

La meglio Italia: Le mobilità italiane nel XXI secolo.
 Maddalena Tirabassi and Alvise del Pra'.
 Turin: Centro Altreitalie/aAccademia University Press, 2014.
 225 pages.

Over the past two decades it has become customary to talk about the swift transformation of Italy from a country of emigration to one of immigration: Italy is now, to use a common Anglophone label, a destination country. Yet, as the volume by Maddalena Tirabassi and Alvise del Pra' amply demonstrates, Italians never stopped migrating, and the number of those moving abroad is, if anything, increasing, especially since the start of the global economic crisis in 2007–2009. Complex and often contrasting rhetorics conspire to make this contemporary migration partly invisible, or at least to mask the true extent and nature of the phenomenon. On the one hand, the media's focus on immigration—whether expressed in alarmist, often racist, tones or through the paternalistic approach, which tells Italians to remember how “we used to be migrants too”—has led to a continuing blindness toward outgoing flows. On the other hand, phrases such as *la fuga dei cervelli* (brain drain) have directed public attention toward specific areas and groups of Italian migrants, effectively limiting our understanding of the overall picture. The combination of statistical data, detailed questionnaire answers, and interviews collected by the Centro Altreitalie and presented in *La meglio Italia* (The best of Italy) is an excellent antidote to rhetorical gestures of all kinds. The picture that emerges from the volume is extremely complex and does not easily translate into simple formulas or trends. What the two authors call the *nuove mobilità italiane* (new Italian mobilities, 3) take many forms and have multiple causes, and their routes lead to multiple destinations. Italy's “glomigrants”—a neologism modeled on the adjective “glocal,” that is, simultaneously global and local (viii)—are usually skilled in languages (some can genuinely be called multilingual), often have previous experiences of life abroad, and in most cases are prepared to move more than once, in a process of fluid migration (188). They occupy different places on the social scale and have variable, though often high, levels of education: The interviewees range from academics to chefs, from entrepreneurs to lobbyists, from volunteers to jazz musicians. Some are bitter about having to leave Italy, others see mobility as a natural progression of their personal trajectory, but almost all seem to share at least one motivation for their decision to migrate: a desire to improve their quality of life. Even that common desire, however, translates into different expectations. For some it marks the hope for greater job opportunities, a release from a perceived future of permanent *precarietà* (precariousness), and the presence of a level field based on a meritocratic system. For others it is a matter of civil rights and equal opportunities, whether these relate to gender, sexuality, or ethnicity.

This new culture of mobility presents both points of contact and distinctive traits if compared with previous waves of Italian emigration. The map of today's flows leads to old as well as new destinations—Germany, China, the Americas, Africa—but the global span of Italian emigration remains a constant. Migrants continue to form complex networks abroad while also maintaining their links to Italy. Yet the channels through which those connections are built now include new media, from Skype to Facebook to blogs, while for many people cheaper travel means more frequent

movement, including periodic visits to the peninsula. This, together with changes in job markets and border controls, also means that traditional ways of keeping tabs on the number of migrants and their movements, such as national statistics and the Anagrafe Italiani Residenti all'Estero (AIRE), or registry of Italians abroad, are less effective than ever. The affective dimension of migration, on the other hand, remains a constant: While many have partners who are not Italian (81), family ties remain powerful and frequently appear in the interviews as the key reason for contemplating a possible return (188). Some of those interviewed, however, feel that going back to Italy would amount to an admission of failure, a forced retreat into a reality from which emigration had seemed to offer a way out (137–138).

There are also some surprises, or at least less predictable results, to be found among the data. One is the generally high sense of integration new Italian migrants report feeling in their host countries. Another is the ease with which many of them embrace multiple identities (regional, national, European, global, or cosmopolitan). In one of the most interesting interviews, reproduced at some length in the volume, a young Chinese-Italian woman goes so far as to refute entirely the relevance of the “identity question,” flatly refusing to choose between her two possible “homes” (174–176). Other interviewees consciously and effectively undermine much used labels, such as the infamous *fuga dei cervelli* (brain drain), talking instead about a *fuga di individui* (escape of individual workers, 140) or even about *risorse in fuga* (the consequent drain of human resources, 189).

For all the complexity and dynamism of today’s migration phenomena, the picture that emerges from the rich, diverse data collected in the volume is definitely that of a growing sense of *italianità internazionale* (international Italianism, 107). Equally strong, however, is the sense that what is missing is a correspondingly international Italy. While many Italians are ready to take risks by moving across the globe, Italy is not proving to be a similarly attractive prospect, not just for returning migrants but also for foreigners looking for opportunities. The net migration balance for qualified workers remains negative, as does the balance between university students and researchers who leave or enter Italy (22). Whether real or perceived, it is this inability of contemporary Italy to present itself as a possible home for old as well as new Italians that constitutes the single most negative aspect of the picture painted in *La meglio Italia*. For many, even among the country’s most recent emigrants, Italy has already become a place of the heart or perhaps a tourist destination: a nation where they can still imagine living but not working and, crucially, not building a life for themselves.

—LOREDANA POLEZZI
University of Warwick