

Fragments of Migration Culture from Bureaucratic Rationality to the Network Paradigm, Suggestions and Food for Thought

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Abstract

Through my contact with migrants at a non-profit organisation in the province of Parma over the last few years I have become familiar with the ways in which they are received and introduced to the realities of their new world. I have been able to interact with many of them and discuss various subjects with some in English or more frequently French (as many come from countries that were at least historically French-speaking), with the help of an interpreter and/or a cultural mediator. The topics addressed range from life in their country of origin to their journey – often lasting years and involving sacrifices and potentially life-threatening dangers –, their attitude towards Italy and the Italians and their plans for the future.

Some of these conversations were transcribed in texts, becoming something akin to life stories (Cipriani, 1989, 1996; Guidicini, 1995; Berteaux, Bichi, 2008; Aa.Vv., 2015). This article will cite extracts from these accounts in order to illustrate the ideas expressed. Due for future publication, the material in question is held at the archives of Svoltare, a non-profit organisation in Parma. More specifically, the interviewees whose stories are cited are: Mohamed Agahatti Toutta, born in 1985 in Danga, a small village in Mali; Omogbai Murana Prince, a 21-year-old from Auchi, the second most important city in Nigeria; Bamba Drissa, also in his early twenties, from the city of Abengourou in the south of Ivory Coast; and Zakhil Abdul Baseer, born in 1994, from the Afghan city of Bazarak, the administrative centre of the province of Panjshir.

The aim of this study is to pave the way for future analysis and reflection about the life stories of immigrants collected at Svoltare over the last two years.

Migration phenomena are often constrained and downsized, reduced to a Procrustean bed by the real or supposed need for rationalisation, which operates at different levels ranging from institutional to political and heuristic. This rationalisation process is mostly functional to or carried out by those in power – the host country in

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the case of emigration. Rationalisation schematises and standardises the phenomenon of migration, weakening many of its characteristics with significant consequences in the field of everyday life, although it seems to be a necessary prerequisite at times, as we will see, for recognizing the human rights of certain migrant categories.

This article will briefly consider three focal points that highlight the rationalisation of migration: the division of migrants into categories, territoriality and economic analysis.

We will then examine a range of considerations and concrete cases to introduce the option of a 'more genuine' culture of emigration. Special focus will be placed on the reasons for emigration and the conceptual corpus of the network paradigm, seen as the most suitable heuristic tool for reflection on the matter.

Keywords: migration phenomena, network paradigm, migration networks.

1. Rationalisation and ethnocentrism

Emigration is a flesh and blood phenomenon forced into impersonal categories by legal bureaucratic power, which still expresses the authority system in force. The words most frequently used to refer to the phenomenon are emigrant and immigrant. The prefix does not focus attention on the subject, but on the place or country, almost indicating that the relevant geographical contexts dominate the person. Although the word 'emigrate' derives from Latin, it only came into widespread use quite recently. In the Middle Ages, for example, words describing movement underlined the action or the actor rather than the places involved – roam, roaming, pilgrim, wayfarer, travel, wander, rove, and hasten through (Ribella, 2011).

Today, the migrant's identity is constructed in the host country. Expressions like clandestine and illegal immigrant, which carry a powerful negative connotation, and terms such as refugee, migrant, foreigner and asylum seeker, which introduce the dynamic of the recognition and protection of human rights, present figures moulded by rational-legal bureaucratic authority in the host country, which will ultimately be the exclusive provider of substance and existence, as well as legitimacy. This is a reference to Max Weber, who sees a form of rationality in the legal bureaucratic power model that has neither charismatic power nor traditional power. State legality forms the basis of bureaucracy, which, by reducing the real to abstract number-based entities, is rational in terms of its purpose as it facilitates the best means-end relationship, also considering that the modern legal bureaucratic state needs to operate on a large scale. While on one hand there is no personalisation in terms of granting favours at will, on the other hand reality is deprived of its distinctive features and becomes depersonalised. This is the famous steel cage

that Weber sees as the potentially unavoidable danger of legal-bureaucratic societies (Weber, 1961, 2009).

The institution of refuge and asylum provide a clear example of the legal-bureaucratic abstraction that both the state of law and international state bodies impose on the migration situation.

Almost all modern states comply with a conventional system that guarantees refuge to anyone that satisfies a series of subjective and objective requisites – being outside their country of origin and being a victim of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, social standing or political opinions, as well as issues related to gender and sexual orientation, regardless of whether persecution has already taken place or is only feared.

The institution of refuge, governed by international agreements, should be distinguished from the institution of asylum, which covers a much wider field and is not determined internationally to such an extent, although state authorities are still responsible for recognising asylum seekers (Rescigno F., 2011). Unlike refuge, asylum seems inappropriate for consideration as a specific institution of general international law; it is more the result of a set of written and unwritten norms and the occasional conduct of individual states or inter-state bodies. The idea of this figure – and that of the refugee – as a legal-bureaucratic construct seems to be further confirmed by the declaration on territorial asylum approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which reiterates that ‘It shall rest with the State granting asylum to evaluate the grounds for the grant of asylum’ (*United Nations Declaration on Territorial Asylum*, art. 1 (3), 1967). It is clear that the definition of the ideal type of asylum seeker will depend on the state within the context of its territorial sovereignty – it is not necessarily in sync with tangible realities. It is a question of bureaucratisation overlapping and often coinciding with the ethnocentric perspective that is part of the cultural heritage in the host country. Abdelmalek Sayad levels a radical critique of the ethnocentric perspective that usually characterises the approach to immigration – the point of view of the host society – as it fails to consider the other main focal point, emigration, with the crisis conditions that push people to leave. He writes: ‘The very power relations that generated emigration and immigration are also concerned with science, more specifically the science of the phenomenon of migration’ (Sayad, 2002: 163).

Refugee, migrant, foreigner, asylum seeker and other terms move away from the corporeity of concrete cases to become part of the state lexicon, terms that indicate existing situations as they are used by the state (Zanfrini, 2016). At the same time though, in the current trend some of these terms can be ‘good words’ as they provide a means to introduce the process of recognising the emigrant’s human rights, albeit in bureaucratically abstract terms.

2. Borders as reasons of state

There seems to be more of a rational than a cultural basis behind both the apparent decharacterisation of the emigrant and the physical foundation responsible for this condition. While the first systematic studies of migration did not make any analytical distinction between internal and international movement, nation states soon adopted the idea of a community with a politically uniform and ethnically and culturally homogeneous lineage in which nationality overlaps with citizenship (Zanfrini, 2016). The limes is the border that is presumed to separate one country from another. Border is therefore a keyword in the connotation of the word immigrant. Indeed, there would be no immigrant without it. In the mystique of nation building, the concept of homeland overlaps with that of nation. In *Marcb 1821*, Manzoni wrote: 'One of arms, language and altar, one of memories, blood and heart'. A country is called a homeland and its border serves above all to delimit the special area that goes by this name. "The sacred confines of the homeland" is a phrase misused in nationalist rhetoric and often used on war memorials in exaltation and remembrance of the many soldiers who died while defending it. By attributing a historical and cultural identity to the concept of nation, the poet overlaps the concepts of people and nation, which he sees as homeland, thereby creating an implicit synthesis between the three.

As literature on the subject underlines, the word 'border' is closely connected to 'nation', which is also part of the state lexicon (Zanfrini, 2016). Above and beyond any nationalist rhetoric, the word denotes a social and political construct (Massey, 2002: 47). The nation takes shape as a largely formal entity whose borders are established by international agreements, the result of negotiations, compromises and shows of strength. They often ignore the true or presumed identity of a population and comply with a rationale focused on balance between countries (which does not exclude but rather rationalises abuse of power). It could be described as a form of political homeostasis, where parliamentary game-playing and economic interests lead to the construction of models of nations that have little or nothing to do with the cultural identities of their people, thereby creating genuine aberrations in every corner of the world. With regard to Europe, just think of the border between East and West Germany or the various reunifications and partitions of the countries which supposedly belonged to the former Yugoslavia (Canale, 2017; Sofri, Gruden, 2005). This model is shared by territorial policies in other continents, with serious repercussions for the people who live there. The borders of many African countries were mapped out artificially and arbitrarily at the Berlin Conference in 1885 and during the Scramble for Africa (Pakenham, 1992; Chamberlain, 1999), without any consideration for

different ethnic groups and cultural identities. The borders of Mali, for example, are the result of the processes of colonisation and decolonisation in the country. Like other new African states, after achieving independence Mali confirmed the borders that had been assigned by European colonists almost a century beforehand, with absurd or cruel consequences for some of the population, who found themselves classed as foreigners in their birthplace.

In this respect, the words of Mohamed Agahatti Toutta are interesting and emblematic:

My name is Mohamed Aghatti Toutta. I'm 31 years old and I was born in the northern region of Mali in Danga, a village in the Sahara desert not far from Timbuktu.

Although I was born and grew up in Mali, I'm not Malian. I'm Tuareg and I don't have a nationality. The conflict between the Tuareg people and Mali for independence stems from the creation of frontiers and barriers that separated the Tuareg people. As a result, we suddenly found ourselves split up into many different modern nations such as Nigeria, Mali, Algeria and Libya. The new borders obviously hindered freedom of movement and made our traditional life based on nomadism really arduous and complicated. As nomads, we can't build fixed abodes because the desert is our home. I'm a stateless person like all the Tuaregs in my village: we were born in Mali, but we don't belong to the nation of Mali and none of us have obtained Malian papers. The only document certifying that I and the other Tuaregs in my village exist is a *carnet de famille*, a registration form listing all the names of the different Tuareg families in the village. The only purpose of this *carnet de famille* is to make it easier for the government to collect taxes.

This extract confirms that border is a *keyword* in the dynamics of constructing the figures of citizen and foreigner, but also that no aspect of it is 'natural'. A border is a line established 'regardless of cultural, historical and racial identities' (Zanfrini, 2016: 4). It is only a word, a line drawn first on paper and then transferred onto the land (Zanfrini, 2016; Simmel, 1908), which echoes a sole rationale: 'the reason of state'.

3. Economic motivation for emigration

What reasons drive people to cross borders, leave their country (emigrate) and integrate into a new country (immigrate)? Although the model of communicating vessels has some distinctive features, in terms of economic thinking it could be considered in line with the logic of rationality regarding the aforementioned purpose of the classification of immigrants and the

dominant logic in the creation of borders and states. From this point of view, the guiding purpose of economic action can be seen at a macro level as a homeostatic balance between capitals, goods and people.

According to this model, work is a market commodity that is subject to the interplay of supply and demand like any other goods both in terms of job opportunities and remuneration. The result is a form of hydraulic dynamics, a system of communicating vessels between countries with different work and pay conditions. In this way, workers move from countries with a low labour demand to those where the demand is higher. Similarly, with regard to remuneration, workers leave countries offering low salaries for those with higher wages. This continues until a homeostatic balance between the communicating vessels – the countries involved – is reached (Volpi, 2014).

Sayad criticises the language of economics for being reductive, limiting itself to assessing the ‘costs’ and ‘benefits’ of immigration, which is simply defined as labour force movement. Indeed, such an approach camouflages ethical and political questions like the fundamental responsibility of colonisation in the illustrative case of Algeria, which led to the dismantling of rural society and a gradual breakaway from the peasant ethos, ‘freeing’ men for the adventure of emigration (Sayad, 2002).

The recent phenomenon of economic globalisation is often driven by the logic of the search for a homeostatic balance between the three variables in the market game: capitals, goods and people. Every imbalance in supply and demand tends to be offset by the transfer of the relevant variables to create a new balance. Capitals are transferred to where they produce a higher yield, goods to where there is more demand and people to where a bigger workforce is needed, all occurring ideally at a global level (Volpi, 2014; Appadurai, 1986; Baricco, 2002; Gozzini, 2010).

However, while these homeostatic models may be suitable for the research departments of big corporations, they are unsatisfactory when applied to concrete realities as they do not give enough weight to the ‘people’ coefficient: while capitals can be moved in a few seconds and goods in a few days, people raise far more complex issues (Zhok, 2006).

The neoclassical model associates economic choice with the so-called homo economicus, who is detached from social, affective and emotional contexts and only concerned with satisfying his needs. In current economic thinking, homo economicus is identified with the principle of the rationality of economic agents, in the sense that his behaviour features an inner coherence based on certain axioms, aimed at achieving given objectives under certain constraints. This hypothesis is a fundamental part of the microeconomic theory of individual decision-making, a completely abstract model that ignores

the sociality of man and highlights the rationality of the individual removed from any social ties (Caruso, 2012; Zabieglík, 2002).

Although this model is still part of many economic studies, it is now frequently questioned. One of the most notable critics is Amartya Sen, for whom man is unquestionably self-interested, but essentially a social being living and acting in a regime of interdependence with his peers. In this perspective, the humanistic values of liberalism are ascribed to the inclination of human nature to recognise “sympathy”, solidarity and cooperation in association with private interest (Sen, 2006).

With regard to migration choices, the neoclassical economic theory underlines the importance of the individual’s decision to emigrate from country A to country B because the latter offers the best job opportunities. Instead, the new economics of migration sees the decision-making process as subjective to each family or household, who allocate one or more members in an attempt to maximise their income and diversify risks (Stark, 1991).

4. Non-economic motivation for emigration

In establishing a range of alternatives to the neoclassical economic theory, Ambrosini observes that there can also be non-economic reasons for emigration such as the desire for adventure or emancipation from the constraints of traditional societies (Ambrosini, 2005). This position is supported by one of the stories referred to at the beginning of this article concerning Prince, who emigrated to escape the restrictions of a traditionally homophobic society. He comes from Auchi in Nigeria, whose punishments for homosexuality are some of the harshest in Africa. The Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act provides for punishments of up to 14 years’ imprisonment for a partner in a homosexual union, while unrestrained behaviour in public with a person of the same sex or being a member of a gay association can lead to a maximum of 10 years in prison. Here follow some extracts from his story:

My name is Prince, I’m HIV-positive and I was born twenty years ago in Auchi, Nigeria... I discovered my sexuality through my first intimate relationship with a schoolmate. We kept it secret, but it came to an abrupt end when he emigrated to Ghana. After this first relationship I had to hide my sexuality, as it is a crime in Nigeria even to fail to inform the authorities about the presence of homosexuals... One evening in 2013 I met Omo at a club in Auchi and we fell in love. Omo’s father was one of the kings of the city and I used to visit him in his mansion, passing myself off as a family friend to evade the enquiring looks of the servants. One day, however, something went wrong and a servant opened the door at the wrong

moment. That was the end for us. As a witness to a form of sexual intercourse deemed repugnant, the servant reported everything to the king. Shocked by the seriousness of what had happened, he decided to hand Omo and me over to the police. I was tied up, blindfolded, thrown into the boot of a car and taken to a wood far away from the city by five of the king's men. They had been ordered to kill me, but had forgotten to bring a dagger. I was left alone with one of them while the others went back to the mansion to get the dagger and I managed to persuade him to let me escape... I know that if I tried to return to my country, my life would be in serious danger and I would be persecuted by the government. I would not be accepted by the same community. Being gay in my country means not meeting anyone with the courage to look you in the eye when you walk down the street. I've never been able to talk to anyone about my sexual orientation, not even my friends or parents, who might have disowned me. The hardest thing to accept has been having the HIV virus. I only found out about it recently and I hadn't had the slightest suspicion. It's something I'm ashamed of. I'm following a course of treatment and I hope with all my heart that the condition won't have any repercussions on my future relationships. I thank God that I'm now in Italy and can be free about my feelings. I've never felt attracted to a woman and I lived with a mask on my face for twenty years, pretending to be a completely different person. Hiding for all that time was frustrating and really difficult.

With regard to the reasons for emigration, the aforementioned neoclassical economic theory is an expression of heuristic rationalisation, referring to rational decision-making by the individual. While this is the greatest expression of micro theories, there are also structuralist theories that see the causes at a macro level with events that drive people to leave a country or attract them to another country. However, both formulations fail to account for the complexity of the situation – micro theories assume that the future emigrant can obtain accurate information about the global situation of supply and demand in the job market, while macro theories do not explain why some stay in the country in question and others leave it. They overlook the social aspects of decision-making and the implications that these decisions entail (Ambrosini, 2010).

While mediation between macro and micro levels has often been overlooked in economic analysis, it has been the focus of sociological analysis, above all in reference to the possible dynamics between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, inserting the concept of community grounded in the feeling of belonging and spontaneous participation into society dynamics based on rationality and exchange (Tonnies, 2001; Weber, 1961). These reflections have extended to legal matters, above all with regard to state-citizen mediation, and studies on so-called intermediate societies, whose function is to mediate

between public and private and develop the personality of individuals in an area of freedom that is essentially private. This category of social groups includes families, political parties, trade unions and churches (Rescigno P., 1958). It is interesting to note that while trying to correct the model of individual decision-making, the new economics of migration (Stark, Bloom, 1985) ascribes rational choice to families, considering a household as a single entity with the informational and decisional power previously entrusted to individuals. This is a moot point as the cohesiveness and identity of the family are being questioned and new models are being developed to interpret the changing society.

In any case, the issue is still firmly in the sociological realm. Indeed, it is sociology that observes changes in society and understands the need to go beyond the theoretical and heuristic approaches referred to above, working to develop more suitable tools to interpret the complexities of society.

The following section features a brief excursus on the network paradigm as one of the most convincing heuristic proposals, now consolidated both in terms of interpreting our social living and providing a link between macro and micro theories.

5. The network paradigm

In affirming that contemporary society is increasingly relational in nature, Donati (1991a, 1991b) – one of the main instigators of relational sociology – denounces both the presence of new configurations closely linked to the increase in social complexity and the difficulty that the consolidated representations and interpretations of society – both functionalist and conflict theories – have in understanding and accounting for the current social structure. Age, sex, occupation and being fathers, mothers or children no longer define a role, while belonging to several social realities does not necessarily lead to the enrichment and strengthening of the individual. The reference system model is also questioned, as the loss of borders makes it impossible to see it as a predefined set of functionally interconnected elements with necessary – though changing – demarcations in constant interchange with the environment.

Contemporary society tends to characterise the adjective liquid so that social actors lose their roles and are deinstitutionalised, while economic, political and financial realities create intercontinental connections, influencing individuals released from the bonds of *Gemeinschaft* through various mechanisms of control and management of resources. Furthermore, it is increasingly anachronistic to see society as a social system coinciding with a

nation-state whose characteristics also include the ability to control the sub-system of economic resources.

The network paradigm expresses the idea of a heuristic model attentive to the changes that the current society is undergoing.

The distinguishing features of the network paradigm are the obsolescence of the concepts of role, position and social function, the abandonment of the concept of system and the adoption of both the notion of society as a network of networks and the concept of a social actor whose identity is established at the intersecting point of multiple social networks. These elements constitute a new and different form of social representation and a new way of raising issues and seeking solutions. Specific interpretative hypotheses (theories) on the phenomena of social processes and the connections between events have developed within this paradigm. The network paradigm does not claim to provide an exhaustive account of reality, but only to investigate the heuristic ability of a new way of raising issues and seeking solutions [...]. The network paradigm offers a new heuristic model that mediates between macro and micro levels, revealing the deep-rooted changes that have affected the institutions of modernity and highlighting the centrality of social relations (such as personal relationships that seemed to have become increasingly socially irrelevant). (Di Nicola, 2015: 138).

In this light, the relationship of belonging also changes. The concept of belonging evolves differently according to whether it relates to networks or intermediate societies. Relationships in intermediate societies accumulated into a cluster and the self was lost in the collective 'we', making these societies a hypostasis of belonging. Instead, relationships in networks are interconnected in a spatio-temporal path (Ambrosini, 2006) and the self expresses its identity in a relationship by making the network a 'metaphor of belonging', to quote Di Nicola's suggestive title.

According to Di Nicola, the perspective adopted by the network paradigm to view reality can be summarised in the following terms.

- Social reality is not made up of individuals acting on the basis of any specific intentionality; social reality is not made up of institutions that impose themselves on the individual. The individual does not exist as a variously socialised atom and society does not exist as an exterior body, an 'external and coercive social fact';
- Social reality is made up of social relationships; the individual always exists 'in relation to' an alter and as soon as this link is activated, it becomes society;

- Society is only actualised, thereby becoming real and visible, through relations that connect individuals; society is made up of networks, it is a network of networks, and so potentially has no boundaries;
- The identity of the social actor is not the result of rules, values or models of behaviour or language, internalised and assimilated from the early years of life, on the basis of which they build their difference from others and behave in compliance with relevant expectations in view of their social positions and roles played. Instead, it lies in the point of intersection between several social networks. This means that although it is analytically and theoretically possible to delineate and define the behavioural expectations linked to a specific role, in empirical terms the behaviour of a social actor will depend on their reference networks even in social situations that are strongly defined and/or institutionalised. This is because their identity is the result of belonging to multiple spheres of relationships [...].
- The reality of modernity is no longer made up of concentric networks, but networks arranged in a multidimensional space that intersect at certain points [...]. (Di Nicola, 2015: 108-109).

6. Mediation between micro and macro

Collins (1992) sees structural analysis (Blau, 1977; Boissevain, Mitchell, 1973, Di Nicola, 2015; Forsé, Tronca, 2005, Mitchell, 1969) as a meso theory as it is able to mediate between micro and macro levels:

part of its ambitiousness comes from a growing awareness of the connection between networks and market or exchange theories. Markets and networks are two conceptions of how individuals link together into a larger social structure. For this reason, they are on the cutting edge of theory in attempting to unite micro and macro into a single model. Both provide a way to deal with real people coming together in situations (Collins, 1988: 412).

Faist (1997) refers to networks at a crucial meso level, perceiving a level of convergence between macro and micro theories.

Networks therefore emerge as a fresh heuristic opportunity to mediate between micro and macro theories and help the analysis of a complex society whenever the traditional conceptual frameworks seem inadequate, given the deep-rooted changes in effect.

7. The network paradigm as a heuristic instrument for the migration situation

A now consolidated body of literature underlines the importance of migration networks in the process of mediation between structuralist (macro) theories and individualist (micro) theories (Ambrosini, 2008, 2006; Zanfrini, 2016; Caponio, Colombo, 2005; Giudici, Wihtol de Wenden, 2016; Melotti, 2004; Fazzi, 2015; Cesareo, Magatti, 2000). As mentioned above, the former are concerned with the large structural phenomena that tend to drive people out of a country or attract them, while the latter attribute the decision to migrate to the rationality of the individual which is based on satisfying self-interest. Neither takes account of the complexity of the real situation that includes relationships, information and resources (Ambrosini, 2001; 2005). The network paradigm makes it possible to analyse migration as a long-term social process with its own intrinsic dynamics (Ambrosini, 2006; Castles, 2004). According to the network theory, emigration makes use of networks that move in space and time (Ambrosini, 2006; 2005). Rather than serving as social containers, migration networks act as relational structures that involve the individual emigrant in essentially collective dynamics. In a frequently quoted phrase praised by Ambrosini for its succinctness, Tilly (1990: 84) writes that 'individuals do not migrate, networks do', indicating that people's relationships are the driving force behind migration movement – they create groups with different types of bonds from acquaintanceship to kinship and work-related ties to name but a few. Unlike the family or other social groups, networks are not fixed elements on the social map but 'emerge, grow and finally decline' (Ambrosini, 2006: 3). They are not part of the socio-physical construction or socio-political identity of the individual, but are like relational vehicles that can move through space and time. They connect the individual migrant to previous migrants, current migrants and non-migrants both in the country of origin and the country of destination.

Not everything in the network is connected to amical family solidarity or the disinterested convergence of intents; it also includes economic and power interests related to departure, travelling and settling in the host country. Recompense is required by those who organise and help realise the journey and often by those who help the emigrant to integrate into the host country. Although this is not necessarily monetary, it can establish a hierarchy within the emigrant group:

it should, however, be reiterated that the support provided to new arrivals by migration networks is not always disinterested and inspired by feelings of solidarity. In general, patron-client type relationships are formed, in which

the beneficiaries are required to show – at least in symbolic terms – feelings of gratitude and deference towards the sponsors of their arrival. The latter see their status within the network of belonging increase for having supported the arrival of new individuals that are positioned in a subordinate position. In the context of the loss of status and slide down the social scale that migration entails, these symbolic rewards take on a significant meaning that might explain the active stance taken by settled migrants to help those who aspire to join them. However, especially when the beneficiaries are not close relatives, various more tangible forms of demand for recompense can come into play: subletting beds at a high price, monetary rewards for finding jobs, onerous debts for loans granted and even borderline forced labour and subjection to conditions akin to slavery (Ambrosini, 2006: 12).

Furthermore, migration networks facilitate the use of so-called ‘ethnic social capital’ (Esser, 2004: 1135), which is linked to an ethnic community or transnational network. However, this is usually less ‘spendable’ than generalised social capital, which is more flexible and therefore more suited to the new social and working situations in the migration experience (Esser, 2004: 1135). Clearly the network does not highlight or address the bureaucratic identity of the migrant, but a composite of everyday life that starts from far away and becomes entwined with the migration experience (Sayad, 2002; Esser, 2004).

8. The network as a vicarious and ‘incorporating’ force

The migration network expresses an attractive potential that sometimes replaces the individual’s decision-making will. This is confirmed by the experience of Bamba, who fled the Ivory Coast for Libya in 2011 to escape the civil war, but then decided to leave his new country with its rampant violence and racism. Almost unknowingly, he has become caught up in the mesh of a migration network:

It was 18 September when I decided to leave Libya and embark on the sea journey, but I don’t really think that ‘making a decision’ is the right term. I was working near a beach and I saw a group of people who were lifting up a boat to push it into the sea. I didn’t think anything of it, I helped them push it and load the people onto it: in the general chaos I jumped in too on impulse and without thinking about the danger of the crossing. Luckily the smugglers didn’t notice because I didn’t pay for the trip! My life was in danger in Libya in any case and I had nothing to lose. There were about a hundred and fifty of us on a rickety old boat that could have fallen to pieces beneath us. It must have been three o’ clock at night when the motor shut

off. People started to panic and three of them fell into the water and drowned. It was dawn when the Italian Navy came to our aid and we reached Lampedusa.

This account demonstrates that the network is a meaningful reality equipped with greater strength than that of individuals. In this case, the energy of the network replaces not only the will of the fugitive but also the will of the people-smugglers and the travelling companions. The episode also provides an extreme emblematic and concise depiction of the concept of embeddedness. The network 'embedded' Bamba not only physically by receiving him onto the boat, but also socially by allowing him to participate in the result of a set of connections and relations that led the group to decide to migrate and then put the decision into practice. Embeddedness is a concept borrowed from economic sociology (Polanyi, 2001), emphasising the power of the migration network to almost totally subsume the individual within the migratory undertaking by organising, strengthening and shaping their actions in accordance with the relational assets acquired by the network through the multiplicity of relations and experiences accumulated over time. From this point of view, individuals do not act in isolation like atoms in the migration process and are not driven by purely individual motives. Instead, they are supported, informed and guided through a set of relations that constitute networks and incorporate individuals into their dynamics, allowing them to participate in their social capital (Granovetter, 1985; 1995; Vertovec, 2003). Taking our cue from Ambrosini (2006: 4), it seems opportune at this point to make a distinction between social capital and embeddedness with specific reference to migration networks: 'embeddedness has a more static meaning: it is used to indicate how networks provide the cognitive and structural framework in which individual decisions are made, define the scope of possible options and channel and mould courses of action'.

9. Restrictive situations and the importance of the network

The network already plays a major role in the decision to emigrate as individuals acquire the knowledge needed to make the choice through relations with family members, friends, acquaintances and repositories or procurers of information at different macro and micro levels. Experiences and information from those who have already emigrated are also extremely important as they provide concrete knowledge of points of support in the host country, thereby reaffirming the network paradigm there. Networks also play an important role when there are restrictive external situations, although in cases of populations in flight it could be supposed that the choice of

destination is a matter of little concern as the goal is to reach safety. The issue is underlined by Ambrosini (2006: 3), who refers to an observation by Koser (1997): ‘The same routes and destinations used by refugees and asylum seekers, which at first glance would seem to essentially depend on expulsion factors and the search for a way out to the first accessible safe country, are actually strongly influenced by social ties’.

Some extracts from Zakhil’s story confirm that networks also influence decisions made by emigrants from war-torn countries:

My name is Zakhil and I arrived in Italy from Afghanistan after taking the Balkan route... I’m 23 and I was born and grew up in Bazarak, an urban village in the province of Panjshir in north-eastern Afghanistan... My father worked as a cook at an American military base in Komar, which was a pretty respectable job especially for a man that had never been to school. But our problems started in April 2015: the Taliban came to see him twice, threatening him and saying that he should be ashamed of himself for working for the Americans and that he would come to grief if he didn’t stop. Despite being afraid and against our advice, my father refused to leave his job at the base. One day he called me when I was in town, asking me to meet him with the cart to take the shopping home. When I got there I found him surrounded by five men whose faces were covered. They were brutally beating him and stabbing him with a knife. I wanted to throw myself on top of him to try to protect him, but passers-by held me back for fear that the attackers would start on me too. Being unarmed, the only thing I could do was to cry for help at the top of my voice. I saw him die before my eyes and when I finally managed to break free and run to him, the monster that had stabbed my father stabbed me too. The scar on my abdomen bears witness to this. While I was running away, I recognised one of them from his voice – it was one of our neighbours who was a Taliban... I ran away as far as I could. I fainted and when I came round I was in hospital. I was surrounded by policemen and they started to ask questions. As soon as I told them that I had recognised one of the attackers, they went to arrest him... The rebels cottoned on immediately that I had reported it to the police, so they burnt our house down. My mother was at home at the time, together with my brother’s wife and her two children. My sister-in-law burnt her arm, but thankfully no one died and they managed to get out safely also thanks to the help of neighbours. I stayed in hospital for about 2 months without knowing anything about what had happened. When I was discharged, my brother came to pick me up and took me to my uncle’s house in the province of Nangarhar. My uncle told me about the fire and showed me a note in which the Taliban said that I had betrayed them and that they would find me wherever I had gone in Afghanistan and kill me like a dog...

My brothers and uncle insisted that I left the country as soon as possible and organised my escape by contacting a smuggler and giving him the money he wanted.

So I started my escape from Kabul on 20 November 2015 with a group of equally desperate people and crossed Iran in about a fortnight. The smugglers arranged the path taken by the migrants on foot, suggesting routes and sometimes providing pick-up trucks that can squeeze in about twenty people. After reaching Turkey... we waited a couple of days before trying to cross the border into Bulgaria... and we arrived in Serbia. We were stopped by the police for four days. They took our fingerprints and then with the help of volunteers from a humanitarian association they took us to the station and bought us tickets to Vienna. A cultural mediator in Serbia advised us to say that we wanted to go to Germany if anybody stopped us in Austria. In Germany I managed to phone my uncle, who had arranged my escape and was still in contact with the smugglers. My uncle had already spoken to his brother-in-law in Italy, who was going to help me when I got there. My uncle told me that smuggler A, who had masterminded the first part of the journey, would soon put me in touch with one of his colleagues, who would make sure I got to Italy. And that's what happened – after buying me a train ticket, this strange chap took me to the carriage, making sure to leave me a ten-euro note for emergencies. I never saw him again. The train crossed Austria and arrived in Trieste at about three o' clock at night while I was sleeping like a log. The inspector came and told me: 'This is the last stop, you have to get off'. It was 3 February 2016.

10. Network between legality and illegality

The legal aspect is often overlooked when considering the network and the ways in which it develops. Many authors do not see legal factors as a mitigating circumstance in the network structure. This is especially evident in the case of illegal immigration, for which networks are even more necessary than for regular emigration (Espinosa, Massey, 1999). Indeed, it seems that networks are able to move between legal and illegal channels and bypass any prohibitions. Although illegal immigration may result in deviant behaviour, this does not necessarily happen; much depends on the connections and migration networks that the undocumented immigrant comes into contact with (Engbersen, van der Leun, 1998). Initially, networks can also encounter social institutions operating in the sector of migration and reception.

While such institutions need a reference model and a formulary to sanction their foundation and development over time, networks can be founded anywhere, do not follow a predefined path and can benefit from the institutions in terms of foundation and development. Above all in the case of

illegal immigration, this could have a mitigating effect on the danger of illegality.

Zakhil's words outline the possible function of an institution (in this case the non-profit organisation Svoltare) in the formation process of a migration network:

I've been at Svoltare for a few months and I really feel at home here. I share a flat with some lads from Afghanistan, except for one who's from Syria. I've always got on well with them and we've created a close relationship with mutual trust: we're friends, we have a laugh, and we hit it off well. None of my family are here in Italy and the most difficult thing to cope with was finding out that my brother had died soon after I arrived. He had cancer and his illness was getting worse when I spoke to him for the last time while I was crossing Turkey. Through my Afghan friends I managed to find a contact to send something to help my sister-in-law. My friends have introduced me to other lads in our situation and migrant families that have lived in Parma for some time. We are making plans for the future with them. Also thanks to their advice, I do Italian courses every day until midday during the week at the Svoltare school, while in the afternoon I sometimes go out with friends to visit an immigrant family. Some of them told me that there's work to be found in farming, so I volunteer at a farm in Fontevivo two days a week.

11. Conclusions

The figure of the migrant should emerge from this brief excursus as more authentic and more real, no longer reduced to a legal schema or a schema of the supply-demand market dynamic, which are what the partial view limited to bureaucratic or strictly economic terms attempt to confine it to: 'migrants are not isolated individuals who react to market stimuli and bureaucratic rules but social beings who seek to achieve better outcomes for themselves, their families and their communities by actively shaping the migration process' (Castles, 2004: 860).

Reference to a broader motivational range than strictly work-related reasons and above all the use of network models in the field of migration have enabled us to outline a migrant figure that is closely linked to the evolving society and could be seen as a touchstone for such change. Networks do not just accompany migrants; they migrate themselves with a spatio-temporal movement requiring many different configurations. We have seen networks in terms of the emerging desire to emigrate, the organisation and execution of the journey and staying in the host country. The first-hand accounts collected from guests at the non-profit organisation Svoltare have provided illustrative

examples of a complex and diverse reality. The fact that these immigrants are illegal offers a special perspective for considering network dynamics, which in this case become almost indispensable, even more important than in the case of regular immigration. Migration networks cannot be reduced to a single model or predetermined models; they vary according to needs and situations. While a subsequent study based on the life stories of migrants will analyse many of the aspects only touched on here in more detail, we can use these brief reflections to put forward a working hypothesis with the following constant features:

- 1) Migration networks mediate between the realities of major political, social and economic issues and the reality of the individual migrant;
- 2) Migration networks have an energy-strength that exceeds that of the individual migrant;
- 3) Migration networks can be seen as 'walk in progress' in spatial terms, in the sense that they emerge, branch off and extend in a single movement, a paraphrase of migration mobility;
- 4) Migration networks make use of a form of temporality that both connects them to past generations whose experience they use and inevitably directs them towards the future in terms of planning.

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