1955	196,826
1956	344,802
1957	341,733
1958	255,459
1959	268,490
1960	383,908
1961	387,123
1962	365,611
1963	277,611
1964	258,482
1965	282,643
1966	296,494
1967	229,264
1968	215,713
1969	182,199
1970	151,854
1971	167,721
1972	141,852
1973	123,802
1974	112,020
1975	92,666

Source: *Sommario*, 1861-1975, p. 34.

**Table A5 Emigration from Italy**

	Expatriations	Repatriations
1971	167,721	128,572
1972	141,852	138,246
1973	123,802	125,168
1974	112,020	116,708
1975	92,666	122,774

Source: *Sommario*, 1861-1975, p. 34.

**Table A6 Italian Emigration to:**

	France	Switzerland	U.S.A.	Argentina	Total
1919	98,281	20,838	82,492	12,834	214,445
1920	157,025	24,277	349,042	37,431	567,775
1921	44,782	8,753	67,495	33,277	154,307
1922	99,464	7,464	41,637	63,582	212,147

Source: *Sommario*, 1861-1955, p. 66.

	France	Switzerland	U.S.A.	Argentina	Canada	Total
1946	28,135	48,808	5,442	749	-	83,134
1947	53,245	105,112	23,471	23,379	58	206,265
1948	40,231	102,241	16,677	69,602	2,406	231,157
1949	52,345	29,726	11,486	98,262	5,991	197,810
1950	18,083	27,144	8,998	78,531	7,135	139,891
1951	35,099	66,040	10,225	56,630	21,467	189,461

Source: *Sommario*, 1861-1975, pp. 34-35.

**Table A7 Italian Emigration to France and Switzerland**

	France	Switzerland
1952	53,810	61,593
1953	36,687	57,236
1954	28,305	65,671
1955	40,713	71,735
1956	87,552	75,632
1957	114,974	78,882
1958	72,469	57,453
1959	64,259	82,532
1960	58,624	128,257
1961	49,188	142,114
1962	34,911	143,054
1963	20,264	122,018
1964	15,782	111,863
1965	20,050	103,159
1966	18,370	104,899
1967	15,517	89,407
1968	13,100	81,200
1969	10,741	69,655
1970	8,764	53,658

Source: *Sommario*, 1861-1975, p. 35.

**Table A8 Italian Emigration to Belgium and West Germany**

	Belgium	West Germany
1941-1950	110,440	15,217
1951-1960	118,824	160,513
1961-1970	33,760	748,848

cf. Livi Bacci, *Transformazione*, p. 252.

**Table A9 Italian Emigration to Argentina and Brazil**

	Argentina	Brazil
1952	33,366	17,026
1953	21,350	14,328
1954	33,866	12,049
1955	18,276	8,523
1956	10,652	6,022
1957	14,928	6,157
1958	9,523	4,528
1959	7,549	3,874
1960	4,406	2,976
1961	2,483	2,223
1962	1,817	1,205
1963	945	548
1964	621	233

Source: *Sommario*, 1861-1975, p. 35.

**Table A10 Italian Emigration to the United States, Canada and Australia**

	United States	Canada	Australia
1946	5,442		4
1947	23,471	58	50
1948	16,677	2,406	2,047
1949	11,480	5,991	10,939
1950	8,998	7,135	13,516
1951	10,225	21,467	17,453
1952	7,525	18,742	26,802
1953	9,996	22,610	12,865
1954	26,231	23,440	16,960
1955	34,975	19,282	27,689
1956	36,386	28,008	25,631
1957	16,805	24,536	17,003
1958	25,302	28,502	12,375
1959	10,806	23,734	14,149
1960	15,208	19,011	19,606
1961	16,293	13,461	16,351
1962	15,348	12,528	14,406
1963	13,580	12,912	11,535
1964	6,866	17,600	10,888
1965	11,087	24,213	10,320
1966	31,238	28,541	12,523
1967	17,896	26,102	13,733
1968	21,693	16,745	14,505
1969	15,470	9,441	8,740
1970	15,490	7,249	6,362

Source: *Sommario*, 1861-1975, p. 35.

**Table A11 Italian Emigration to Argentina**

1907	107,227
1908	104,718
1913	111,500

Source: *Annuario Statistico*, p. 88.

**Table A12 Italian Emigration to the Americas and to the United States**

1886	82,166	12,485
1896	192,908	37,851
1902	282,586	121,139
1905	444,724	316,797
1913	556,325	376,776

Source: *Annuario Statistico*, p. 88.

**Table A13 Employment (Percentage of Males)**

Years	Agricultural Workers	Landless Labourers Day Workers	Workmen Employed in Building	Skilled Workers and Artisans	Tradesmen	Professional People	Domestics
1878	38.70	19.05	16.88	13.40	6.04	1.60	2.06
1888	56.75	19.09	9.64	6.04	2.15	0.76	0.92
1898	32.52	28.40	18.70	7.78	2.65	1.08	0.79
1913	34.03	31.21	14.43	12.55	3.54	0.84	1.82

Source: *Annuario Statistico*, p. 207.

**Table A14 Employment of Females (For Every 100 Female Emigrants)**

Years	Agricultural Workers	Landless Labourers Day Workers	Workmen Employed in Building	Skilled Workers and Artisans	Tradesmen	Professional People	Domestics
1878	55.61	8.60	0.58	13.04	4.02	2.24	9.95
1888	72.51	19.94	1.25	5.54	1.49	0.74	4.37
1898	58.04	14.73	1.46	7.53	2.13	1.49	7.29
1913	26.83	13.61	0.77	16.17	2.96	0.85	37.33

Source: *Annuario Statistico*, p. 208.

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# History of South Italy

**Property Rights, Institutional Change and Economic Growth  
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*First published on The Journal of European Economic History,*  
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**The Balkan Minorities (Slavs and Albanians) in South Italy**  
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*vol. XXIX (2000), 2, 3, pp. 249-269.*

**The Economy in Italy and Southern Italy towards  
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*Translation of *L'economia italiana e meridionale al tramonto del secolo XX.**  
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