

ITALIAN WOMEN MIGRANTS IN POST-WAR BRITAIN

The case of textile workers (1949-61)

by

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Abstract:

In the decade following the end of the Second World War, a mass migration of Italian workers came to the United Kingdom to be employed in Britain's factories and mines. Amongst these, many were women.

Thanks to official recruitment schemes drafted by the British and Italian governments of the time, young women left Italy in their thousands, to be employed as domestic workers or in factories, especially in the textile districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Here, they joined other migrants recruited through the European Volunteer Workers scheme, a government-led operation aimed at sourcing manpower from mainland Europe. The Official Italian Scheme was one of such recruitments, but one of the least investigated.

The present research begins by studying the process of recruitment of young Italian women, within the wider context of Italy's post-war emigration policies and its diplomatic relations with Great Britain.

Subsequently, the research focuses on the entry of Italian women in the textile districts of Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Yorkshire and the process of their integration within British society

Finally, the thesis examines the attitudes of Catholic missionaries in Britain, the Italian expatriate community, the implications arising from mixed marriages and the formation of new multicultural families.

*I wish to dedicate this dissertation
to the memory of Professor Ferdinando Cordova*

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List of Abbreviations

CGIL - Italian General Confederation of Labour (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro)

CISL - Confederazione Italiana Sindacati dei Lavoratori

ENPI - Ente Nazionale Prevenzione Infortuni

EVW - European Volunteer Workers Schemes

FLC - Foreign Labour Committee

MdE - Ministero degli Esteri

MdL - Ministero del Lavoro

NSHC - National Service Hostels Corporation

OIS - Official Italian Scheme

PCI - Italian Communist Party

ULMO - Uffici del Lavoro e della Massima Occupazione

UNRRA -United Nations' Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

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INTRODUCTION

“Migration is not unlike a wedding celebration, it takes two. Actually, in this case, it takes three: the country of origin, the country of destination, the citizen who moves” thus spoke the Italian minister of Labour Amintore Fanfani as he addressed the Italian Parliament on the 26th of October 1948.¹ In the following years, Fanfani’s ministry occupied a central role in the organisation of such weddings as, according to Donna Gabaccia “well into the 1960s, Italy’s government functioned as a labor agent to direct migrants to foreign work places”.²

This new wave of Italian migration is strikingly different from its predecessor, the great exodus that occurred at the turn of the nineteenth century, as, to paraphrase Gabaccia again, the liberal principle according to which people possessed the natural right to move wherever they liked disappeared in the face of twentieth-century nationalism.³

Italian post-war migration was, therefore, a phenomenon regulated by nations through the implementation of bilateral agreements, promoted and organised by institutional

¹ The English translation is mine. This is the original Italian speech: “Per l’emigrazione è un po’ come per gli sposalizi: bisogna essere in due. Anzi, in questo caso in tre: il paese che invia, il paese che riceve, il cittadino che va. The transcript of this speech is contained in the following volume: Camera dei Deputati, *Atti Parlamentari anno 1948, Discussioni dal 16 Ottobre 1948 al 17 Novembre 1948*, Rome, 1948. I acknowledge a debt to Michele Colucci’s book for bringing it to my attention. Michele Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L’emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57* (Roma: Donzelli, 2008).p.225.

² Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas, Global Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000). p.227.

³ Ibid.

bodies. This created the grounds for migration experiences which were much less likely to occur in the context of traditional forms of spontaneous, individual emigration.

Within the framework of the agreements signed by Italy and Great Britain, we find the ‘anomaly’ that constitutes the object of this study: the recruitment of young Italian women for British industries: 2000 Italian women were employed by the textile manufactures of Lancashire and Yorkshire just in the years 1949-51, within the context of a wider recruitment strategy aimed at importing European workers to Britain, known as European Volunteer Workers Schemes (EVW). Other contingents of Italian women were selected for other sectors such as domestic service, and the tin-plate industry.

This research will focus on the recruitment of women within the textile sector. Despite the fact that it involved a smaller number of migrant-workers compared to the recruitments for domestic service (an estimate of 2000 women per year in the years 1950-55), the selection of textile workers was the operation that started off what is known as the Official Italian Scheme (OIS), and it is the one that has left the most conspicuous ‘paper trail’ in the archival documentation produced by the relevant government bureaus. Also, the regulatory framework put in place for the textile recruitments in the years 1949-51, served as a template for the recruitment of more textile workers in the following years and, to some extent, for the recruitments of workers for other sectors as well.

There is also another consideration that makes the textile sector an ideal case study: English textile manufactures have historically been concentrated within delimited areas, Greater Manchester, and the counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire.⁴ This allowed Italian

⁴ As Greater Manchester has not been formally a part of Lancashire since 1974, this research will try, wherever possible to distinguish between the two, or specify whichever boroughs are concerned. However,

workers employed in the English mills to establish, if not a ‘Little Italy’ of sorts, at least a social network of fellow-Italians.

Manchester did in fact have a pre-existing small Italian community, established in the central Ancoats area from the late nineteenth century onwards and, therefore, a circuit of restaurants, shops and social venues through which the new wave of migrants could, to some extent, come in contact with fellow Italians. Other cities and towns around which textile mills were clustered, such as Lancaster, Preston or Bradford, in Yorkshire, were not home to a pre-existing Italian community, nevertheless, the high number of Italian and other foreign workers settling in these areas meant that here, textile workers did not have to endure the spatial segregation and geographic dispersion that characterised the experience of domestic workers. In the course of the present research we will see as, in time, the geographic context will become more important and how textile districts became a crossroad of the personal and professional trajectories of Italian textile workers.

The following sections of this introduction will offer an overview of the various sets of scholarly works related to the topic of the present research; a summary of the key debates that it will address; and some considerations about methodology, and source-material which have informed its agenda and organisation. Finally, the last two sections will include an overview of the dissertation’s structure and main topics and information about the documentation and data employed.

because the events discussed have happened before this date, most of the documentation used ignores this distinction. As we will see, most documents mentioning the cotton manufacture districts (as opposed to the wool manufactures for which Yorkshire is famous) that refer generally to the ‘Lancashire’ area, would have considered Greater Manchester and the Merseyside included in such definition.

Gender Matters – Thoughts on migration history, recent developments and the use of sources

‘The citizen who moves’ mentioned by Minister Fanfani, is a slippery and elusive subject in migration studies. In the post-war context, the movement of labour within Europe has been so institutionalized and heavily regulated at both ends of the migration route that traditional academic literature has, for a long time, overlooked the specificity of the workers involved, regarding them, to use Eleonore Kofman’s definition, as “passive agents tossed around in the turbulent seas of international capitalism”.⁵ This can be partly explained by taking into account the theoretical landscape that shaped scholarly literature on migration up till the late 1980s. Some scholars, such as Castles, have focussed on the study of the normative and economic context that surrounded migration. Others looked at migrants as a collective subject, as ethnic communities, in line with an interpretative strand that studied these communities and their relationship with their host-country, focussing on processes such as assimilation. In the British context, works such as Kushner and Lunn’s *The Politics of Marginality*, or Panikos Panayi’s early study *Immigration, Ethnicity, and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945*, are authoritative examples of an overarching inquiry into the complex interplay between mainstream British culture and its migrant communities.⁶ This approach informs

⁵ Eleonore Kofman, *Gender and International Migration in Europe: Employment, Welfare and Politics, Gender, Racism, Ethnicity*. (London: Routledge, 2000). p.23.

⁶ Tony Kushner and Kenneth Lunn, *The Politics of Marginality : Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain, Immigrants and Minorities* (London: Cass, 1989), Panikos Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity, and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945, New Frontiers in History*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

some of the best known histories of the Italian community, such as Terri Colpi's *The Italian Factor*, or Anne-Marie Fortier's *Migrant Belongings*.⁷

As for Italian historiography, Matteo Sanfilippo observed in 2003 that "for decades, very few historians have focussed on this subject and the last moment of significant attention dated back to the years 1976-1980".⁸ According, again, to Sanfilippo, emigration was a topic that Italian historians avoided, either because it was reckoned to be the domain of scholars based in the 'receiving' countries or, perhaps, because it had been somehow expunged from Italian collective consciousness. Either way:

After having been closed in a ghetto, those who studied Italian migration have often developed a jargon and cultural features that produced a mechanism of self-ghettisation. Traditional historians don't read the work produced by migration historians and these, either as in retaliation or because of an excess of specialisation, have developed a language that is impenetrable to the uninitiated.⁹

The new millennium saw the emergence of germinal new studies dedicated to the history of Italian migration. Some of the best known examples, such as the collection of essays compiled in *Storia dell'emigrazione Italiana* of 2001 and Ludovico Incisa da Camerana's book *The Great Exodus*, clearly show a will to develop new perspectives that

⁷Terri Colpi, *The Italian Factor : The Italian Community in Great Britain* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1991), Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

⁸ "per decenni pochissimi si sono occupati di questo argomento e che l'ultimo momento di significativa attenzione datava al quinquennio 1976-1980". Matteo Sanfilippo, "Emigrazione Italiana: Il Dibattito Storiografico Nel Nuovo Millennio," *Studi Emigrazione*, no. 150 (2003). p.378.

⁹"Dopo essere stati chiusi in un ghetto, gli studiosi delle migrazioni italiane hanno spesso elaborato un gergo e una fisionomia culturale tali da produrre un meccanismo di auto ghettizzazione. Gli storici tradizionali non leggono gli studiosi dell'emigrazione e questi, per ripicca o per iperspecializzazione, s'inventano un linguaggio che li rende illeggibili per chi non sia un iniziato". Matteo Sanfilippo, *Emigrazione E Storia D'italia* (Cosenza: L. Pellegrini, 2003). p.10.

look beyond migration policy and statistical analysis, putting the emigrant-subject centre stage.¹⁰ In *Storia dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, much attention is given to 'migration strategies' of individuals, families and communities, social networks; the representations of emigration in popular culture; and, finally, the much neglected area of female migration. Camerana's study, on the other hand, is entirely centred, to the point of having been judged by many as somewhat 'sentimental', on the migrant's experience, the subjectivity of men (and to some extent women) on the move.

These are only two of the best known examples, within a scholarly landscape that has progressively enlivened and opened itself to the influences of international debate, of studies that have assumed men and women migrants as central to their inquiry, recognising them as the true protagonists of the migration experience.

The Issue of Gender within Migration Studies

The more historians began to seriously look at the figure of the migrant, the more this figure revealed itself as complex, difficult to inscribe within accepted paradigms, particularly the die-hard assumption that economic migration is an historical phenomenon that mainly concerned men.

Women were labour migrants too is the title that Paola Corti chose in 2002, for her essay on nineteenth-century migration of Italian women to France.¹¹ The recent years have

¹⁰ Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina, *Storia Dell'emigrazione Italiana: Partenze* (Roma: Donzelli, 2001), Ludovico Incisa Di Camerana, *Il Grande Esodo. Storia Delle Migrazioni Italiane Nel Mondo* (Milano: Corbaccio, 2003).

¹¹ Paola Corti "Women were labour migrants too: Tracing late-nineteenth-century female emigration from Northern Italy to France" in Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta, *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives : Italian Women around the World, Studies in Gender and History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Abingdon: Marston, 2002).

seen the appearance of a wealth of studies focusing on women migrants, and also of works which have challenged previous assumptions about its patterns and purposes; one of these assumptions being that while men migrated as “workers”, women migrated as “dependants” of a male breadwinner, even those who later set about earning wages in the host-country’s labour market.

As Bruna Bianchi has pointed out, the perceived quantitative disparity between female and male labour migration, even within the great exodus of the years 1876-1914 has been greatly overestimated. “Official data tends to underestimate female migration fluxes because they overlook all of those migrations which happened in irregular conditions and all the internal movements within the country, either seasonal or long-term”¹². Maddalena Tirabassi echoes Bianchi by observing that “only by reconstructing the economic role performed by women through their work both within and outside the home has it been possible to bring migrant women out of anonymity”. She goes further by suggesting that even those women who performed a more traditional role within a migrant family must be reintegrated into our research agenda, since “women were the ones who determined the successful outcome of the migratory experience, whether they moved or stayed behind”. In this way, the perceived smaller ratio of women involved in emigration flows will no longer be allowed to be “used as a justification for historiographical neglect”.¹³

¹² “D’altro canto, i dati ufficiali tendono a sottovalutare i flussi emigratori femminili poiché non comprendono le emigrazioni che avvenivano in condizioni di irregolarità, né gli spostamenti all’interno del paese per una stagione o per anni che facevano parte del normale orizzonte di vita delle donne.” Bruna Bianchi, *Lavoro ed emigrazione femminile*, in Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina, *Storia Dell'emigrazione Italiana: Partenze*, p.257

¹³ “Solo ricostruendo il ruolo esercitato dalle donne in campo economico sia attraverso il lavoro domestico che extradomestico è stato possibile far uscire le donne migranti dall’anonimato. In secondo luogo incorporando a pieno titolo anche le donne che restarono in patria nell’agenda migratoria. Furono infatti loro a permettere il ritorno degli uomini, ad amministrare le rimesse, a pagare i debiti, oltre che a seguire i mariti all’estero,

Donna Gabaccia, both in her own work and in the essay-collections she has co-edited, has promoted a line of inquiry into the lives of Italian women migrants in a transnational, cross-cultural perspective.¹⁴ These books, bringing together the findings of Italian researchers with those studying Italian communities within their host nations, explored the role of women in the creation and perpetuation of the 'Italian identity'. What is more, they advocated the need to study migration from a multidisciplinary perspective:

Until the mid-1990s, most reviews of scholarly literature focused on single disciplines ... In the intervening years [...] the study of immigration and migration has become more self-consciously interdisciplinary, and women-centred research has shifted toward, and to some degree has been supplanted by, the analysis of gender.¹⁵

These are interesting considerations because, in parallel with what was happening in the world of historical research, social sciences have focussed on current international trends in migration as a key research field, and this has enabled interesting exchanges and cross-pollinations between the various disciplines. As global migration flows are undergoing a progressive 'feminisation', it is within social and political studies that we have seen, in recent years, some of the most significant attempts to address the challenges that gender poses to the migration paradigm and the development of a questioning, theoretical approach that goes beyond an endless collection of case-studies. Donna Gabaccia, again,

attuando in tal modo la condizione primaria per rendere definitivo il progetto migratorio." Maddalena Tirabassi, *Le emigrate italiane:dalla ricerca locale a quella globale*, in Matteo Sanfilippo, *Emigrazione E Storia D'Italia, I Quaderni Del "Giornale Di Storia Contemporanea"* (Cosenza: L. Pellegrini, 2003). Pp. 179-180.

¹⁴ Loretta Baldassar and Donna R. Gabaccia, *Intimacy and Italian Migration : Gender and Domestic Lives in a Mobile World* (New York: Fordham University Press), Gabaccia and Iacovetta, *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives : Italian Women around the World*.

¹⁵ Katharine M. Donato et al., "A Glass Half Full? Gender in Migration Studies," *International Migration Review* 40, no. 1 (2006). p.4.

has pioneered such developments in the United States from as early as 1992, by editing the papers presented for the conference “Women in the Migration Process”.¹⁶ In Italy as well, the interdisciplinary approach has recently produced interesting results, such as the 2006 volume *Migrazioni al femminile*, a collection of conference papers that looks at contemporary global female labour migration through several different disciplinary approaches.¹⁷ Here, we find analyses of the exclusion/inclusion dynamics that affect the life and work of migrant women and explorations of the gendered terms in which work is conceptualised today that should well be kept in mind by historians as well.

As we have said, the gender bias that characterised so much of traditional migration history has been justified by the traditionally held belief that the number of women involved in economic migration was negligible. It is important to note that, in this respect, statistical considerations proved distracting to the point that the documented exceptions have not until recently attracted the attention of researchers.¹⁸ This brings us to the subject of the present research: the fact that, after the Second World War, Italian female migration to the UK has been consistent enough to flip, for the first time, the gender ratio of the overall British-Italian community in favour of women has been mentioned in passing by only a few historians, namely Umberto Marin back in 1975, and more recently by Lucio Sponza.¹⁹

¹⁶ See on this subject: Donna Gabaccia, *Seeking Common Ground : Multidisciplinary Studies of Immigrant Women in the United States : Conference Entitled "Women in the Migration Process"* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Maria I. Macioti, Gioia Vitantonio, and Paola Persano, eds., *Migrazioni Al Femminile* (Macerata: EUM, 2006).

¹⁸ One such exception being the 20th century Irish migration, on which there is now a consistent literature, see: Pauline Jackson, *Migrant Women : The Republic of Ireland 1987* (Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs Education: Commission of the European Communities, 1987). Mary Lennon, Marie McAdam, and Joanne O'Brien, *Across the Water : Irish Women's Lives in Britain* (London: Virago, 1988).

¹⁹ These studies are: Umberto Marin, *Gli Italiani in Gran Bretagna, Sussidi E Documentazioni* (Rome: Centro Studi Emigrazione, 1975). and Lucio Sponza and Arturo Tosi, *A Century of Italian Emigration to Britain, 1880-1980s : Five Essays, The Italianist. No.13 Supplement ;* (Reading: [s.n.], 1993). Colin Holmes and Neil

Italian post-war women migrant to Britain have not yet, however, been the subject of focussed inquiry.

According to Louise Ackers, the inability to look beyond the “male-breadwinning family as the basis of social organisation” demonstrated by so much academic literature, has conveniently translated into explanations of migration behaviour, and affected the way scholars have framed their research agenda:

Migration is [seen as a] primarily economically and male-determined with an initial phase of male pioneer migration followed by a phase of passive family reunion migration as wives and children join the economically-established breadwinner.²⁰

Such assumptions are responsible for the delay with which mainstream migration theory has looked into those case-studies that did not conform to this model. More importantly, these assumptions have in themselves behaved as historical agents, influencing not just our knowledge of migrations but migration policy as well. In many respects, they have shaped the ways in which migration ‘happened’. To quote Ackers’ example of the European Union:

Such ‘common sense’ presumptions, rendered credible and respectable by mainstream migration theory, have doubtless informed policy making structures within the European Union, committed to securing labour mobility within the Single Market. [...] As long as migration is conceptualised in essentially gendered terms, the barriers identified, and the solutions developed, will also be gendered.²¹

Evans, *John Bull's Island : Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

²⁰ Louise Ackers, *Shifting Spaces: Women, Citizenship and Migration within the European Union* (Bristol: Policy, 1999). p.9.

²¹ Ibid.

Ackers here is referring mainly to the study of recent or current migration flows and the interplay between academia and policy. It could be argued that migration history is in this respect an exception, because of the often considerable length of time that stands between the researcher and his/her subject. This is not, however, always the case and it is not hard to come by examples of how academic research has mirrored or been affected by contemporary ideas within governmental policy. An example of this is a 1958 study by J.A. Tannahill, a civil servant who had been personally involved in the recruitment of east-European refugees for the European Volunteer Workers schemes.

Tannahill was a government official turned academic, who drew from his work experience in the Ministry of Labour and the privileged access he had to official documentation to produce a research for Manchester University. As Tannahill himself recognised in the introduction to his volume “It was also a great advantage that the Ministry of Labour was willing to open its files to one of its own staff, as it could not have done for an outside research worker”.²²

Tannahill’s study sits at the intersection between academic research and government policy and, as we will see frequently in the following chapters, it can be read both as one of the earliest scholarly texts concerning EVWs and as a documentary source, a representation of the mentality and objectives expressed in both environments (officialdom and academia) at the time. His examination of the British management of the recruitments never questions the Authorities’ attitudes, the criteria they utilised and the purposes of the schemes. His

²² John Allan Tannahill, *European Volunteer Workers in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958). p.3.

unquestioning mind-set is somehow striking to the modern reader. As we will see, those in charge of selecting workers for the EVW schemes were following quite different criteria in the recruitment of women compared to men. These differences are symptomatic of the ‘gendered terms’ in which labour was conceptualised in the minds of the personnel in charge. As a result, the women employed through the schemes did not benefit from some of the entitlements awarded to men, such as the possibility to bring with them family dependants. We will dwell on this subject more extensively in Chapter One, as it had considerable repercussions on the successive recruitment of Italian women as well. It is interesting to note, however, that Tannahill was well aware that women were getting a rougher deal, he recognised that this unequal treatment was in fact preventing the recruiters from fulfilling their target quota of women, and yet he does not once question the criteria followed by the Ministry of Labour; the logic behind them, whatever it was, was taken entirely for granted.

Gender bias in documentary evidence

We have seen how assumptions regarding gender have influenced historical literature on migration. Because labour migration has been consistently conceptualised in gendered terms, as revolving around the male ‘bread-winner’ figure, both by academic research and policy, such terms have shaped and informed the documentary sources historians rely on to study the subject.

Because of such gendered considerations, the material produced in the post-war

years by the organisations involved in the support of Italian migrant workers, such as Trade Unions or Catholic organisation, hardly ever mention women workers. One could well read every issue of those publications targeted at delivering information and support to Italian migrants, such as the “*Bollettino Quindicinale per L’Emigrazione*” or “*L’Emigrato Italiano*”, from cover to cover and still remain ignorant of the fact that so many women left Italy after the Second World War to live and work abroad.

The same criticism of neglect applies to the documentation produced by Italy’s most important Trade Unions’ association, CGIL (the Italian General Confederation of Labour) and also by its British counterpart, the TUC; it is striking how little material has been produced by the two union associations on the subject of female foreign workers. Here we see confirmed how gender bias still hinders the work of the historian, not just because it renders virtually unavailable relevant information but also because it shapes and defines what sources exist, indeed it becomes in itself “the source”.

Thousands of Italian women travelled to Britain as workers, and many of those who migrated as ‘family dependants’ were largely absorbed by the local labour market – in 1961 there were 13.910 Italian women employed in Britain, against a total of 19.500 Italian men.²³ Yet, as we will see, the “traditional” sources available – such as archival documentation, official fact-finding reports, newspapers etc – reflect the ways that gender roles in the family and the work place were thought of at the time, the subaltern status of female work outside the home.

This means that what limited sources are available must be studied critically. It also

²³These figures can be found in Marin, *Gli Italiani in Gran Bretagna*. Appendix, Table XXI, p. 183.

means that we must rely on other tools and methodologies that have enabled historians to document and investigate women's lives. Non-traditional sources, for example, recorded interviews, need therefore be used alongside the more traditional sources as they are effective in bringing to light the experiences of those subjects, such as working-class women, who would otherwise remain silenced; this was importantly demonstrated by Elisabeth Roberts's excellent studies of British women and working-class communities, which were based largely on interviews.²⁴ As Linda McDowell reflects in the introduction to her study of Latvian women migrants to Britain "Work drawing on oral histories and other biographical sources has begun to uncover alternative memories, insisting on the redrafting of a singular public memory, challenging the singularity of 'public memory' and its denial of diversity and difference".²⁵ Her work clearly demonstrates how memory can be used both to record the lives of women which are virtually invisible within the scope of traditional sources and how the data collected can be used to bring together and add to various wider debates about immigration to Britain and the role of women within ethnic communities.

As the present research is also concerned with relating the case-study of Italian textile women with the 'bigger picture', interviews and accounts of women migrants directly involved in the OIS scheme will be used frequently, both as a means to integrate the more traditional sources and to verify the claims and conclusions found within the small bibliography connected with the subject of Italian textile workers in post-war Britain. These

²⁴ See: Elisabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place : An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: 1984).

²⁵ Linda McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers* (London and Portland: UCL Press; Cavendish Pub., 2005). p.24.

interviews will be employed as means to bring to the fore issues that the other available sources neglect: the subjective experience of women workers as they were ‘processed’ through the various stages of their migration; the many ways in which they responded to their new local environments, the work place etc.; the choices they made in relation to family, marriage and work. An overview of the criteria followed in the selection of respondents and the ways in which their accounts were collected and transcribed, is provided in the last section of this introduction.

The Country of Origin and the Country of Destination – Post-war Migration History in Italy and Great Britain

But let us now go back to the Italian minister and his choice metaphor. Mr Fanfani had a point: for migration to have happened (legally at least) in the historical context we are considering, when multilateral agreements on European Integration and plans for free labour circulation within the EU were at their very earliest stages, two nations such as Italy and Great Britain needed to find concerted solutions to such a wide array of problems that the efforts involved could well be jokingly compared to the planning of a rather expensive wedding. In the following chapters much of the legal framework concerning migration of workers from Italy to Great Britain in the post-war decade and the relationship between the two governments will be described and analysed. But before this, it would be useful to first gain an understanding of the normative framework that surrounded the implementation of

the Official Italian Scheme. For this purpose, we consider below both the archival documentation and existing bibliography on Italian migration in the post-war years' immigration to the United Kingdom, and British policies regarding foreign workers.²⁶

The European Volunteer Workers Schemes

As we have already noted, the British recruitment of Italian workers began as part of a wider effort to import European workers for the nation's under-manned industries. The EVW Schemes targeted 'Displaced Persons' from German refugee camps and, subsequently, extended to include workers from Germany, Austria and Italy. These schemes have attracted the attention of UK-based historians as a context from which to examine British attitudes towards 'aliens', particularly in terms of colour and race.²⁷ What follows is a brief outline of the key issues discussed in some of these studies and their relevance to the case of Italian migrants. The recruitment of workers from other European countries, after all, anticipates by a few years the entry of progressively conspicuous waves of migrants

²⁶On the subject of Italian Emigration see: Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina, *Storia Dell'emigrazione Italiana: Partenze*. For Britain see: Kushner and Lunn, *The Politics of Marginality : Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain*, Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity, and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945*, Panikos Panayi, *The Impact of Immigration : A Documentary History of the Effects and Experiences of Immigrants in Britain since 1945, Documents in Contemporary History*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999). James Walvin and Company Channel Four Television, *Passage to Britain : Immigration in British History and Politics, A Pelican Original* (Harmondsworth: Penguin in association with Belitha Press, 1984).

²⁷ Such literature is all quite recent and, as yet, not vast. This might be because of, according to Louise Ryan and Wendy Webster, *Gendering Migration : Masculinity, Femininity and Ethnicity in Post-War Britain, Studies in Migration and Diaspora*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). "A characteristic opposition between Britishness as white and 'immigrants' as black and Asian which developed in the post-1945 era sustained the idea of Britain as an ethnically homogeneous nation, disrupted only by post-war developments. Such an opposition obscured the history of migration before 1945 – predominantly Irish and Jewish – [...] Such an opposition also obscured the continuities between the pre-1945 period and the post-1945 periods, both characterised by significant migration from Europe". The lack of interest in the history of refugees from Europe to Britain was also noticed, back in 1999 by Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide : Global, National and Local Perspectives During the Twentieth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1999).

from Asia, Africa and the West-Indies. Historians such as Panikos Panayi and sociologists such as Robin Cohen, have brilliantly documented and reflected on the conflicts that this new wave brought to a country which had only just begun adjusting to its much diminished role in the new post-war world order and its problematic relationship with perceived “otherness”.²⁸ The different sets of obstacles encountered by EVWs on the one hand, and Asian and Caribbean migrants on the other, on the path towards their integration into society seem to denote what McDowell defined “ the malignant resonance” that preoccupations with skin colour have had in the history of post-war multicultural Britain.²⁹ This, as we will see, is a question that much of the recent literature on post-war British immigration is intently focused upon.

In such a context the effort to secure the labour of white Europeans has been described by Kathleen Paul as one of the many initiatives undertaken by the British establishment to “whitewash Britain”.³⁰ European labour seemed to have been regarded as far more absorbable, in the medium and long term, than non-white workers from the Commonwealth. But in a country so unsettled by the perceived violation of its frontiers, real and imagined, were EVWs really so readily absorbed? And were Italians viewed in the same way as their European counterparts? As Paul points out, the appreciative references to the physical vigour and character of northern and eastern EVWs found in much of the British public discourse of the time, seem to hint at an expectation that these migrants

²⁸ Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity, and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945*. Robin Cohen, *Frontiers of Identity : The British and the Others*, Longman Sociology Series (London ; New York: Longman, 1994).

²⁹ McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*. p. 195.

³⁰ Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain : Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1997).

would improve, in almost eugenic terms, the future ‘British stock’. These studies, however, rarely consider the Official Italian Scheme in their interpretation of the EVWs as a strategy to ‘keep Britain white’. The way in which Italian people were portrayed by the British media and in the ministerial correspondence of those in charge of the recruitments, all seem to reveal stereotypical ideas about ‘Latin people’, their temperament and an underlying uneasiness about these new Italian communities. It is doubtful whether the recruitment of Italians corroborates or not these interpretations about Britain’s agenda on European foreign workers.³¹

European Volunteer Workers were named this way in an attempt to make their presence appear less threatening to the British public by circumventing the stigma attached to those known as Displaced Persons: their recruitment was generally portrayed in the public discourse as a humanitarian gesture.³² In such a context, historians have observed a real divergence between the humanitarian justification used to gain internal support for the recruitment schemes and the very opportunistic practice of cherry picking the healthier, more useful workers, even if it meant separating entire families or refusing entry to people who faced great danger.³³ As the regulatory framework applied to these first schemes of *Baltic Cygnet* and *Westward Ho!* was largely used also as a template for the Official Italian Scheme, it will be interesting to evaluate the impact of the British government’s agenda on

³¹ The ideas about Italian people’s suitability and “Latin temperament” expressed by the British government officials involved in the recruitment process are well identified in the aforementioned brief but illuminating article: Joseph. Behar, “Diplomacy and Essential Workers: Official British Recruitment of Foreign Labor in Italy, 1945-1951,” *Journal of Policy History* Volume 15, no. 3 (2003).

³² This phenomenon is explored in the following: Diana Kay and Robert Miles, *Refugees or Migrant Workers? European Volunteer Workers in Britain, 1946-51* (London: Routledge, 1992).

³³ *Ibid.* but also: Paul, *Whitewashing Britain : Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*. pp. 80-81 and Stephen Castles, Heather Booth, and Tina Wallace, *Here for Good : Western Europe's New Ethnic Minorities* (London: Pluto, 1984).

the concrete experiences of the migrants selected between 1946 and 1951. Were these migrants indeed ‘tossed around in the turbulent seas of international capitalism?’

Inter-European Migration and Diplomacy

Another issue that has attracted much scholarly interest is the relationship between inter-European migration in the post-war era and the simultaneous development of European integration and economic co-operation.³⁴ The most authoritative opinions concur in recognising that bilateral agreements between nations, such as those concerning immigration, performed an important role in the context of international diplomatic relations, in a climate in which the agendas and expectations of the various partner-nations diverged.³⁵ Authors such as Stephen George have described Britain’s traditionally distrustful attitude towards European integration and its opposition both to free circulation of labour within partner nations and to whatever resolutions were perceived as posing limitations to state-sovereignty in favour of strong European integration.³⁶ The wishes of the Italian governments of the time could not have been more different and the two countries, therefore, were on diametrically opposed fronts³⁷. In Michele Colucci’s study of Italian labour migration in Europe, we see how, in the vision of Italy’s prime minister Alcide De

³⁴ Franco Romero, *Migration as an Issue in European Interdependence and Integration: The case of Italy*, in Alan S. Milward, *The Frontier of National Sovereignty : History and Theory, 1945-92* (Routledge, 1993). Desmond Dinan, *Ever Closer Union : An Introduction to European Integration*, 3rd ed., *The European Union Series* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

³⁵ See – as an example drawn directly from the case of Italian-British relations: Behar, "Diplomacy and Essential Workers: Official British Recruitment of Foreign Labor in Italy, 1945-1951."

³⁶ Stephen George, *Britain and European Integration since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

³⁷ Federico Romero, *Emigrazione E Integrazione Europea, 1945-1973, Studi Di Storia* (Roma: Lavoro, 1991).

Gasperi, the themes of inter-European co-operation and free labour circulation were closely connected. But Colucci also noted that the Italian government sometimes accepted a less favourable deal for its migrant workers in an effort to secure a better settlement of other important issues, such as in the case of the immigration agreements signed by Italy and France in February 1946, when Italy was still trying to obtain a more satisfactory rearrangement of its north-eastern borders.³⁸

So was it the case that Italian migrants, compared to the rest of their European counterparts, received a rougher deal? Had the compromising attitude of the Italian government reduced the options available to young women workers, made their migration experience somewhat harder? Such questions will be examined in the first two chapters of this work. In connection with this enquiry, it is useful however to bear in mind that once the *Official Italian Scheme* was interrupted, in 1951, recruitment of Italian workers continued thanks to the initiative of single private employers and industries, resulting in the lifting of some of the rigidities that characterised the previous government-driven recruitments.

The Domestic Actors

Finally, returning once again to Minister Fanfani's analogy, the present study will consider the role played by other important guests and witnesses, all in one way or another closely involved in the successful outcome of this marriage. Apart from the various ministries and governmental agencies involved in the practical running of international recruitment

³⁸ Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. p.47.

schemes, migration – as a process – involves many other ‘domestic actors’: the local administrations of the areas most affected by the departure/arrival of workers; the industries that employed migrants; the Trade Unions of both countries; and, finally, all the religious organisations, charities and clubs which care for and support immigrant communities. It has been recognised that “ political forces internal to migrant receiving countries are important determinants of migration [flows]” and yet, arguably, the same applies for the internal forces existing within the countries of origin as well.”³⁹

The influence of one the most important secondary actors, the Catholic church, can be seen as operating simultaneously at both ends of the migration route. In Italy, the Church exerted its influence through the activity of one of most powerful Trade Union organisations, the Confederazione Italiana Sindacati dei Lavoratori (CISL) and its local sections, the “ACLI”. In Britain, as we will see, the ministry and pastoral care performed by Italian Catholic missionaries became one of the key ‘binding-agents’ of the new Italian communities.⁴⁰ Did such community-building efforts facilitate or hinder the migrants’ integration in British society? And how did the views of Catholic ministers regarding women and their role within the family affect the lives of women who had settled in a country perceived as much more secular than Italy at the time? These are questions which

³⁹ Sharon Stanton Russell and Michael S. Teitelbaum, *International Migration and International Trade* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1992).p.5.

⁴⁰ The Vatican *Pontificio Collegio per L’Emigrazione* was reactivated in 1949 and entrusted to the administration of the Missionary Congregation of the Scalabriniani Order. See: Paolo Borruso, *Missioni Cattoliche Ed Emigrazione Italiana in Europa 1922-58* (Rome: Istituto Storico Scalabriniano, 1994), Gianfausto Rosoli, *Insieme Oltre Le Frontiere: Momenti E Figure Dell’azione Della Chiesa Tra Gli Emigrati Italiani Nei Secoli Xix E Xx*. (Caltanissetta, Rome: Salvatore Sciascia Editore, 1996). On Italian Trade Unions see: L. Bertuccelli, "Politica Emigratoria E Politica Estera: Il Ruolo Del Sindacato," in *La Riscoperta Delle Americhe : Lavoratori E Sindacato Nell’emigrazione Italiana in America Latina, 1870-1970*, ed. Emilio Franzina Vanni Blengino, Adolfo Pepe (Milano: Teti, 1994), Paolo Zanetti Polzi, *Lavoro Straniero. Cgil E Questione Migratoria Dal 1945 Ad Oggi* (Milano: Archivio del Lavoro, 2006). Claudio Calvaruso, *Emigrazione E Sindacati* (Rome: Centro studi emigrazione, 1975).

will be considered in Chapter 4. As Matteo Sanfilippo notes, much of the scholarly literature investigating the history of Catholic apostolate overseas and the church's support of migrants has been produced by Catholic research institutes.⁴¹ There are, therefore, limits to how much we can expect this literature to seriously question the behaviour of Catholic hierarchies and missions.

The last domestic actors we need to introduce are the British trade unions. As Colucci has accurately described in his study of the failed recruitment of Italian workers for British coal mines, trade unions were strongly opposed to the government's plans to import EVWs.⁴² British Unions effectively lobbied both government and employer-organisations and succeeded in imposing several limitations in order to contain the number of foreign recruits. There is very little literature, however, regarding how local trade unions, particularly in the textile sector, dealt with migrant workers on a day to day basis and how they were regarded by the workers themselves. Those studies that have looked into the relationship between British Unions and foreign workers, such as the afore-mentioned study by Castles and Kosack of 1985,⁴³ are now quite dated, and most of them are limited by their focus on the issue of race and colour⁴⁴. One of the very few exceptions, in this respect, is a paper published in 2008 by Hallet, Phillips and Abendstern, on the subject of local trade

⁴¹ Matteo Sanfilippo, *Chiesa, Ordini religiosi ed Emigrazione*, in Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina, *Storia Dell'emigrazione Italiana: Partenze*. p. 141.

⁴² Michele Colucci, *Chiamati, Partiti E Respinti: Minatori Italiani Nella Gran Bretagna Del Secondo Dopoguerra* (Roma: Studi Emigrazione, 2003).

⁴³ Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁴⁴ See for example Peter L. Wright, *The Coloured Worker in British Industry. With Special Reference to the Midlands and North of England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968). Ambalavaner Sivanandan, *Race, Class and the State: The Black Experience in Britain*, *Race and Class Publications* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1978).

unionist attitudes towards foreign workers within the textile sector, particularly EVWs, which we will come back to again in the following chapters.⁴⁵ As this article clearly demonstrates, the acceptance of foreign workers depended greatly on the number of male workers that each trade union represented, as male-dominated unions were generally more powerful and were less accepting of immigrant workers, as will be seen.

Once again, the issue of gender proves itself to be a factor that cannot be discounted when looking at labour history. For the purpose of the present research, therefore, the work of authors, such as Sarah Boston, that have explored the unionist representation of women workers, particularly within the textile sector, and have questioned the degree of involvement of women in trade unionism, both in the British context and in a wider, global perspective, is a significant resource that informs both the investigation and the analysis that follows.⁴⁶

Chapter Outline

This research hopes to improve the knowledge on Italian women migrants in post-war Britain and to finally tell their story in some depth. To achieve this, a wide range of sources has been consulted, ranging from recorded testimonies to archival papers, both Italian and British, and newspapers, censuses, and surveys. The first chapter will examine the first

⁴⁵ Simon Phillips, Christine Hallett, and Michele Abendstern, "If We Depart from These Conditions...": Trade Union Reactions to European Immigrant Workers in the Textile Industry -1946-1952," *Labour History Review* 72, no. 2 (2007).

⁴⁶ Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Unions* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1987). See also Wendy Chapkis and Cynthia H. Enloe, *Of Common Cloth : Women in the Global Textile Industry* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 1983). And finally, Elizabeth Lawrence, *Gender and Trade Unions, Feminist Perspectives on the Past and Present* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994).

recruitments of Italian workers in the context of post-war relations between Britain and Italy, the EVW schemes and the policies of European countries in relation to labour, migration etc. Chapter Two will then focus on the various phases that characterised the journey of the workers from Italy to Britain; the terms of their employment; the ways in which they were recruited and selected for their new employment.

In Chapter 3, an examination of the workers' new daily life both in respect to their workplace and the local communities in which they settled is undertaken. This will include an appraisal of the hostel provisions for foreign workers, the availability of housing, factory life, work-mobility. This chapter will also provide an analysis of several issues that affected textile workers and their local communities at the time, such as the progressive decline of the British textile manufacture, diminished job-security, health and safety, Trade Union representation. Finally, Chapter 4 will consider the issue of integration by relating the experience of the workers involved, their accounts of life in Britain, family and work; also, this chapter will look into the concerns expressed by the Catholic church regarding the welfare of Italian women workers and the way these concerns have been dealt with by some academic research.

Source-Material, Interviews and Quotations – On selection, transcription and translation.

In the course of this dissertation, there will be frequent use of oral testimonies, transcribed. This material comes from two sources: the first is a series of interviews collected by the

author, from Italian women, who had come to Britain to become textile workers or who worked in the textile sector at some point of their working-life. All these women have settled in the Greater Manchester area, in boroughs such as Oldham, Bury or Ashton under Lyne. The interviews took place in the initial preparatory stage that preceded this work and the initial number of respondents approached was ten. The respondents were interviewed both individually, in a confidential setting, based on a standardised set of questions; and collectively, in the form of open-ended group interviews. From this initial collection of ten interviews, five have been selected to be quoted in the following chapters. There are two reasons behind this choice of narrowing the number of testimonies used: the main reason is that these accounts are not intended as a sample on which to draw a statistical analysis, but as narratives that allow us to view historical happenings through the ways in which they were perceived by some of the women who lived through them and also, as examples which may validate, or else complicate and problematise interpretations found elsewhere in the source material considered. Because of the importance of these retellings as ‘narratives’, as ‘subjective experiences’, it was felt that using all of the interviews would prove a distraction, as the reader would struggle to keep track of the identity of each respondent and the main developments of the lives they are describing. The second reason for the selection of the five interviews employed is their superior clarity in exposition and relevance, and the wealth of information volunteered in each of them. As the respondents are all well into old-age and have lost some degree of familiarity with their native language, some factors such as poor health, difficulty with language and memory loss have affected some interviews more than others.

All the interviews were conducted in Italian, as this is the language that the respondents were comfortable using when addressing the author and each other. The five interviews have been transcribed, in as much as possible, verbatim, although some ‘post-editing’, in the form of added punctuation, and the omission of some names or passages for the protection of the respondents’ identity and privacy, have been undertaken. The transcriptions are collected in an appendix to this dissertation.

In the English version of this dissertation, the extracts quoted from the interviews have been translated into English in the body of the text, while the original Italian can be found in the relevant foot-note. The names used - Annalisa, Gabriella, Lisa, Alba and Marina - are fictitious, for obvious reasons.

Although this research largely focuses on the Greater Manchester area and cotton manufacturing, there are several instances in Chapters Two, Three and Four, in which we will expand to consider the wool industry, and therefore, the Italian workers who settled in the area of Bradford, in Yorkshire. The author was not able to find Italian women as potential interviewees, however, the Bradford Sound Archive has preserved six recorded interviews of Italian textile workers, collected in 1984. These interviews differ from the ones collected for the purpose of this research, however, in that they were conducted in English and, to some extent, were based on a different set of questions. These interviews will be used in the text by quoting directly from the approved transcripts supplied by the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, and referenced in accordance with the Archives specifications. As the interviews are anonymous, the various respondents will be identified with letters of the alphabet, as Interviewee A, Interviewee B etc..

Lastly, a few comments on the documents quoted in the text. As some of the sources used are in English and some in Italian, they have all been translated wherever necessary (as in the case of English documents quoted in the Italian version of the dissertation and vice versa) quoted and referenced in accordance with university guidelines. As for the bibliographical sources, aside from the original text, wherever possible the author has used the published translation in existence. The quotations extracted from those books and articles which, to the best of the author's knowledge, have not appeared in translation, however, have been translated by the author with the original text provided in the relevant footnotes. The author apologises in advance for any existing published translations she may have overlooked.

1. Italian Migration in post-war Great Britain: The years of bilateral-agreements (1949-51)

Just like the other European workers entering Great Britain between the years 1946-51, Italians were employed through the following procedures: 1) Individual recruitments organised directly by British companies in need of labour and according to Umberto Marin 57% of Italian migrants, 14,275 individuals, were employed this way. 2) Collective recruitment schemes resulting from international agreements between British authorities and other European governments. These are the 175,000 migrants known as *European Volunteer Workers*.

As will be seen, individual recruitments largely followed in the steps of the EVW schemes, taking advantage of the standardised procedures for entry of workers in the UK put in place during the running of the programmes. This first chapter will look at these collective recruitments, especially the one involving Italian workers, the Official Italian Scheme, situating them within their historical context and describing in more detail how they were set-up.

Because of the bilateral nature of the agreements which gave the schemes their legal framework, this chapter will appear divided in two halves, each dedicated to the two countries involved, Great Britain and Italy. The role of Britain as the receiving country, and the assimilation of Italian textile workers in British society will of course be a constant theme running all through the present research. In this first chapter, however, the main objective will be to focus on a few key aspects of the nation's post war history: the elements which convinced British authorities to open the borders to European immigration and the ways in which they set about to make it happen. These factors had crucial importance in determining who was allowed in and who was denied entry – they determined, in fact, many of the options available to these foreign workers once they settled in the UK as well.

This chapter will describe the organisation and the running of the European Volunteer Worker Schemes with a special attention to the differences and similarities in the criteria applied during the selection process, in each scheme. These differences make clear what kind of migrants the British were hoping to attract and why. Men and women workers were selected according to different criteria based, it would appear, not just on nationality but also on gender. This raises the question, why was this so?

The most startling differences about the entitlements enjoyed by men and women within these schemes were relative to their marital status. Women workers were programmatically selected only amongst single and childless applicants and were not allowed to be rejoined by family members. This fact, according to the opinion of Catholic missionaries that came in contact with women textile workers and to the views expressed by historians such as Umberto Marin, affected their migration experience and their lives¹.

¹ Marin, *Gli Italiani in Gran Bretagna*. The views of Catholic missionaries will be discussed in more detail in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

According to these sources, a high rate of mixed marriages, personal isolation, unwanted pregnancies and broken family ties are just a few of the negative effects that resulted from the young age and single status of women labour migrants. The first section of this chapter will investigate the selection of unmarried Italian women, examining this process within the wider context of British labour recruitments of the time.

Finally, the second section will focus on Italy, the sender nation. The migrants entering Britain were, of course, only a small portion of the overall number of emigrants leaving Italy in the post-war years, though it has been observed that migration to European destinations absorbed a much higher percentage than ever before. Italy's effort to select workers for Britain's undermanned industries must be understood in the context of the many similar negotiations it was entering into at the time. The Italian government was actively encouraging the migration abroad of its many unemployed, by negotiating migration agreements not just with Britain, but also with France and Belgium, amongst others. The Italian government conducted itself during such negotiations as if amongst equal partners, yet, scholars such as Michele Colucci or Federico Romero have often pointed out that this equality of status existed in words alone.² As will be seen, in many cases, Italy could not secure the best working conditions for its migrants and this chapter will describe the negotiations that were behind the selection of women for British textile mills in an effort to establish if they were, in fact, a case in point or rather, an exception.

² Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*, Romero, *Emigrazione E Integrazione Europea, 1945-1973*.

The Italian Community in Britain before and after the Second World War

The new wave of Italian migration to Great Britain in the post-war years has been defined as the first example “within the century-old history of Anglo-Italian relations, of a real mass migration”³. It must be born in mind, however, that this phenomenon was preceded by an uninterrupted, though less conspicuous, stream of migrants, since the early nineteenth-century in particular, and that 18,000 people of Italian descent lived in Britain at the beginning of the Second World War⁴. Once Italy declared war against the Anglo-French alliance in June 1940, Italians residing in Britain were subjected to arrests and deportations by the British authorities and it is difficult to quantify the effects that these have had on the size of the community.⁵ As Umberto Marin points out in his history of Italians in Great Britain:

We said that Italian emigration restarted immediately after the war; but really, in the case of Great Britain, even the war could not interrupt this century-old coming and going, because after all the first contingents of Italians who moved to Britain were those mobilised by war itself: we are referring here to the prisoners and the so-called war brides.⁶

³ Marin, *Gli Italiani in Gran Bretagna*. p.88.

⁴ Data regarding the Italian population of Britain since 1945 has been taken from the British Census Records of 1951 and 1961, from the statistics compiled by the Italian Ministry of foreign Affairs for the years 1967, 1971, 1974. Data concerning the pre-war time have been taken from Ibid.

For Census Data cfr.: Census Great Britain and Office Great Britain. General Register, *Census 1951, England and Wales : General Tables, Comprising Population, Ages and Marital Condition, Non-Private Households, Birthplace and Nationality, Education* (London: H.M.S.O., 1956), Office Great Britain. General Register, *Census 1961, Great Britain, General Report* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1968).

⁵ Lucio Sponza, *Divided Loyalties : Italians in Britain During the Second World War* (Bern ; New York: P. Lang, 2000).

⁶ “Più sopra dicemmo che l’emigrazione italiana riprese nell’immediato dopoguerra; ma forse, almeno per

131,800 Italian prisoners of war were brought to Britain during the war years and repatriations began in 1946. Many Italian POWs had been awarded the status of “co-operators”, having accepted work to sustain the British war effort. In recognition for their efforts the British government offered them the possibility to remain in Britain and to be joined by their families if they so wished. Only 1,100 ex POWs, however, accepted the offer.

To this already uncertain estimate we must also add the aforementioned number of Italian “war brides”, women of Italian citizenship who entered the United Kingdom as wives of British subjects. Their precise number is unknown as all foreign women who married Britons before 1949 acquired British citizenship automatically and did not figure in the statistics of foreigners entering the UK. According to Umberto Marin, however, a total of 841 Italian individuals entered Great Britain in order to marry a British subject in the years between 1946 and 1951 and most of them were women. This data, therefore, appears to be strongly affected by where the marriages had taken place and it is impossible to ascertain how many Italian women who married British citizens in Italy subsequently moved to Britain. On the other hand, curiously, there is surprisingly precise information on the number of Italian men who entered the UK after their marriage to British women: a total of 57.

The figures quoted by Marin are in line with the ones contained in a survey on British Post-War migration, conducted by Julius Isaac and published in 1954, except for one

quello che riguarda la Gran Bretagna, neppure gli eventi bellici pregiudicarono il secolare andirivieni, se non altro perché i primi contingenti di italiani che nel dopoguerra si trasferirono in Gran Bretagna furono proprio quelli mobilitati dalla guerra: ci riferiamo ai prigionieri e alle cosiddette sposine di guerra.” Marin, *Gli Italiani in Gran Bretagna*. p. 89.

detail. According to Isaac the 841 Italian citizens who entered Britain between 1946 and January 1951 were all women which can be added to the mentioned figure of 57 Italian men.⁷

The uncertainty of these figures is, of course, not limited to the statistics regarding Italian migration but is the result of the more general and inevitable, according, again, to Isaacs “shortcomings of British migration statistics” during the war years, in which data “were collected for specific administrative purposes and not with a view to supplementing official migration statistics”⁸.

Between 1946 and 1951, 14,275 Italian migrants entered Britain. As a result, the Italian presence within Britain grew impressively: from 33,159 individuals according to the census data of 1951, to 81,327 in the Census of 1961.⁹ The real impact of this increase was probably greater than these figures would suggest since, as observed by Terri Colpi in her 1991 study of the British Italian community, census data only acknowledged those individuals who still had an Italian citizenship and not, for example, second or third generation Italians who nonetheless maintained feelings of close cultural and personal belonging to their land of origin.¹⁰ These numbers, therefore, do not represent adequately how big the Italian communities in Britain must have become as a result of these changes.

This new post-war migration wave introduced two important elements of novelty: until the 40s, the Italian community of Britain was a diverse and composite minority made up mostly of artisans, street-vendors and caterers; but now, the newcomers were employed

⁷ Julius Isaac, *British Post-War Migration*, National Institute of Economic and Social Research. *Occasional Papers*. No. 17 (University Press: Cambridge, 1954).p. 188.

⁸ Both passages are quoted from Ibid. p. 21.

⁹ Marin, *Gli Italiani in Gran Bretagna*. Appendix, Table XII, p.176.

¹⁰ Colpi, *The Italian Factor : The Italian Community in Great Britain*.

to fill the vacancies in British industries, particularly foundries, textile, rubber and pottery industries.¹¹ Workers were also needed as domestic servants and in hospitals, care homes and institutions. Recruitments, therefore, attracted people from the southern areas of Italy, where the post-war legacies of unemployment and insufficient investment were at their most acute. These new recruits were, largely, unskilled labourers fleeing the rural villages of Italy's *mezzogiorno*. According to the figures published by Marin in the appendix to his book, Italians entering Britain up until 1962 were mostly from the southern provinces of Avellino – 1,517 individuals – followed by Caserta, Agrigento, Benevento and Naples.¹²

The second novel element with regard to the post-war immigration of Italians to Britain was the high ratio of women amongst the newcomers. For the first time women outnumbered men in the total of Italians living in Britain, they constituted 61% of the overall Italian population, according to the Census of 1951, a rough total of 21,000 Italian women. This increase happened because British labour shortages affected sectors which relied on female labour, such as domestic work, which by itself co-opted an average of 2,000 Italian women per annum in the years between 1950-55. Factory work, too, employed a large number of women, especially in textile mills, potteries and tinplate manufactures.

In the summer of 1949, a pilot-recruitment of 50 Italian women, to be employed by textile companies in the district of Chorley, in Lancashire, started off what was known as the Official Italian Scheme (OIS). This scheme was organised by the Italian and British authorities and brought a total of 1,655 Italian women workers to Britain before it was abandoned in 1951. The OIS was discontinued because it was deemed too expensive and because it never managed to co-opt the number of workers that the Ministry of Labour was

¹¹ Lucio Sponza, "Gli Italiani in Gran Bretagna : Profilo Storico," *Altreitalie* 30 (2005).

¹² Marin, *Gli Italiani in Gran Bretagna*. Table XV p.177.

hoping to recruit. This scheme, as previously mentioned, opened a channel, putting in place standard procedures which soon enabled companies and private employers to recruit individual workers or entire contingents directly and apply to the Ministry for the issuing of work permits at a later date. What is more, those first government-driven recruitments reactivated traditional patterns of chain-migration which enabled each migrant to sponsor another prospective worker. Italian recruits, therefore, kept streaming to the UK, in their thousands, well into mid 1960s.

Great Britain and the Collective Recruitment Schemes: the European Volunteer Workers

Since coming into office in July 1945, the Labour government chaired by Clement Atlee had to face the problem of labour shortages, the most critically undermanned sectors being agriculture, coal mining, hospitals and sanatoriums, together with the textile, metallurgic and construction industries.¹³ In response to this emergency, 118,000 POWs were “imported” from the United States and Canada, while the ones already detained within British camps were allowed to remain in the UK if they so wished.

¹³ To summarise the history of the EVW Schemes I have used the following materials: Isaac, *British Post-War Migration*, McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*, Paul, *Whitewashing Britain : Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*, Elizabeth Stadulis, "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom," *Population Studies* 5, no. 3 (1952), Tannahill, *European Volunteer Workers in Britain*.

All of these early provisions were aimed at maximising the existing human resources and tapping into all possible reservoirs of man-power; a strategic campaign, which heavily relied on the mobilising power of the mass media, was launched in an attempt to persuade British women not to abandon the jobs they had taken up during the war effort. Similarly, the Labour government targeted senior workers, in an attempt to persuade them to remain in occupation a few years past their expected retirement age.

These measures, however, could only function as responses to the problem in the short term while, in the mean time, the potential further-reaching consequences of labour shortage were still being hotly debated. A survey compiled in 1942 by the Ministry of Health pointed out that the birth rate in the inter-war years had remained too low and estimated the need of 700.000 new births *per annum* – a 25% increase of fertility within the following 30 years – to save the British population from impending decline¹⁴.

According to Kathleen Paul in her study of British immigration policies, concerns regarding the demographic slump affected policy makers and made them look at immigration as one of the possible solutions. More than just seeking to promote internal employment it was now necessary to view the recruitment of foreign labourers in a different perspective: these workers had to be regarded, also, as possible new British citizens, fathers and mothers of the future Britons. According to Paul, “Policy makers clearly expected EVW to naturalise as British subjects, to marry men and women and ultimately to produce British children.”¹⁵

This interpretation completely subverts the traditional view that considered British recruitment of foreign labour as an effort to promote exclusively a migration of guest

¹⁴ Cmd. 6358, Current Trend of Population in Great Britain, H.M. Stationery Office, 1942.

¹⁵ Paul, *Whitewashing Britain : Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*. p.87

workers, conceived as short termed and with no prospects of future assimilation. Such was the opinion expressed by Stephen Castles in 1986:

In 1945, the British Government set up the European Voluntary Worker scheme, to recruit about 90,000 workers from refugee camps and later from Italy as well. Only single persons were eligible. They were not regarded as permanent residents, and their civil rights were severely restricted. Tied for three years to a job chosen by the Ministry of Labour, they were liable to deportation for misconduct or ill health, and single men and women recruited were rarely allowed to bring dependants with them.¹⁶

This judgment needs to be reviewed in the light of the more detailed knowledge acquired in recent years on the subject of the EVW schemes. As will be seen, it is not true that only single men and women were eligible and the number of workers subjected to deportation in the years following the implementation of the schemes was negligible. It is very interesting, however, to note how both Paul and, at the time, Castles, have moved from the same observation – the recruiters' preference for unmarried foreign workers – only to reach two completely opposite conclusions on whether these migrants were selected with a view to their long-term assimilation into British society.

Paul's thesis is validated by the contents of a 1952 survey compiled by Elisabeth Stadulis on behalf of the Population Investigation Committee, investigating the welfare of the Displaced Persons who had entered Britain in the previous years.¹⁷ Stadulis, in an introduction to her work, reflects on the fact that Britain had given its contribution to the problem of war refugees and displacement of people by accepting a quota of 87,000 DPs,

¹⁶ Stephen Castles, "The Guest-Worker in Western Europe - an Obituary," *International Migration Review* 20, no. 4 (1986).p. 762.

¹⁷ Stadulis, "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom."

but that such a choice had not been dictated by exclusively humanitarian concerns:

Fears of unemployment and economic catastrophe cast long shadows over post-war Britain. The Labour government's decision to import so many foreign workers was not expected to be a popular one and was not lightly taken. But it was influenced by two factors: the threat of a declining population, and declining production.¹⁸

In 1949, the Royal Commission on Population reported that, so long as the current birth-rate remained constant, it was necessary to set an annual target of 50,000 foreign workers to be brought to Britain in order to prevent the general ageing of the population.¹⁹

As exaggerated as these concerns were, they seem to have found a wide resonance in the parliamentary debates and in the press, and so did the idea that importing foreign labour could serve the dual purpose of filling man-power shortages and prevent the ageing trend of the British population. In order to identify possible sources of foreign labour and how to best direct them to the most needy productive sectors, the *Foreign Labour Committee* (FLC) was created in February 1946, under the responsibility of seven members of the cabinet; this Committee became the institutional propeller which planned and oversaw all projects regarding the recruitment of refugees and migrants coming from Europe.²⁰

The Polish Resettlement Corps

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 15.

¹⁹ Cmd 7695, Report of the Royal Commission on Population, H.M. Stationery Office, 1949.

²⁰ Lydia Morris, "Migrants and Migration," *Work Employment Society* 7, no. 3 (1993).

The first possible candidates identified by the FLC were a group of people who already had a strong connection with the United Kingdom – these were the Polish war veterans who had fought under the orders of the British military command and who refused to be repatriated into Poland now that Britain had formally recognised the Soviet government of Warsaw.²¹ Despite having received a solemn assurance from Winston Churchill that they would not be repatriated against their will, in the spring of 1946 these Poles were still stationed in various British military bases while the Attlee government was trying to facilitate their migration to third countries.

Now, however, the FLC proposed to invite them to settle in Britain with their families and the *Polish Resettlement Corps* was set up in order to facilitate the transition of these veterans from military to civil life.²² Out of the 114,000 Polish individuals who joined the PRC, 67,000 *ca* were recruited into various British productive sectors. Because the offer to Polish migrants was extended as a reward for their military contribution to the Allied victory, their employment was not subject to the restrictions which were later imposed to the EVWs. The majority of Polish workers, therefore, were able to choose their prospective occupations more freely and, as a result, the economic sectors which were in most desperate need of man-power, such as agriculture and industrial work, did not benefit from the PRC as much as anticipated. In addition, the new Polish workers were mostly men, so their employment did not help fill the vacancies of those sectors that traditionally required female

²¹ For a detailed account of the Polish Resettlement Corps scheme see Keith Sword, Norman Davies, and Jan Ciechanowski, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain 1939-1950 : The M. B. Grabowski Polish Migration Project Report* (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1989).

²² Keith R. Sword, "'Their Prospects Will Not Be Bright': British Responses to the Problem of the Polish 'Recalcitrants' 1946-49," *Journal of Contemporary History* 21, no. 3 (1986). Z Layton-Henry 'Britain: from immigration control to migration management', in Wayne A. Cornelius, ed., *Controlling Immigration : A Global Perspective*, 2nd ed. / edited by Wayne A. Cornelius [et al.] ed. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press ; London : Eurospan, 2004).

labour such as textile work and domestic service in hospitals and other institutions.

The Recruitment of European refugees: Westward Ho! and Baltic Cygnet

In order to find more foreign workers for British industries, FLC proposed to look at the various refugee camps, administered by the international organisation UNRRA (United Nations' Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) and, after 1947 IRO (International Refugee Organisation), mostly scattered in the three zones of occupied Germany.²³ Two years after the end of the war, a composite multitude of individuals were still held within these camps – former POWs, detainees of German labour and concentration camps, survivors of the Nazi political and racial persecutions as well as civilian families uprooted as a result of the “advancements and retrocessions of the eastern front”.²⁴

Soon enough, the British authorities began to look at this sad state of affairs as an opportunity to find new workers for under-manned industries and, at the same time, ensure that Great Britain was seen as being committed to contribute towards the solution of an acute humanitarian emergency. In October 1946, the Minister of Labour George Isaacs announced the imminent arrival of a first contingent of 1000 women, originally from the Baltic countries of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, selected amongst the DPs of the German zone administered by Great Britain. This was the preliminary stage of the *Baltic Cygnet* recruitment scheme, aimed at finding women to work in hospitals and sanatoriums; this

²³ Two recent and outstanding works on the subject of UNRRA camps and Displaced Persons in post-war Britain are: Guido Crainz, Raul Pupo, and Silvia Salvatici, eds., *Naufraghi Della Pace. Il 1945, I Profughi E Le Memorie Divise D'europa* (Rome: Donzelli, 2008). And Silvia Salvatici, *Senza Casa E Senza Paese : Profughi Europei Nel Secondo Dopoguerra* (Bologna Il Mulino, 2008).

²⁴“ la popolazione fuggita a seguito degli avanzamenti e delle retrocessioni del fronte orientale”, Silvia Salvatici, “Le displaced person, un nuovo soggetto collettivo”, in Crainz, Pupo, and Salvatici, eds., *Naufraghi Della Pace. Il 1945, I Profughi E Le Memorie Divise D'europa*.

program brought to Britain an estimated total of 2,126 Latvians.²⁵

A few months later another program, the *Westward Ho!* Scheme, was launched, and through this the British authorities were able to select 79,000 individuals of both sexes and various nationalities: Estonian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Ukrainian, Polish, Yugoslavian, Bulgarian and Rumanian, but also Czechs, Slovaks and Sudeten Germans.

What were the criteria of eligibility adopted by the British authorities? Regarding their skills, qualification and aptitude to work, the selection of prospective workers was carried out within the UNRRA camps and, after a first interview, the candidates were subjected to medical examination. In this phase, the refugees were not recruited in view of a specific occupation, which would only happen after their arrival on British soil – so the selection was performed on the basis of their general abilities and good health.

The personnel in charge, however, followed guidelines which depended largely, at any given moment, from the productive sector that was in most urgent need, so the criteria followed by the recruiters changed from time to time. The age limit, for example, fluctuated: according to Tannahill, a Ministry of Labour officer directly involved with the recruitments, an initial limit of 50 years old was imposed at the beginning for all male workers recruited within the *Westward Ho!* Scheme, with the occasional admission of individuals under 60. But when, in 1948, the only sector employing foreign workers was coal mining, the age limit was lowered to 36 years old.²⁶ In the case of women workers, the criteria followed within the *Baltic Cygnet* Scheme were more homogeneous and the age limits set between 18 and 40 years old; the same limitations were applied, not too rigidly, to women recruited within *Westward Ho!*.

²⁵ McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*. p.100.

²⁶ Tannahill, *European Volunteer Workers in Britain*. p.38.

Particular rules applied in regards to the possibility for each worker to bring with them or be joined by dependant family members. As will be seen, the regulations put in place in the *Baltic Cygnet* and the *Westward Ho!* Schemes served as a template for the subsequent recruitment schemes.

The young women recruited through these schemes had to be unmarried and were not allowed to bring any dependants – this is because, the recruiters considered as “dependants” only spouses and all under-age children. This practice, according to Tannahill, seriously jeopardised the success of the recruitment as even single women workers who were interested in migrating to Britain, were opposed to abandoning ageing parents or young siblings.²⁷ When selecting workers for *Westward Ho!*, British authorities were initially committed to facilitate the migration of family units – as long as there were, in each family, at least a couple of able workers – and also of married “*linked-couples*”, whenever geographically close occupations for them could be found.

These provisions, however, though more humane, came up against many difficulties and extra costs. Having selected suitable workers, the British personnel was responsible for organising their transportation to Britain, accommodation in the intermediate legs of the journey and the supply of food, clothes and a small daily allowance for the workers’ first expenses. Once arrived, suitable accommodation for the workers’ family dependants would have to be found, a task that promised to be expensive and difficult as Britain had sustained great damage from air-raids during the war and faced now a real shortage of suitable housing. Recruiting entire families, therefore, created problems in the short term, because of the difficulties of setting up hostels that could accommodate them, but also in the long term,

²⁷ Ibid.

as these families would soon be joining the long queue of workers waiting for housing to become available.²⁸

Tannahill's account indicates that the issue of housing-shortages was connected to concerns over how these foreign workers would be viewed by British public opinion and over the possibility that the operation could be perceived as damaging by British workers:

The country was scoured for disused Army or prisoner of war camps or for any other unwanted accommodation which could be used to house dependants. It must be borne in mind that the shortage of housing was at its most desperate stage at this time; British 'squatters', impatient at delay, had already moved into some of the camps which might have been suitable for EVW dependants. In the end [...] it was decided that the state of public opinion would not permit any diversion of scarce building labour or materials for the construction of new hostels.²⁹

Recruiting families therefore, was obviously a prickly enterprise which bore political implications and unsustainable financial costs. In 1948, the running expenses of the EVW schemes were estimated by the Ministry of Labour to have reached a total of £2,750,000, an average of £30 for each worker.³⁰ This estimate, however, is based on incomplete calculations and does not consider, for example, the British financial contribution to the running costs of the refugee camps and that of maintaining all the personnel in charge of the recruitments schemes abroad.

Both Tannahill in 1957, and Miles and Kay in their study, have highlighted the many problems that emerged in the course of these recruitments.³¹ To begin with, there was

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. p.46.

³⁰ Ibid. The estimate included the expenses of recruitment, transportation and care of the workers until their arrival in the British hostels. The running costs of the hostels were also not included.

³¹ Kay and Miles, *Refugees or Migrant Workers? European Volunteer Workers in Britain, 1946-51*.

the risk of inadvertently allowing entry to undesirable individuals who would prove very difficult to send back if found to be unsuitable for work. This is because, though the Ministry of Labour initially hoped that these foreign workers could be expelled if a change of circumstances made their employment no longer advantageous, the Home Office, soon enough, realised that most of the birth-places of these workers were now within control of the Soviet Union. If Britain was to try and return these ex-refugees to the UNRRA camps it would be at the cost of a major international scandal.

Britain's predicament was all the more severe because of the real difficulties in ensuring the selection of fit and able workers. In the refugee camps medical personnel was often lacking and the visits had to be performed by staff recruited within the camps themselves. This practice often resulted in a rather flexible application of the directives on behalf of the medics, and symptoms which could later reveal serious or invalidating health conditions were sometimes overlooked.

The British government was venturing along a path that presented many a possible pitfall. On the one hand, liaising with its international counterparts, Britain wanted to appear committed to doing its bit in the humanitarian emergency of war refugees, on the other, the government had to contend with the opposition of trade unions and pacify a public opinion which was easily alarmed by any suggestion that migrants would be getting a better deal than British workers.

For all these reasons, expelling unwanted workers was almost impossible and the recruiters, as a result, relied heavily on the practice of cherry-picking the fittest and most able workers whenever they could, even if that meant separating entire families and accommodating them in unsuitable overcrowded hostels. To make matters worse, in the

eyes of the British authorities, once the foreign workers arrived in Britain, there was no way of ensuring that they stayed permanently in the jobs to which they had been allocated. Many DPs came from professional backgrounds, were qualified for more rewarding employment and would try to obtain a better job as soon as the terms of their recruitment allowed it. After the compulsory two years, the EVW were going to disappear within the various channels of the British labour market and those sectors that were most in need of labour would remain yet again unfulfilled.

Defeated Nations as possible sources of labour: the Blue Danube, the Northern Sea and the Official Italian Scheme

In the last months of 1948 it was clear that the British efforts had not secured the expected number of women workers necessary for domestic work and textile factories so the FLC proposed to look at Germany, Austria and Italy as possible sources of labour. These three countries had come through the war years defeated, though Italy's status and its relationship to the Allied nations was ambiguous, and all of them had inherited the problem of severe unemployment and faced the prospects of an uncertain and difficult industrial reconstruction.

The *Blue Danube*, the *North Sea* and the *Official Italian scheme* brought to Britain a total of 13.600 women. Amongst them were 2,000 Italians selected to work in textile factories. Though initially intended to recruit women workers only, the OIS was subsequently employed to recruit Italian men as well, with varying results. The best known example is certainly the recruitment of workers for the brick-making industries of Bedford,

where a new and large Italian community soon developed.³² Other experiments did not turn out quite as successfully. This was the case of the recruitment of workers destined to coal mining, which caused a long showdown between trade unions, the British government and the Italian authorities.³³ The outcome of this *debacle* was the repatriation of all the Italian miners. Other collective recruitments met a similar fate, for example those destined to British foundries and railway construction.

When recruiting workers from these three countries, Britain was not hindered by any humanitarian consideration and this meant that some important changes were introduced in the selection process of Italian, Austrian and German workers even though “on paper” they appeared to receive equal treatment. Unfortunately, the *Blue Danube* and the *Northern Sea Scheme* have not been the subject of specific academic research, so the present study cannot compare the recruitment of Italian workers with that of their German and Austrian counterparts. This is particularly disappointing because these schemes happened simultaneously and were responsible for co-opting women who would soon experience, often for the first time, being part of a cosmopolitan work force, working side by side and living together in the enforced proximity of their communal workers’ hostels.

Similarities and differences in the employment conditions of the EVWs

As we have seen, the DPs’ options were restricted in many ways when it came to choosing

³² Michele Colucci, "L'emigrazione Italiana in Gran Bretagna Nel Secondo Dopoguerra: Il Caso Di Bedford (1951-60)," *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* (2002).

³³ Colucci, *Chiamati, Partiti E Respinti: Minatori Italiani Nella Gran Bretagna Del Secondo Dopoguerra*.

their occupation. The British authorities tried hard to reconcile two opposing necessities: a) to allocate a workforce to the most needy productive sectors and make sure that the workers remained there for as long as they were needed; b) to ensure Britain could not be accused of treating its foreign workers as slaves. The refugees recruited within the first two schemes, therefore, were obliged to remain in their first occupation for a certain amount of time, usually 12 months, after which they were entitled to ask the Ministry of Labour to authorise their change of employment. These workers, as we have seen, had been recruited within the *UNRRA* camps so they enjoyed refugee status and were not easily expelled³⁴ The new Italian workers, on the other hand, like their German and Austrian counterparts, would lose the legal right to live in the United Kingdom as soon as their contracts expired and an extension was allowed only to those who remained employed within the same company “unless differently authorised by the British authorities”³⁵. This explains, as we will see, the frequently temporary nature of the Italian migrations of this period and the high number of migrants returning home.

In addition, Italian, German and Austrian women workers were recruited according to more severe age restrictions than their fellow countrymen and, sometimes, even the Baltic Cygnets. This fact is not made explicit in the British literature concerning these recruitment. Isaacs for example, stated that Italian women selected within the OIS had to be between 18 and 40 years old,³⁶ but the workers’ employment contracts held by the Italian *Ministero del Lavoro* reveal that the favoured praxis was to limit employment to women

³⁴ Kay and Miles, *Refugees or Migrant Workers? European Volunteer Workers in Britain, 1946-51*. p.44

³⁵ “salvo che non siano diversamente autorizzati dalle autorità britanniche” Archivio Centrale di Stato, Ministero del lavoro e della previdenza sociale, direzione generale del collocamento della manodopera, Div. IX, accordi di emigrazione verso paesi extra-comunitari, b. 471, sottofasc. “contratto tipo manodopera femminile”.

³⁶ Isaac, *British Post-War Migration*. p. 180.

under 30 years old³⁷. This was the age limit stated on most of the versions of the template agreement which was used for the recruitment of Italian women workers in the following years.

The Italian authorities later negotiated an increase of the minimum age from 18 to 21 years old in response to the alarmed reports of the Italian missionaries in charge of the pastoral care of these young women in Bradford³⁸. However, judging from the correspondence between the two Ministries, it would appear that the maximum age of 30 was left completely unchallenged.

The procedure started undergoing changes once individual companies began recruiting Italian workers directly. In November 1957, for example, John Dewhirst & Co. Ltd, sought to employ six Italian weavers between the age of 21 and 40 years old but another company, John Smith & Sons of Bradford – and so many others – requested workers between 21 and 28 years of age.³⁹

When the OIS was launched, the *Ministry of Labour* had already realised the setbacks of their initial flexible policy in terms of allowing foreign workers to bring family dependants. For this reason, the same rules devised for the Baltic cygnets were enforced in the recruitment of Italian women: only single, childless women were employed. Married Italian male workers, on the other hand, could be recruited and were allowed, after a number of years, to be joined by their wives and under-age children. According to a communication dispatched by the Italian *Ministero del Lavoro* in 1952:

³⁷ Several of these contracts are collected in ACS, Minlav, Dcgm, Div. IX, b. 471, sottofasc. “contratto tipo manodopera femminile”.

³⁸ ACS, Minlav, Dcgm, Div. IX, b.466, “Emigrazione italiana in Inghilterra”, sottofasc. “Personale femminile”.

³⁹ Both requests are contained in ACS, Minlav, Dcgm, Div. IX, accordi di emigrazione verso paesi extra-comunitari, b. 471, sottofasc. “Richiesta manodopera femminile da parte di varie ditte”.

The migrant worker who wishes to be joined by his family must apply to the competent Italian consulate, sending in double copy the enclosed form, devised by the British Home Office, stating that the worker is able to house and provide for his family in Great Britain at his expense.^{40.}

This meant, as correctly noted by Michele Colucci, that the possibility of being reunited with one's family coincided with the transition from the workers' hostel to private accommodation.⁴¹ For our migrant workers, saving enough to leave the hostels was not an easy task, as their pay-cheque was subject to various deductions with which employers and public agencies recovered a lot of the initial expenses connected with their recruitment, such as the running costs of the hostels and the workers' meals. Putting together enough money to afford an advance on the rental of a room and shipping the family to Britain could take many years, plus, it inevitably created new problems for the local British administrations, because each worker who left the hostels increased the demand for suitable housing.

Italian women workers, on the other hand, were in the same position as all the women employed through the EVW schemes⁴², and it is easy to understand how their single status was instrumental in allowing the British authorities and the industries involved to

^{40.}“Il lavoratore emigrato che desidera farsi raggiungere dalla famiglia deve inviare al Console italiano competente territorialmente, una attestazione in duplice esemplare e nella formula allegata, stabilita dal Ministero degli Interni Britannico, dalla quale risulta che il lavoratore è in grado di alloggiare e mantenere la propria famiglia in Gran Bretagna” Communication dated 13th March 1952, sent by the Direzione generale occupazione interna e migrazioni del ministero del Lavoro italiano, found in ACS, Minlav, Dcgm, Div.IX, b. 466.

⁴¹ Colucci, "L'emigrazione Italiana in Gran Bretagna Nel Secondo Dopoguerra: Il Caso Di Bedford (1951-60)."

⁴² Article number 1 in the template contract contains the following:“Saranno accettate solo donne non sposate o vedove senza figli che siano in buone condizione di salute [...] Le volontarie non saranno autorizzate a portare con sé persone a carico o altri parenti, ne questi potranno raggiungerle in Gran Bretagna.” ACS, Minlav, Dcgm, Div. IX, accordi di emigrazione verso paesi extra-comunitari, b. 471, sottofasc. “contratto tipo manodopera femminile”.

keep their costs down. Another question, however, arises (prompted, no doubt, by our own contemporary perspective on these matters since the issue appears to be so self-evident at the time that no explicit reference can be found in the official sources of the time): why were male workers allowed to bring their families to Britain? Or, in other words, why was it not considered viable, or even desirable, to apply the same restrictions across the board and allow entry only to unmarried workers of both sexes?

Gender inequalities in family-rejoining procedures – what do they mean?

To offer workers different treatment on the basis of their gender was certainly not unusual or surprising, bearing in mind that not even the massive employment of female workers during the war effort had the effect of bridging the wage-differential between men and women in the British labour market. This was only officially abolished in 1974 with the Equal Pay Act and still survives, in many work environments, today⁴³. During the reconstruction years, despite so many women workers choosing to remain in waged employment,⁴⁴ the British labour market had gone back to being as highly segregated as it was before 1940. The textile manufacturing sector, represents, in this sense, the most notorious and transnational example of such enduring segregation, thanks to an abundant social-scientific literature which has emphasised its enduring characterisation as a “*gender ghetto*”.⁴⁵ In post-war Britain, gender segregation was a structural component of

⁴³ An overview of the history of gender wage differential can be found in: Antoni Zabala and Zafiris Tzannatos, *Women and Equal Pay : The Effects of Legislation on Female Employment and Wages in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁴⁴ According to an article published in the *Times*, 200,000 British women had remained in employment, because of the difficult economic climate and the appeals to their patriotic feelings. “Women remaining at work” *The Times*, 15 February 1949.

⁴⁵ See on this subject: Chapkis and Enloe, *Of Common Cloth : Women in the Global Textile Industry*.

employment in all sectors and, according to McDowell, “86% of all women workers were employed in jobs in which their co-workers were predominantly other women”.⁴⁶ The effects of this division on wage inequality between men and women are well known and, as we will see, the example of Italian textile workers was no exception.

However, it must be highlighted that wage inequality is only one of many such inequalities within a prevailing and generally accepted praxis of differentiating work along the lines of gender. In such a context, it is no surprise that the different entitlements held by male and female migrant workers was not commented upon in the contemporary studies such as those of Isaac and Tannahill. Also, unsurprisingly, the restriction of employment to single women did not encounter any opposition by the Italian authorities except for the occasional remark that, exactly as in the case of the Baltic Cygnet scheme, such a restriction had clear effects on the number of women aspiring to migrate, and could jeopardise the success of the OIS. These were the recommendations of the Italian “Directorship of Employment and Migration policies” in a memorandum addressed to the Italian Ministry of Labour on the 3rd February 1950:

Despite the fact that the conditions offered so far to unskilled women factory workers by English Industries, recruited in Italy for the textile sector, have not found great favour amongst the prospective workers, it is our opinion that, in time, it will be possible to obtain a wider availability of women workers to migration to England:

- a) by an accurate diffusion of information regarding working and life conditions in England, undertaken in a serious and objective fashion, without intended propaganda;
- b) by undertaking recruitments in all areas of the Republic;
- c) by negotiating with England a relaxing of the current age and marriage status

⁴⁶ McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*. p. 131.

restrictions imposed on prospective workers.⁴⁷

At this point it is necessary to go back and examine Italian male workers and their entitlement to family rejoining. This was an entitlement that Italian men shared with their counterparts recruited through the *Westward Ho!* Scheme, as even those selected after 1947 were allowed, after a certain amount of time, to be rejoined by their wives and children if they could afford the expenses. Again it is interesting, though apparently outside the scope of the present study, to consider the various contributions of academic literature and the existing data on the recruitment of Italian workers in an effort to clarify some key aspects: why did the British authorities open recruitment to married men even though, in many ways, they appeared keen to select guest workers and not permanent migrants?

Despite the fact that none of the studies that compose this small but interesting bibliography of the EVW schemes explicitly address this issue, nonetheless it lies not only at the intersection between crucial considerations regarding the relationship between gender and work in post war British society but also regarding the relationship between migration and gender. In this last respect, the theoretical contribution offered by social sciences, brought about by the progressive feminisation of migration phenomena in recent decades, is immense. What follows is a summary of the various factors that could explain, even partially, the desirability of an all-single female workforce, as it has been conceptualised

⁴⁷ “Benché le condizioni fino ad ora offerte dall’industria inglese alla mano d’opera femminile non qualificata, reclutata in Italia per il settore tessile, non siano state tali da incontrare un largo favore tra le reclutande, si ritiene che al momento opportuno si potrà ottenere una più ampia adesione di mano d’opera femminile all’espatrio in Inghilterra: mediante una opportuna divulgazione delle condizioni di lavoro e di vita in Inghilterra, fatta in modo serio ed obbiettivo, senza un carattere propagandistico; effettuando il reclutamento in tutto il territorio della Repubblica; ottenendo da parte inglese un allargamento degli attuali limiti sull’età e sullo stato civile delle reclutande” in ACS, Minlav, Dcgm, Div. IX, accordi di emigrazione verso paesi extra-comunitari, b. 471, sottofasc. “contratto tipo manodopera femminile”.

within various strands of academic research, but also the reasons that can explain why male workers got such a better deal.

Gender and the labour market in British society

It is generally agreed that, until the end of the Second World War, the overwhelming majority of women working in Britain were single and childless. The years we are studying, therefore, represent, in this sense, a moment of conflict between this pervasive and longstanding tradition and the effects of explosive socio-economic changes. The census data quoted in her study by Linda McDowell, for example, reveal that if in 1931 unmarried women made up 77% of the total female workforce (against 16% of married and 7% widowed women), as early as 1951 this percentage had already lowered to 52%.⁴⁸ This change has been explained with the diffusion of part-time work amongst married women and with the demographic changes that occurred during the 50s, which saw women marry at an earlier age and have fewer children closer together in age.⁴⁹ It is also generally accepted that the years in question saw an increased advancement of the autochthonous female workforce to clerical jobs, leaving a void in the more lowly sectors of manufacturing, domestic service etc. which was inevitably filled by the input of foreign labour.

Despite all these changes “women in full time employment were largely unmarried or childless”⁵⁰ and it is quite probable that, not unlike today, women without family commitments were still preferred by their employers because they were thought to be free

⁴⁸ McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*. p. 130.

⁴⁹ Elliott, Jane, *Demographic trends in domestic life, 1945-1987*, in David Clark and Jacqueline L. Burgoyne, eds., *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change (1944-88)* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁵⁰ McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*. p. 130.

from domestic and family duties. This attitude is highlighted in a statement given by Yorkshire industrialist Mr Cartwright to the press in 1948 about the foreign women employed in his wool manufactures:⁵¹

These women [...] have no husbands to cook for in the evening, no children to wash and put to bed, and as they live in a hostel their shopping , cooking and cleaning is done for them.

There is no reason to believe that other company owners would not have shared Mr Cartwright's sentiments. If, however, the image of the working woman in the British labour market had evolved into embodying the stereotype of the young unmarried worker, this is also due to the fact that women's paid employment was, traditionally, regarded as a secondary source of income within family units largely organised around the figure of the male *bread-winner*. In one of her papers on gender and the history of social policy, Jane Lewis argues as follows:

Modern welfare regimes have all subscribed to some degree to the idea of a male breadwinner model – the strength or weakness of [this] model serves us as an indicator of the way in which women have been treated in social security systems [...] and of the nature of married women's position in the labour market.⁵²

The bread-winner model has been the subject of many studies, especially within Anglo-American academia, and many scholars interested in the relationship between migration and gender have strongly remarked on how this model has had far reaching

⁵¹ Cited in Ibid. p.110

⁵² Jane Lewis, "Gender and the Development of Welfare Regimes," *Journal of European Social Policy* 2, no. 3 (1992). p. 159.

implications in the migration context as well. According to Louse Ackers :

The male breadwinning family as the basis of social organisation (and the distribution of social resources) thus conveniently translates into explanations of migration behaviour; migration is primarily economically and male-determined with an initial phase of male pioneer migration followed by a phase of passive family reunion migration as wives and children join the economically-established breadwinner.⁵³

The regulation of the immigration phenomenon by receiving countries is necessarily, according to this interpretation, influenced by this paradigm. As it has been seen in the previous section, despite the many individual cases and the social changes in motion at the time, the different rules concerning the employment of male and female foreign workers could well be the result of these established notions. Analysed in this perspective, denying work to married male workers would have gone against many accepted notions and consolidated social practices.

The social and economic price of collective recruitments: foreign workers in the post-war housing shortage crisis

As remarked by Louise McDowell in her study of Latvian EVWs, migrant women workers might not have competed with British workers for available housing upon their arrival, but British authorities could not force them to remain single indefinitely or prevent them from finding other more comfortable accommodation.⁵⁴ As soon as these young women had saved enough to share a house with other co-workers, fellow country-women, or got

⁵³ Ackers, *Shifting Spaces: Women, Citizenship and Migration within the European Union*. p. 9.

⁵⁴ McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*. p.110.

married, they left their hostels and the resulting repercussions on the problem of insufficient housing necessarily presented themselves. On the other hand, employing single migrant women ensured that, in the medium term, there would not be Italian husbands or children for which work would have to be found at a later stage.

To put it simply, limiting recruitment to single migrants enabled British authorities to maintain control over the distribution of the available work-force and direct it where it was most necessary. Women mostly worked in sectors characterised by a preponderant female workforce. Textile industry is, in this respect, a typical example but hospitals and care-institutions could often, similarly, be situated in places which lacked any avenue for male employment. As a consequence, recruiting married women migrants would often have provoked an excessive offer of male workers in areas where they were not needed. This was a problem similar to the one described by Tannahill in his recollection of the running of the *Westward HO!* Scheme, when attempts were made to recruit entire families or linked couples:

In practice, every effort was subsequently made to place such “linked couples” in work close together, but this was not always possible, since so many women were required for textiles in areas where there was no work for men available.⁵⁵

Tannahill also lists other obstacles, such as the travel costs and the expenses connected to the running of hostels suitable to house family units, all of which persuaded the British authorities to drop the recruitment of families and couples.

The problem created by migrant families in communities where housing was in

⁵⁵ Tannahill, *European Volunteer Workers in Britain*. p. 47

short supply is well illustrated by what happened in places where, like Bedford, foreign recruitments had introduced large contingents of migrant men to work in the local industries. Soon, Bedford's newcomers seemed to be possessed by a real family-rejoining frenzy, facilitated by Italian legislation, which allowed emigrants to marry by proxy. Family rejoining meant, for the migrant worker, leaving the expensive and often bleak hostels and, finally "*mettere su casa*" – setting up a home. The following is an extract of an interview to an Italian migrant living in Bedford quoted by Michele Colucci:

Oh no, no, you can't say no to a home because if there's a home then you are able to do everything else but a home is too important, with a home you can be sure that money won't be wasted and the children one day will have something. (Giuseppe C.)⁵⁶

Leaving the hostel was an essential phase of transition for the migrant worker which enabled him or her to put an end to their "social and spatial segregation"⁵⁷. Plus, thanks to the pooling of resources typical of family life and to the activities performed traditionally by wives in the home, migrants could finally begin to save money and improve their living standards.

In Bedford, the influx of migrant families that moved there in such a short period of time became a topic frequently discussed in the local press:

Bedford is being flooded with Italians and very little thought is given to their accommodation, Bedford magistrates were told yesterday.

⁵⁶ "Eh no, no, alla casa no non puoi dire no alla casa perché se c'è la casa poi viene che fai tutto il resto ma la casa è 'na cosa troppo importante, co' la casa ti sei sicuro che i soldi non si perdono e che i figli dopo hanno qualcosa" Extract from an interview to an Italian migrant in Bedford, found in: Renato Cavallaro and emigrazione Centro studi, *Storie Senza Storia : Indagine Sull'emigrazione Calabrese in Gran Bretagna* (Roma: Centro studi emigrazione, 2002). p. 106.

⁵⁷ Colucci, "L'emigrazione Italiana in Gran Bretagna Nel Secondo Dopoguerra: Il Caso Di Bedford (1951-

Hundreds of Italians, Poles and other foreigners work in the brickfields and heavy industries near Bedford. Their coming into town has created a social problem.⁵⁸

And more:

Bedford Corporation has a waiting list of 2000 for council houses and new applicants are added to the list as houses are built. Members of the rapidly growing Italian colony – Already 2,000-strong in the town – are not on the list. And when the house and flat owners with property to let are faced with the choice of an ordinary British couple and an Italian couple with anything up to eight or nine children, they prefer to let to the smaller family.⁵⁹

These reports show that, already in 1949, migrant families and housing shortages were inevitably connected to one another. This was a problem which the British authorities were likely to have foreseen, and indeed the correspondence produced by the Ministry of Labour contain many references to these matters.⁶⁰ This seems to suggest that, despite the problems it inevitably created, allowing the practice of family rejoining must have been considered by the British authorities as advantageous on some other level.

Gender, Race and Migration: Italian migrants between assimilation and racial stereotyping.

We have seen how, according to Kathleen Paul, the recruitment of the EVW was intended, in the minds of at least some of its creators, as an effort to select people who would, in time,

60)."

⁵⁸ "Town 'flooded' by Italians – Court told of Housing needs". Appeared in *Bedfordshire Times*, 26th August 1955.

⁵⁹ "They're noisy, gay, big-hearted – and a problem" *Daily Herald*, 28th September 1955.

⁶⁰ The National Archive, LAB 26/253, "Welfare of Italians employed in this country, including arrangements for provision of Italian Food in National Service Hostels Corporation hostels".

become fathers and mothers of future British citizens. Other historians have analysed the complex relationship existing between the construction of the British identity and the attitude towards “otherness”, bringing to the fore underlying attitudes and fears, concerns over *miscegenation* and the need to protect British women in this respect. This is the opinion of Wendy Webster as expressed in her paper on women migrants within the EVW schemes:

In the 1950s internal frontiers defined in response to black migration to Britain included neighbourhoods, streets and homes, in a range of anxieties and hostilities towards ‘blacks next door’. But in the late 1940s, the central frontier in such concerns was already apparent – the white British woman. It was a fear of ‘miscegenation’ – always strongly gendered as black men threatening white femininity – which was at the heart of concerns about immigration.⁶¹

Both Paul and Webster see in the recruitment of the *EVW* an alternative to the importation of Black migrants from the colonial dominions of Africa and the West Indies. McDowell too, in her work on *Baltic Cygnet* has traced down many examples in which Baltic women were being portrayed in the public discourse in ways that exalted their marriageability, enthusing over their whiteness, good health, youth, physical and moral cleanliness.⁶²

Because all these researchers have mainly focused on the recruitment of workers from north and eastern Europe, the issue of the EVW workers’ potential for assimilation (woman workers in particular) has been readily conceptualised within the frame-work

⁶¹ Wendy Webster, "Defining Boundaries: European Volunteer Worker Women in Britain and Narratives of Community," *Women's History Review* 9, no. 2 (2000).p.261.

⁶² McDowell noticed that the intent was obvious even from the name chosen for the Scheme, *Baltic Cygnet*” .McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*. Pp. 97-98.

White refugees/good versus Black migrants from the Commonwealth/bad. These interpretations are, however, a bit vague when it comes to evaluating British attitudes towards people who probably occupied intermediate positions in this hierarchy of undesirability, for example Jewish refugees, or Irish migrants. The literature concerning the difficult integration of these groups reveals what a complex, articulated notion “otherness” appeared to be in British society of the time.⁶³ So where would the women and the men of Italy have stood in such a scenario, in relation to their perceived otherness?

As for Italian women, none of the documents considered in this study explicitly described them in terms of *marriageability* comparable to the way Baltic women were; yet the possible intimacy between Italian women and British men did not seem to be a cause of any special concern. The situation was a little different in the case of Italian men. Amongst the British authorities, Italians seemed not to enjoy the greatest of reputations, and doubts regarding both their physical capability and their temperament were frequently raised. For example, according to a memorandum compiled within the Ministry of Labour, the National Coal Board objected to the employment of Italian workers on the basis that the latter did not have the right temperament to work in coal mining.⁶⁴ As prospective fathers of the future British citizens, it would seem that they were not held in great esteem, especially if such descriptions are compared with the enthusiastic words, reported by Paul, spent to praise the Eastern European refugees’ strong and healthy stock:

[...] in the principal parliamentary debates on foreign labor, government

⁶³ Attitudes towards Jewish and Irish people in British society have been analysed by Holmes and Evans, *John Bull's Island : Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971*. Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity, and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945*.

⁶⁴ Mr.Flindall to Miss Tavener, 29th June 1948, TNA, LAB 13/261.” A proposal that unemployed Cypriots and Maltese in Greece and Egypt should be brought to this country to settle”.

representatives spoke of the “benefits that come from the assimilation of virile, active and industrious people into our stock”. The Ministry of Labour described Yugoslav DPs as a “very tough and muscular race”, and both Labour and Conservative MPs described the aliens as “first class” people who would “be of great benefit to our stock”.⁶⁵

The misgivings over “Latin” races, easily found an echo in the press, as in the case of this article published in the *Daily Telegraph*:

Mr. Victor Raikes, Conservative M.P. for the Carston division of Liverpool, said yesterday at Liverpool that the real objection of miners to Italian workers was not so much the danger of unemployment, but that these workers had “a certain sex appeal towards miners’ wives and daughters.”⁶⁶

The media readily picked up on what seemed to be a widespread unease towards the new settlers, especially in the areas that hosted large numbers of Italian workers;

“we’ve got to remember they’re peasants!” One woman said heatedly unburdening herself “They are terribly noisy, blaring radios, shouting across the street, lounging around. One very nice family I knew here simply had to leave. Their daughters had just left school, the Italians ogled and whistled so life was unbearable!”⁶⁷

An exhaustive explanation of this issue could only be achieved by considering diverse contexts such as the attitudes of the British public opinion towards aliens and its proneness to racism. There are of course many academic investigations on the subject and many sources can be considered – for example the materials collected and preserved by the

⁶⁵ Paul, *Whitewashing Britain : Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*. p.84.

⁶⁶ “Unrest among Italians in South Wales” *Daily Telegraph*, 24th January 1952.

⁶⁷ “Little Italy in Bedford”, *The Times*, 29th September 1960.

Mass Observation Archive,⁶⁸ which have been studied also in respect to racism and anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, none of these address the questions of racial stereotyping and hostility towards Italians.

The portrayal of Italians in the media is also not a helpful measure of how well they were received by British society at large, because the attitude of each newspaper towards Italians recruited through the OIS seems to have been heavily dependant on the position they chose to take over the issue of foreign recruitment in general. *The Times*, for example, maintained a benevolent pro-government outlook on the operation which affected the way they portrayed the foreign workers, including the Italians, emphasising their hard work, and the satisfaction of their employers whilst down -playing and mitigating whatever difficulties arose in their integration process.

The Italians are usually thrifty (many save to bring their families here) and diligent. [...] One of them entered a Walsall foundry six years ago at £4.15s a week and now earns up to £19 a week as a machine moulder, has paid off the mortgage on his house and lives there with his wife and four children, two of whom were born here. He plays the accordion in a local dance band.⁶⁹

The conservative broadsheets such as the *Daily Mail*, on the other hand, were eager play up the disruption caused by the new settlers and voiced the unhappiness of the people who lived in the areas, like Bedford, most affected by the new Italian migration.

A similar policy was adopted by those papers, such as the *Daily Herald*, which had

⁶⁸ The Mass Observation Archive has collected materials documenting everyday life in Britain since 1937, amongst them are the famous 500 diaries commissioned by the Archive, written by a group of volunteers between 1937 and 1965. Excerpts of these diaries have been published in Simon Garfield, *Our Hidden Lives : The Remarkable Diaries of Postwar Britain* (London : Ebury, 2004 (printing [2005])).

⁶⁹ “Italians in the Midlands filling vacancies in industry”, *The Times*, 10th August 1955.

closer bonds with the trade unions, especially during the fight over the employment of Italian miners. To demonstrate their allegiance to the unions, these papers painted a rather unflattering portrait of Italian workers and questioned even their performance in the Belgian coal mines. In 1951, a correspondent from Brussels explained to the readers of the *Newcastle Journal*, that employing Italian miners would imply, in actual fact, accepting Belgium's "rejects", a motley crew made of individuals who were either too delicate or too rebellious for work in the mines. In the worst case scenario, they could turn out to be actual criminals.

Remember, the only trained miners in Italy are those who learned the job in Belgium. There are three classes who would prefer not to return to Belgium. The first are those who left soon after they arrived, because the housing conditions were so bad [...] Secondly there are those who objected to the discipline in the mines [...] Thirdly, there are some who left Belgium because they were in trouble, either with the mine or with the police. Belgium's need for miners is great and she would not keep men away for light offences. [...] If there is really a reserve of mining labour in Italy, it seems as though Britain's share will be anything but the best of it.⁷⁰

It is important to address the question of whether a certain amount of xenophobia, which we have seen surfacing occasionally in the media, was shared by the political class, the policy makers and the staff in charge of running the recruitment schemes. The most updated studies on the EVW tend to concur in seeing a connection between the level of xenophobia expressed by the media and the public opinion on the one hand and, on the other, the way foreigners were dealt with by policy makers or in the public discourse. However, in the context of British post-war race-relations, there is disagreement as to which

⁷⁰ "Belgium already has the best of Italian pit labour", *Newcastle Journal*, 13th February 1951.

one was, so to speak, born first.

Paul has been the most outspoken in underlining the decisive role played by Britain's immigration policies in shaping the nation's difficult assimilation of the newcomers and in refusing what she called the "Whitehall version": the idea that a fundamentally liberal government was forced by a fearful and hostile public opinion to impose controls and limitation towards the citizens of colour.⁷¹

Paul's arguments have been recently challenged by Randall Hansen, who argued that

[f]rom the ivory tower, Paul, Carter, Solomos and others have recreated a world that we never had, in which politicians, aiming at apartheid by the back door, slyly indoctrinated a liberal public into xenophobia and racism. It makes a tantalising story, but it simply did not happen.⁷²

It is this author's opinion that the great variety of archival sources considered by Paul in her study, charting the ways foreign workers were thought of and spoken of in the paperwork produced by the Home Office, the Trade Union Congress and the parliamentary debates, paints a picture that cannot be dismissed so readily. What these sources show in the specific context of Italian workers, validates her analysis. In fact, it seems that prejudices over the "latin-ness" of Italians played a role not just in their perceived suitability towards hard work and integration amongst British communities, but also diminished, in the eyes of the English, the credibility of Italian interlocutors when it came to negotiations between the two countries on the subject of labour recruitment. The following extract is quoted from a

⁷¹ Paul, *Whitewashing Britain : Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*. p. 133.

⁷² Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain : The Institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

dispatch written by the British Labour Attaché William Braine, addressed to the Ministry of Labour:

You will not need to be reminded that the Latin races bring into most discussions a certain amount of malicious comment of the sort we are accustomed to call feminine, although here it is the men who indulge in it.⁷³

Italian workers – The Lesser Evil?

This long survey of themes and interpretations has been necessary to introduce some important considerations regarding the reception of Italian workers in Great Britain. It has also, to some extent, clarified the expectations and wishes of the various parties concerned – the British authorities, public opinion, the industrialists. What kind of migration, to put it simply, were these parties envisaging and willing to tolerate.

Returning now to our first question “Why did the British authorities only select single, childless women”, it appears to be, now, almost self-evident: because they could, seems to be the obvious, logical, answer.

In spite of the hope, held by many, that importing labour from Europe would have positive effects on the state of Britain’s’ national birth rate, it has been shown how, especially in the agenda of the Home Office and the Ministry of Labour, the staff who organised these recruitment schemes were intent on restricting access to an immigration on an “*ad hoc*” basis, tailored to suit the demands of the British labour market. This is arguably the most eloquent demonstration of what conceptualising the migrant worker as a

⁷³ WH Braine to Ball in a note dated 21st November 1950. in TNA, LAB 13/833, “Recruitment of Italian men for employment in coal mining industry: policy, Agreement, etc.”

“guest worker” implied.⁷⁴ Though Castles’ knowledge of the criteria followed by the British authorities in selecting the EVW was imprecise, he probably was not wrong in thinking that, at least in regards to Italian workers, a widely held opinion insisted in regarding them as “temporary”, therefore neglecting to address the issue of their necessary social integration.

Soon enough, however, the necessity of placing large groups of foreign workers – who were subject to thinly veiled prejudices and negative stereotyping – in areas which had never had to deal with the problems of a composite and multiethnic society, prompted the British authorities to prefer married male workers. To avoid the threat represented by large contingents of unattached male foreign migrants ‘on the loose’ the British authorities followed the course of allowing family rejoining even if it meant encouraging a more stable kind of immigration.

Italy and its post war emigration policies

The post-war years are generally recognised in historical studies as the context of a new wave of mass migration of Italian people, the age of a new “Diaspora”.⁷⁵ Compared to the previous historical migrations, this new wave differed in two important aspects. Firstly, the

⁷⁴ Castles, "The Guest-Worker in Western Europe - an Obituary."

⁷⁵ Donna Gabaccia, *Emigranti. Le Diaspore Degli Italiani Dal Medioevo a Oggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*.

North American destinations were no longer an option and, as a consequence, the volume of trans-oceanic migration had shrunk, favouring now Australia and South America. Migration to other European countries became a significant quota of all international migration from Italy.⁷⁶ Secondly, Italian governments now actively promoted and facilitated the migration phenomenon, in contrast with the previous Fascist establishment which favoured policies aimed at discouraging emigration in favour of “colonisation” of the African areas that had fallen under Italian administration.⁷⁷

This new Italian Diaspora – 5,600,000 citizens moving outside Italian national borders between 1946 and 1965 – has long remained a neglected field of study, especially regarding the role played by the Italian authorities in providing this migration with its legal framework and making it part of their overall occupational agenda. Recently, however, this post-war scenario has been the subject of a detailed and interesting work by Michele Colucci.⁷⁸ This study, focusing as it does only on post-war migration to Europe, reconstructs the debate which engaged public opinion over the issue of emigration in the context of Italy’s newly reborn democratic system. It also evaluates the importance that emigration had in the minds of the establishment who chaired the first Christian-Democrat governments.

According to Colucci, the new Italian ruling class showed a precocious interest in emigration, evident since the conflicts within the members of the “constituent assembly” over the formulation of the article number 35 of the Italian Constitution. Two main attitudes toward the issue soon emerged: the first (shared by Socialists, Communists and some

⁷⁶These figures can be found in: Amoreno Martellini, “L’emigrazione transoceanica fra gli anni quaranta e sessanta”, in Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina, *Storia Dell'emigrazione Italiana: Partenze*. Pp. 371-377.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*.

members of the short lived *Partito d'Azione*) looked at Italian labour abroad mainly as a phenomenon which exposed workers to danger and displacement, therefore calling for special protective measures to be put into place. The second attitude, common to the Christian-Democrats, saw emigration as an economic resource. It emphasised the importance of international mobility and the “freedom” to emigrate, looking with concern at the boundaries set by other European nations to the “free circulation of labour”. According to Colucci:

The post-war debate about migration policies will be constantly affected by this double interpretation. The conflicts aroused over the implementation of emigration – aroused both within the governmental forces and in the conflicts between government and opposition – are all to be considered a product of these two different visions.⁷⁹

So what place did these concerns occupy within what has been defined the *europeismo centrista*, “centrist Europeism” of the Christian-Democrat leader Alcide De Gasperi? This question is all the more important because, to quote Federico Romero in his 1995 essay on Europeism and Italian nation-building:

In actual fact, De Gasperi was the one who defined and organised all the most important themes which have shaped the official and public stance of Italy on the subject of European integration until just a few years ago. And many of the interpretative problems have arisen from the fact that, with political cunning, he advertised the European option with tones, objectives and motivations which were artfully differentiated (however interconnected) and adapted to each different

⁷⁹“Il dibattito sulle politiche migratorie del dopoguerra verrà continuamente attraversato da questa doppia lettura. Gli stessi conflitti sulla gestione dell’emigrazione – che si scatenarono sia all’interno dei governi sia nella dialettica tra governo e opposizione – sono in qualche modo da considerarsi figlie di queste due differenti visioni” Ibid. p. 58.

interlocutor he was addressing.⁸⁰

In the rhetoric of the Christian-Democrat secretary, emigration was to assume centre-stage role in the post-war reconstruction process. He frequently articulated this vision by referring to the necessity, on behalf of the Italian dispossessed, to “*riprendere le vie del mondo*” – to go back out in the world – and by insisting on the question of free labour circulation in all his contacts with European and American interlocutors.⁸¹

These efforts, however, had questionable effects on the overall occupational situation and have reintroduced some of the usual side-effects of emigration, for example a new increase in the numbers of those resorting to clandestine emigration. This was inevitable because, as suggested here by Sandro Rinauro in his article about Italian clandestine migration:

In this context of the long term restriction, the post-war years represent one of the most difficult phases of national emigration because of the huge disproportion between, on the one hand, the great numbers of Italian looking to migrate and flee the destitution caused by the war and, on the other, the labour markets and the restrictive policies of the receiving countries.⁸²

⁸⁰“In effetti è stato De Gasperi a definire ed organizzare quasi tutti i principali argomenti che hanno poi guidato l'approccio ufficiale e pubblico dell'Italia all'integrazione europea fino a pochi anni fa. E molti dei successivi problemi interpretativi nascono dal fatto che, da buon politico, egli presentò la scelta europea con toni, scopi e motivi sapientemente differenziati (per quanto interconnessi) a seconda dei diversi interlocutori a cui di volta in volta si rivolgeva” Federico Romero, “L'europa Come Strumento Di Nation-Building: Storici E Storia Dell'italia Repubblicana,” *Passato e Presente* (1995). p.21

⁸¹ Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. p. 64.

⁸²“In questo contesto di restrizioni di lungo periodo, gli anni della ricostruzione rappresentarono uno dei momenti più difficili per l'esodo nazionale a causa dell'enorme sproporzione, da un lato, tra la grande massa degli italiani desiderosi di emigrare di fronte alle miserie ereditate dalla guerra e, dall'altro lato, i mercati del lavoro e le politiche restrittive dei paesi d'immigrazione” Sandro Rinauro, “Percorsi Dell'emigrazione Italiana Negli Anni Della Ricostruzione: Morire a Dien Bien Phu Da Emigrante Clandestino,” *Altretalies* 31, no. luglio-dicembre (2005).p.5.

This brings us back to one of the chief historiographical problems regarding DeGasperi's campaign for labour mobility and his emigration policies, the fact that it relied on partner nations to welcome large foreign migrants. Generally speaking, historians have been sceptical about the extent of De Gasperi's success in imposing his agenda, especially in the case of the bilateral agreements and the inter-European cooperation agreements; the actions of the Italian prime Minister, in Colucci's view, did not always match his words:

During February 1946 Italy and France signed their first emigration agreements [...]. For the time being, it is useful to emphasise the tactical nature of these agreements in the context of the diplomatic relations between these two countries. Migration of workers sat alongside other provisions which were intended to demonstrate Italy's good will in these delicate International circumstances: the issue of Italy's territorial claims over the [North-eastern] border was still open and Italy hoped to influence the outcome by accepting a less favourable settlement of other matters, such as the emigration agreements.⁸³

Even the most benign interpretations concur in recognising that, in the short term, the Italian government's agenda faced insurmountable obstacles. In the case of Italian-British relations, as we have seen, for a variety of reasons, the volume of effective recruitments stayed well below what Italy had hoped for. Generally speaking, it is impossible to ignore the fact that, when it came to bilateral migration agreements, the wishes of those who sent and those who received migrant labour were often diametrically opposed to each other.

⁸³ "Nel febbraio 1946 vennero firmati i primi accordi di emigrazione tra Italia e Francia [...]. Ciò che per ora è opportuno sottolineare è la natura tattica che questi accordi rivestono dal punto di vista delle relazioni diplomatiche tra i due paesi. L'emigrazione dei lavoratori era affiancata da altri provvedimenti finalizzati a mostrare la buona volontà del governo italiano nella delicata congiuntura internazionale: era ancora aperta la questione delle rivendicazioni territoriali sulla frontiera e l'Italia sperava di spuntarla trattando "al ribasso" su altre questioni, come appunto gli accordi di emigrazione". Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. p. 47.

Coming back to the recruitment of textile workers, the Italian authorities were well aware that selecting only single women would inevitably impinge on their ability to provide a sufficient number of workers, but how much scope did they really have to negotiate less restrictive criteria, and better working conditions for Italian workers? In this respect, it is interesting to read the exchange that occurred between the Italian Embassy in Britain, the Ministry of Labour and the Italian *Ministero del Lavoro* on the possibility of extending to women workers a sum of two pounds sterling, usually paid by the British authorities to each Italian male worker for the health care of their families in Italy.

Curiously, the issue only arose in 1953 when a textile company named Clough recruited a batch of Italian women for its cotton mills and, apparently by mistake, the *Ministero del Lavoro* supplied them with a template contract which contained, in the section relative to the workers' financial entitlement, a reference to these £2 allowance. Clough, in the first instance, agreed to adopt this contract but soon the Ministry of Labour intervened to scrap it. As they explained, the contribution paid by the companies to the workers was only meant to benefit their spouse and under-age children. Women workers, therefore, who were single, were not entitled to receive it.

All recruitments of Italian workers were carried out using a standard template contract which the two ministries had started to draft as early as 1949. As will be made clear, this template was initially formulated with male workers in mind, and the various contracts adopted in the employment of female workers in the following years are really copies of this first template onto which the necessary alterations could be made. In this context, the documentation sent to Clough could well have been a mistake on behalf of the Italian ministerial staff, however, when the Ministry of Labour intervened to make the

relevant amendment, the *Ministero del Lavoro* tried to raise an objection. As a result, the Italian Embassy must have been forced to mediate between the two ministries, and, on the 23rd October 1953 sent the following communication to the Italian ministry:

Reconsidering the recent version of the template contract prepared and presented in this way, this Ministry of Labour, having concluded that, because of the aforementioned reasons, it could not be applied in its entirety to the women workers, has elaborated a second template, which is enclosed in two copies and which should only be used in the context of the recruitment of Italian women. The main amendment is the suppression of the clause regarding the two pounds, since recruitment is restricted to singles or childless widows only who, according to the English, should not have any dependants..⁸⁴

The fact that the British had insisted on a restrictive interpretation of the notion of “family dependants” limited to spouses and children is, of course, no surprise, but it is interesting to notice that, as late as 1953, this point is still not clear and the employment contracts for Italian women were still subject to amendments and controversies

This memorandum is useful as it anticipates here one of the predictable difficulties encountered by the bilateral agreements between Italy and countries looking to import foreign labour: Italy’s subordinate position as the sending country was such that there was very little it could do to negotiate better conditions for its workers. Beggars cannot be choosers, so to speak; these seem to be the thoughts of the Italian correspondent from the

⁸⁴ “Riconsiderando la recente versione del testo del contratto tipo da esso preparato e presentato costì questo Ministry of Labour, avendo constatato che, secondo le suaccennate vedute, esso non poteva applicarsi integralmente anche alle lavoratrici, ne ha elaborato un secondo schema, che si allega in duplice copia e che dovrebbe applicarsi esclusivamente alla manodopera femminile italiana. La modifica principale sta nella soppressione della clausola del versamento delle due sterline, dato che il reclutamento è limitato alle sole donne nubili o vedove senza prole, le quali non dovrebbero, secondo l’ipotesi inglese, avere dipendenti a carico.” Held in ACS, Minlav, Dgcm, Div.IX, b. 471, sottofasc. “contratto tipo manodopera femminile”.

London embassy:⁸⁵

In conclusion, this Embassy confirms the previously stated opinion [...] that our protestations should not assume an intransigent position, as employment offers could, as a result, be oriented towards other countries, depriving us of an emigration outlet that offers satisfying working conditions.

In this respect, we are able to assure you that the Lancashire Cotton Corporation [...] and other two textile industries are carrying out recruitments in Austria.

The Italian director of the department of “Occupazione interna e delle Migrazioni” (National Employment and Emigration) had already reached similar conclusions a few years before, in a note to the Italian Labour Minister’s office, dated 3rd February 1950:

It has been made very explicit that, should any difficulties arise, connected to the working conditions which would be identical to those enjoyed by British women workers of the same level, the request [for labour] would be diverted to Germany...⁸⁶

It is clear that the Official Italian Scheme, to a certain extent, was made to compete with the other two and references to the recruitments taking place in Germany and Austria were often used to overcome hesitations expressed by the officers of the *Ministero del Lavoro*, and bully them into accepting less favourable conditions for the workers. A vicious circle soon emerged: the more successful Britain was in imposing its terms, the less

⁸⁵“ In conclusione, questa Ambasciata riconferma il parere già espresso [...] che le nostre insistenze non dovrebbero portarci a posizioni di intransigenza tali da far orientare l’offerta di lavoro verso altri Paesi, sottraendoci la possibilità di alimentare un’emigrazione che offre nel complesso condizioni soddisfacenti di lavoro. A questo ultimo proposito si è in grado di precisare che la Lancashire Cotton Corporation [...] e due altre industrie tessili stanno facendo reclutamenti in Austria.”ACS, Minlav, Dcgm, Div. IX, accordi di emigrazione verso paesi extra-comunitari, b. 471, sottofasc. “contratto tipo manodopera femminile”.

⁸⁶ “è stato fatto chiaramente intendere che ove vi fossero difficoltà, eventualmente connesse alle condizioni di lavoro che saranno identiche a quelle praticate in Inghilterra al personale femminile inglese della stessa categoria, la richiesta verrebbe stornata alla Germania...” in Ibid.

desirable these offers of employment appeared to prospective Italian migrants who, ultimately, “voted with their feet” and chose whether to fulfil the quotas of Italian workers allocated by the Anglo-Italian authorities or not. And in turn, as a result, the Italian authorities were under an ever increasing pressure to find suitable migration opportunities for the nation’s unemployed.

It is tempting to try to place the British recruitment schemes within the popular distinctions between economic and political migrations; within this frame work, the first two EVW schemes, together with the *Polish resettlement Corps*, would appear, at a first glance, as a political migration. We have seen how Kay and Miles, in their work, have thoroughly integrated and corrected this view, underlying the many strictly economical considerations which were at play even in such circumstances⁸⁷. Behar, in a brief article published in 2003, has gone further, suggesting that:

The recruitment of Displaced Persons was thus an officially political migration with a strong economic undertone. The recruitment of Italian workers was the opposite: what looked like a strictly economic arrangement actually involved important political considerations.⁸⁸

According to Behar, these “political considerations” have to be found in the slippery field of the inter-European diplomacy of the time, particularly, the British preoccupation that, as demonstrated by Behar’s study of Foreign Office’s papers, Italy might move closer to the USSR, if Britain did not appear to actively support the Italian government by recruiting as many workers as possible. We have seen how, according to Colucci and

⁸⁷ Kay and Miles, *Refugees or Migrant Workers? European Volunteer Workers in Britain, 1946-51*.

⁸⁸ Behar, “*Diplomacy and Essential Workers: Official British Recruitment of Foreign Labor in Italy, 1945-1951*.”

Rinauro, the Italian authorities played what cards they were dealt, trying as much as possible to maintain the issue of emigration to their support of inter-European co-operation constantly interlinked, in their negotiations. However, according to Behart, Britain's commitment to import Italian labour was little more than a rather vague declaration of intent – which in practice led them to leave the door open to collective recruitments from Italy even after they had proved incapable of reaching the target number of workers, but never to seriously reconsider the terms of their offer. Britain handled De Gasperi's demands over free labour mobility within the European area in a similar way, according to Behar:

Here too the dichotomy in British policy toward Italian labor recruitment was manifest. British policy with respect to international agencies was generally to keep clear of any binding commitments. Informal agreements were preferred to formal ones, and bilateral agreements were preferred to universal conventions. International agencies were seen as advisory bodies and clearing-houses for information. Italy, on the other hand, sought to use international bodies to obtain formal commitments to promote freer labor migration.

Thus Britain found itself opposing the Italian agenda in various international fora, while trying at the same time to seem cooperative.⁸⁹

Italy as a migrants' placement agency

According to Donna Gabaccia “well into the 1960s, Italy's government functioned as a labor agent to direct its migrants to foreign work places”.⁹⁰ But this activity has not been immune from ambiguities and unusual outcomes. One wonders what cause, in actual fact, was served by these “agents” and whose interests were most effectively pursued. If, in other

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰ Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*. p. 154.

words, these recruitments have really gone some way towards relieving Italy's unemployment and offer these workers otherwise unimaginable chances of a new life; or, rather, should they be regarded as Italy's "tribute" to the recipient nations, a tribute paid in cheap labourers who would have accepted work at conditions which the native workforce found increasingly unacceptable.

In order to implement De Gasperi's agenda and allow Italians to "go back out into the world", Italian authorities organised a veritable task-force of governmental agencies presiding over each step of the "recruitment" process. In this context, these first bilateral agreements with Britain, Belgium and France, and the procedures put in place at the time, provided the legal frame-work and the standard procedures which would be used in the following years directly by all foreign employers seeking to employ Italian workers without the mediation of their national authorities.

This task-force operated under the supervision – which was meant to be joint, despite much confusion and overlapping of competences - of the *Ministero del Lavoro* (MdL) and the *Ministero degli Esteri*, (MdE) the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Each one of these institutions, one in Italy and the other operating outside the national borders, presided over the activity of several local subdivisions which administered all stages of the migratory route. To the MdE reported all the Italian Embassies and Consulates; MdL, on the other hand, presided over the activity of the *Uffici del Lavoro e della Massima Occupazione* (which we will call ULMO) and the *Centri di Emigrazione*, Emigration Centres. According to Colucci:

It is indispensable, however, to emphasise that from the beginning the two areas of intervention (within and without Italy) were born of the same Migration policy and for

this reason they can be understood more easily if they are studied as an integrated system and, in practical terms, as two sides of the same coin..⁹¹

The ULMO and the Emigration Centres were designated as the first go-to places in the effort to attract and assist prospective migrants from as early as 1948, with the Law Decree no 381 of the 15th April. The ULMO, which had so far served as public regional employment agencies, were now instructed to advertise overseas' employment opportunities alongside the vacancies of the domestic market; also, the ULMO personnel were to manage the waiting lists of aspiring migrants and compile reports of their activity over a six-month period for the *Ministero del Lavoro*. These reports are excellent sources of information and statistics regarding the recruitment of workers abroad in each Italian region and also, reveal how many offers of employment were not accepted by the prospective migrants. As will be made plain in the following chapter, a very high number of these unanswered recruitment offers were the ones destined to the textile mills of Great Britain.

The Emigration Centres were designed for the "grouping, the temporary accommodation and the assistance of all migrants in the imminence of their departure or return and their families"⁹². Initially there were five: Milan – where all migrants destined to European countries were sent – Genoa, Messina, Turin and Naples. The Neapolitan centre is of particular interest for this study because most of the workers leaving for Britain were concentrated here before their departure.

These centres are rightly infamous and have been described in very harsh tones by

⁹¹ "E' indispensabile però sottolineare fin dall'inizio che i due versanti di intervento (dentro e fuori l'Italia) erano figli della medesima politica migratoria e per questo possono essere compresi più a fondo se studiati come un sistema integrato e, in pratica, come due facce della stessa medaglia." Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. p. 100.

⁹² 'raggruppamento, l'alloggiamento, la vittuazione e l'assistenza in genere dei lavoratori che emigrano o che rimpatriano e delle famiglie' cited by Ibid. p.

migrants in their accounts. Mostly, they were located within train stations or military compounds and those who arrived here, hoping to be soon sent on their way to a new country, had already undertaken an often long and exhausting journey from their native towns and villages. Many had already spent a lot of money and contracted debts in order to get there. Having already undergone a preliminary interview and sometimes a summary medical examination in their local ULMOs, these workers generally assumed that their departure was certain and imminent but here in the Emigration Centres they were interviewed and inspected all over again by the selection committees of the receiving countries. These committees had ample margins of discretionality in rejecting the candidates. They were composed of medical staff, ministerial and diplomatic personnel and representatives from the recruiting industries, in the case of Britain, even trade unions.

The activity of these foreign delegations challenged and seriously limited any possibility, for the Italian authorities, to manage their side of the recruitment process autonomously. As Colucci rightly observes “The issue of migrants’ recruitment and of the foreign commissions became since the end of the war an area of political conflict.”⁹³

Meeting these delegates often had a shocking impact on the aspiring migrants and could abruptly end all hopes they had invested on their migration project. What is more, the delegations were progressively acquiring more and more independence from their Italian counterparts. They were chaired by diplomatic personnel who sojourned in Italy for long periods of time and could quite unscrupulously use their position and their knowledge of the recruitment process and their growing familiarity with the inner workings of the Italian establishment to protect their national interests.

⁹³“La questione della selezione degli emigrati e delle commissioni straniere rappresentò fin dalla fine della guerra un terreno di conflittualità politica” Ibid. p. 121.

In the case of British recruitments, no example can be more instructive than the activity of WH Braine, nominally the Labour Attaché of the British Embassy in Rome, chief organiser of the labour recruitments and ever-present middleman in the relations between Italian and British authorities. The Labour Attaché was a figure first introduced by France, as early as 1940, within its diplomatic agencies abroad and soon copied by many other countries from 1945 onwards. Britain and the United States soon understood what invaluable services could be performed by this kind of representative abroad when it came to micro-manage immigration matters but also in all aspects of international diplomacy during the cold-war era.⁹⁴ In 1948 Henry Hauck, a Labour Counsellor working for the French embassy in London described the role of the Labour Attaché as follows:

The functions of labour attachés naturally vary from one country to another. Some States which have large numbers of nationals abroad require the labour attaché to look after those settled in the country to which he is accredited. Other States, for which questions of immigration or emigration are particularly important, instruct their labour attachés to follow these problems with special attention.⁹⁵

WH Braine's work was obviously precisely that, a task he accomplished with exceptional ability and without disdaining the use of the occasional sleight of hand. According to Michele Colucci:

Apart from a possessing perfect knowledge of the Italian migratory machine and its limits – and appearing to have good connections within the Christian-democrat milieu, even a personal rapport with the [Italian Labour Minister] Fanfani – Braine was well aware that the working conditions in Great Britain proposed by him were not realistic

⁹⁴ Hugh Wilford, "American Labour Diplomacy and Cold War Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 1 (2002).

and, therefore, he had to make sure that the Italian Embassy in London did not belie him.⁹⁶

Braine was often a little creative with the facts when it came to describing what working conditions and quality of life migrants could aspire to if they accepted the job; he also took advantage of his familiarity with the “migratory machine” to guarantee British commissions had a free hand in recruiting migrants, in an effort to secure larger and better qualified contingents of workers. This was made evident in January 1950, in the midst of negotiations to recruit Italian potters and decorators for the ceramic industries of Stoke on Trent. Braine managed to arrange for a delegation of British company representatives to visit the plants of the Ginori ceramics in Florence.⁹⁷ In theory this delegation was only supposed to ascertain that the “manufacturing processes – in the sector of interest – [did] not differ too much from those applied in British factories” but, while they were there, the delegates also interviewed on the spot 15 women and 9 men keen to emigrate to England. This behaviour contravened the usual practice of leaving their Italian counterparts in charge of operating a first selection of the prospective candidates but also, more alarmingly, Braine was allowing his delegates to propose work to people who were already in regular employment. He was apparently operating with the authorisation of Minister Fanfani who had appointed a ministerial officer to escort the delegates on their Florentine trip.

⁹⁵ Henry Hauck, "Labour Attachés," *International Labour Review* LVIII, no. July-December (1948). p. 145.

⁹⁶ “Oltre a conoscere perfettamente la macchina emigratoria italiana e i suoi limiti – e oltre a mostrarsi molto inserito negli ambienti democristiani, fino a vantare una conoscenza personale con lo stesso Fanfani – Braine sapeva che le condizioni di lavoro da lui prospettate in Gran Bretagna non erano realistiche e pertanto occorreva evitare che l’Ambasciata italiana a Londra lo smentisse.” Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. p. 190.

⁹⁷ “le modalità pratiche di lavoro – nel settore che ad essa interessano – non differiscono sostanzialmente da quelle adottate nelle fabbriche inglesi’ Appunto per il Ministro del Lavoro da parte della Direzione Generale per l’Occupazione Interna e Migrazioni, Divisione Decima. In ACS, Minlav, Dcgm, div IX, b. 470, emigrazione italiana in Inghilterra, sotto fasc. contratto tipo manodopera femminile.

The initiative, however, set a precedent and caused much upset amongst the industrialists of the ceramic sector. A couple of days later the president of their association complained to the *Ministero del Lavoro*:

In regards [to the employment of high skilled workers and trainee potters] we take the initiative of bringing to your attention the following:

- 1) At the moment, there is no unemployment in this productive sector, which has a normal level of employment. Manufacture Industries are a cause for national pride, exported and appreciated world-wide. It is therefore necessary not to encourage an exodus of qualified workers which would impact on the volume of our exports and the input of foreign currency,
- 2) England, who before the war was an importer of Italian artistic ceramics, has now prohibited the importation,
- 3) On foreign markets (especially the United States) England is now a strong competitor of Italian ceramics,
- 4) In the Anglo-Italian treaty currently enforced it is stated that a contingent of ceramic products is to be imported from England to Italy.

For all these reasons, our Association deems not at all useful, or rather non advisable, to supply decorators, who are not unemployed, to England.⁹⁸

Here again we see how the issue of “political conflict” observed by Colucci, translated itself in the impossibility, for the Italian officers to, at the same time, defend the

⁹⁸ In merito [all’assunzione di operai specializzati e apprendiste ceramiste] ci permettiamo di fare presente quanto segue:

Non esiste attualmente disoccupazione in tale settore, che ha una occupazione normale. L’industria artigiana è un vanto nazionale e provvede ad esportare i suoi prodotti artistici che sono ovunque bene accolti. È necessario quindi non favorire l’esodo di operai specializzati per evitare che si riducano le esportazioni e quindi l’entrata di valuta pregiata.

L’Inghilterra, che prima della guerra era acquirente essa pure di ceramiche decorate italiane, ne proibisce ora tassativamente l’importazione;

Nei mercati esteri (specie Stati Uniti d’America) l’Inghilterra fa una forte concorrenza alle ceramiche artistiche italiane,

Nel trattato attualmente in vigore con l’Inghilterra è previsto un contingente di ceramiche artistiche da esportarsi dall’Inghilterra in Italia.

Per le ragioni suddette sembra alla nostra Associazione non essere affatto utile, o per lo meno non opportuno, fornire ora dei decoratori, che non sono disoccupati, all’Inghilterra.” *Ibid.*

interests of the national industry, fulfil all of Britain's *desiderata* and, lastly, protect the Italian workers. What was meant to be, in the manifest intentions of the Italian authorities, a concrete remedy to the problem of unemployment, in real terms came constantly up against the subordinate position that Italy occupied in relation to the recipient nations, a constitutive condition of what Colucci calls "disadvantage" which raised its ugly head at every stage of the recruitments:

Italy was at a disadvantage, not just in Strasburg or Brussels – where it constantly tried, with little results, to peddle the principle of free labour circulation – but also in Charleroi, in Wales, in the Loire – where the International migration agreements were constantly violated – and, worst of all, in Milan, Genoa and Naples where foreign representatives had hugely ample margins of autonomy in selecting prospective migrants.⁹⁹

It remains to be seen what practical effects this disadvantage had in the concrete migratory adventure of the individual workers and, in particular, of women workers – bearing also in mind that female migrants had to cope with ulterior "disadvantages", peculiar to them alone. Plus, it remains to be seen what happened once the government-driven recruitments were replaced by individual and chain migrations. If, as mentioned, these later migrations took advantage of the procedures laid down during this first "governmental" phase, it is also true that the latter introduced new elements, for good and

⁹⁹“ L'Italia era “in svantaggio” non soltanto a Strasburgo o a Bruxelles – dove cercava continuamente, con scarsi risultati, di rivendicare il principio della libertà di circolazione della manodopera – ma anche a Charleroi, in Galles, nella Loira – dove gli accordi internazionali sull'emigrazione venivano puntualmente violati – e soprattutto a Milano, a Genova, a Napoli dove i funzionari stranieri avevano margini amplissimi di manovra nelle selezioni degli emigranti.” Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. p. 121.

for bad. The praxis of direct recruitment and “sponsorship” by established foreign workers of a family member or acquaintance, brought about new forms exploitation, as sponsors and intermediaries often exacted payment from aspiring workers for the favour. At the same time, a more fluid, individual-based, recruitment process could overcome some of the obvious rigidities that characterised the collective recruitments, such as the age and marital status restrictions. This sometimes offered those who chose to emigrate wider margins of freedom in their personal choices and in their private lives. In the following chapter the journey of Italian textile workers to their new home will be described, by examining the personal experiences of those who were recruited within the OIS and also those who migrated in the following years.

2. Leaving Home

No personal story of migration can possibly be the same as the next. As we will see, even a seemingly homogeneous sample, such as women workers of similar age who migrated from Italy to Great Britain to be employed for textile work over a relatively short period of time, is really made of countless different experiences, diverging paths, of individual life journeys which cannot be reduced to a comprehensive whole. The focus of this chapter will be the moment of departure, the processes that shaped and enabled the emigration of these women from Italy, the limitations imposed upon them and the opportunities given: an account, therefore, of shared circumstances. The study of the early stages of this emigration adventure, however, reveal that differences introduced over the years in the recruitment-process had concrete, perceivable effects on the individual experiences of the workers.

The first section will present what is common to all Italian textile workers recruited by Britain, namely the terms of their contractual engagement, which remained virtually unchanged – save for a small increase in wages – over the years 1949-60. The rest of the present chapter will describe, first, the recruitment of workers during the years of the Official Italian Scheme, and secondly, the departure process of those workers who were co-

opted through company-driven recruitments and who arrived in Britain with individual work permits.

Italian Textile workers: Terms of employment and contractual obligations

Between 1949 and 1960, all women who became textile workers in Great Britain, were employed on the basis of a standard template contract that British and Italian authorities began drafting during the first months of the Official Italian Scheme. The template however, was only finalised in 1953, and even after this date, employers were allowed to make occasional amendments, extensions or reductions of the age restrictions and adjustments regarding pay rates etc. This template agreement consisted of four pages, where the clauses were listed in the two translations, Italian and English.

The opening section, article number 1, defined who was eligible for employment and specified some of the limitations we have discussed in Chapter 1:

Only single women or childless widows in good health and over 18 and under 30 years of age will be accepted.

Women volunteering under this scheme will not be allowed to bring with them dependants or any other relatives; nor will such persons be permitted to join them in Great Britain.¹

¹ Many copies of the template contract are held in ACS, Minlavr, Dgcm, Div.IX. b.466, emigrazione italiana in

Article 2 stated that all candidates had to undergo medical examination to assess whether they were in good health, and article 3 established the duration and specific nature of their contractual obligations.

Volunteers accepted for employment must be prepared to remain in employment in Great Britain for two years and will enter Great Britain on a permit valid for this period, subject to the conditions that they register at once with the Police [...]

Free transport, accommodation and maintenance during the journey to Great Britain will be provided. The initial period of permitted stay will be extended if the volunteer complies with these conditions and if the extension is desired both by the volunteer and the British Authorities.

Articles 4, 5 and 6, concerned the financial retribution to which workers were entitled, free board and accommodation together with a small grant, paid weekly, from the day of departure to the first official day of employment. The amounts paid could vary, but consisted generally of a down payment given on arrival (often £1, give or take) followed by a small weekly sum intended as pocket money for the worker. The Italian workers, stated Art. 5, were employed under the same conditions as British workers and would earn the same wages, paid weekly. The wages were determined by the employers and would generally increase slightly every year or so to compensate for inflation. Available statistics concerning the typical wages paid to weavers, for example, show an average of 99s 2d for 1948, which were increased to 107s 5d in 1950, and 137s in 1953.²

Inghilterra, sottofasc. “personale femminile”

² This statistics can be found in Edwin Hopwood, *A History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry and the*

Generally, Italian workers were employed as trainees whether they had any relevant previous experience in this line of work or not. For this reason, their wages were usually the minimum wage rates applied in this sector. Article 5, however, specified that “ normally after a period of training workers are paid at piece rates which enables them to earn more than the minimum time rates”. This would have enabled workers to shift from a basic by-the-hour wage to a form of incentive-pay, based on each worker’s individual output. This, however, was merely a general recommendation, since it was entirely up to the employers to introduce piece rates and British authorities could not act to enforce them.

Work hours were not stated in the template agreement, since textile factories typically subdivided production into two, or even three, daily work shifts. Each worker was, however, employed to work 44 or 45 hours per week. Article 5 also stated what follows:

Volunteers will live either in hostels or private lodgings. They will be charged for this accommodation the same amounts as are paid by British workers for similar accommodation. The charge [...] does not cover the mid-day meal, but in most factories a cheap meal can be obtained.

In some occupations workers will not be accepted unless they are willing to become members of a Trade Union.

This assurance, that volunteer workers would be charged the same rates as British workers for hostels and private lodging, is, though formally irrefutable, a bit misleading. British workers after all did not, as a rule, live in hostels. And it was not within the power of the Ministry of Labour to ensure that private landlords applied the same rates to foreign migrants and local tenants alike; they could not even be sure that foreign workers would be

Amalgamated Weavers' Association : The Lancashire Weavers' Story (Manchester: Amalgamated Weavers Association, 1969). As British currency was not decimalised until 1971, £1 was the equivalent of 20 shillings.

accepted as tenants as readily as British ones. Until volunteer workers had found a way of moving from the hostels to private accommodation, their earning potential was subject to a number of fixed costs, such as the charges imposed by the hostels themselves, which included the costs of at least two of their daily meals, irrespective of what each worker actually consumed. So, it is fair to say that, at least initially, British and foreign workers did enjoy equal pay, but the amount of disposable income they could aspire to was not equal at all.

Articles 6, 7, 8 mainly concerned the equalisation of foreign and British textile workers in regards to tax deductions, unemployment, health insurance, and benefits. Each individual contract would have quoted an estimation of the combined weekly contributions expected from the employee. These deductions represented other fixed expenses that, paired with the costs, also fixed, of hostel accommodation and daily meals would inevitably pose limitations on each worker's ability to make savings and send remittances back to family in Italy. The Italian authorities were anxious to understand exactly how big these limitations were likely to be, as we can see from this memorandum sent to the *Ministero del Lavoro* by the British embassy in Rome, in September 1949:

Minister Fanfani expressed a wish to be informed about the amount of savings that an Italian woman worker could make from her salary once her traineeship is over. [...] It could be useful to know that experienced Austrian women working in the cotton mills earn on average 4 (or 5?) pounds a week if not more, they pay for their accommodation charges ranging from 26 to 35 shillings a week if their mid-day meal is included; or between 24 and 30 shillings if not included (also consider that a canteen meal costs in average 5 or 6 shillings a week). Their national insurance contributions amount to 3 shillings and 10 pence per week, their transportation expenses vary from 1 shilling to 3

shillings a week and their Income Tax ranges between 2 and 5 shillings a week.³

It must be observed that these projections offered by the British Embassy were all given with a margin that, all considered, is quite ample. The worker who was lucky enough to pay, for each voiced expense, only the minimum amount suggested by the authors of the memorandum, would have paid 30s10p a week in fixed charges. But the worker who paid the maximum amount would have faced a deduction of 46s10d which was over £2; in other words, more than half the weekly wage of £4, paid to fully trained textile operatives, according to the British Embassy.

The documentation produced by the Italian *Ministero del Lavoro* in the relevant years reveals that upgrading of textile workers to piece-rates was not always allowed and, in general, many women realised that, once all their lodging and transportation costs were deducted, their wages were a lot lower than expected. Amongst a group of letters and brief notes sent by apprentice textile workers to the Italian Embassy to communicate how they were finding their new employment, there is one sent by a workers from Naples named Antonietta Verdesca. Her letter, sent from Naples, November 15th 1950, is rather disgruntled in tone:

Here we live very badly, they do not treat us like it was stated in the contract. As soon as we can we will come back to Italy.⁴

³ “Il Ministro Fanfani desiderava inoltre alcune notizie circa l’ammontare dei risparmi che una lavoratrice italiana poteva effettuare sul proprio salario una volta finito il corso preparatorio. [...] Può essere utile tuttavia sapere che le lavoratrici austriache esperte nelle sezioni tessili dell’industria cotoniera guadagnano 4 (o 5?) sterline settimanali o più, pagano alloggi per un ammontare da 26 scellini a 35 settimanali se un pasto a mezzogiorno è incluso o da 24 a 30 se escluso (ciò che una mensa di azienda costa dai 5 ai 6 scellini settimanali. Il loro contributo per le assicurazioni nazionali è di 3 scellini e 10 pence per settimana, le loro spese di viaggio variano da 1 scellino a 3 per settimana e il loro “income Tax” va da 2 a 5 scellini per settimana.” Memorandum ardesse to the *Ministero del Lavoro* by the British embassy in Rome, in September 1949. Held in: ACS, Minlav, Dgcm, Div.IX, b. 471, sottofasc. “contratto tipo manodopera femminile”.

⁴ “Qui viviamo molto male, non ci trattano come era scritto sul contratto. Appena possibile torneremo in

Amongst the women employed to work in the pottery sector, who were extended an almost identical contract, we find similar occasional expressions of surprise and dissatisfaction about wages. As in the case of this other letter, addressed to the *Ministero del Lavoro*, by Grazia Bucci on behalf of her two daughters, who had been both employed in Stoke on Trent, as potters, for three months:

[My] two daughters, Liliana and Fulvia, [...] in every letter complain of living very badly, in regards to living provisions, and to their retribution and finally to the work, for which the pay is not adequate and is barely enough for their necessities⁵

As stated, the agreement stated clearly that weekly deductions entitled each worker to free healthcare, and unemployment benefits after a “statutory minimum number of contributions” (art. 5). It was also stated that special assistance was assured to the workers who fell sick or became unemployed before becoming entitled to benefit. The assistance would consist of “either free board and accommodation with a weekly cash allowance of 5 shillings or a money allowance according to needs to provide for maintenance”. On a similar note, article 9 established that Italian workers were just as eligible as British workers for compensation for injury arising “out of and in the course of their employment”, thus emphasising that, to all intents and purposes, foreign workers were entitled to the same benefits and welfare protection. If they were not sent home, that is.

Italia”. ACS, Minlav, Dgcm, Div.IX. b.466, emigrazione italiana in Inghilterra, sottofasc. “personale femminile”.

⁵“Due figlie, Liliana e Fulvia [...] in ogni loro lettera si lamentano di trovarsi molto male sia come viveri, sia come retribuzione e infine come lavoro, la cui retribuzione non è adeguata al lavoro stesso, ed è appena bastevole alo loro necessario.” ACS, Minlav, Dgcm, Div.IX. b.466, emigrazione italiana in Inghilterra, sottofasc. “personale femminile”.

According to article 10:

Volunteers who were unable to continue in employment owing to prolonged sickness or who are found unsuitable or whose services are no longer required by the British Government [...] will be repatriated to their home area at the expense of the British Government.

Lastly, articles 11 and 12, posed some limitations over what the workers could bring with them from Italy – only clothes and items for personal use. In other words, nothing which could be sold or bartered. Once in Britain, volunteers were allowed to remit a portion of their earnings to Italy, but no more than £10 per month and send parcels to friends and relatives as long as they did not contain non rationed foods and “certain articles subject to control”.

The template went a little further to explain that, in Britain, purchase of food was still subject to rationing, though meals could be “purchased in canteens, restaurants, etc., without the surrender of ration coupons and many items of food are un-rationed.”⁶ Rationing of foodstuffs and other goods had been introduced in January 1940, at first on a limited number of products such as butter, bacon and sugar.⁷ In the following years, however, the programme had been extended to include most foods and, in some years, clothing, fuels and various household necessities. In an attempt to control inflation, the British government kept rationing in place till 1954, extending it to staple foods, such as bread and potatoes, which had not been rationed in the wartime years.

Article 14 asserted that facilities were to be made available to enable the workers to

⁶ The relevant quotation is contained in article 6 of the template agreement.

⁷ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain : Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

learn the English language. From the letters written by trainee workers and the testimonies of women interviewed in the course of this research, it would appear that English teaching provisions differed depending from area to area, as some textile companies employed a larger number of Italian workers and were more motivated to make language courses available to them, and from the availability of Italian speakers who could be employed for the purpose. In one of these letters, Clara Aceti, a textile apprentice working in Dundee described in very detailed and appreciative terms her first few months in Britain, but reports that English teaching provisions had not yet been implemented:

The biggest difficulty here are the English lessons, since we are the first Italian girls to arrive we won't easily obtain a school in our language.⁸

It may be of interest to know that, in this particular instance, a makeshift solution to the problem was soon found as Clara herself, who was born in the Franco-Italian region of Valle D'Aosta and therefore spoke French, could be taught English by a French speaker and, then, use her knowledge to help her Italian co-workers along.

The Official Italian Scheme – Organising the first recruitments

As shown in Chapter 1, the recruitment of Italian workers to Great Britain was only one

⁸ Letter dated 2nd December 1950. "La più grande difficoltà è per le lezioni di Inglese, essendo noi le prime ragazze giunte non avremo con facilità scuola nella nostra lingua. Potrò invece ottenere lezioni in francese ed eventualmente aiuterò qualche compagna che lo desideri". ACS, Minlav, Dgcm, Div.IX. b.466, emigrazione italiana in Inghilterra, sottofasc. "personale femminile".

amongst many such bilateral agreements that, in the post-war years, the Italian Authorities signed in an effort to relieve the nation's unemployment. For the purpose of "enabling the highest possible number of people to leave Italy in the shortest possible time" the Italian government set up a veritable task-force of institutional bodies in charge of advertising work opportunities abroad, selecting suitable applicants and assisting migrants in the first steps of their journey.⁹ So, how did Italian women come to learn about the opportunities offered by British mills? Through what channels were they able to secure their new job?

The Uffici del Lavoro

The regional and local *Uffici del Lavoro*, literally Labour Offices (for which we will refer by the Italian acronym ULMO) were the Italian employment agencies, created in September 1943. They reported to the *Ministero del Lavoro* and managed, at a local level, all matters concerning employment. These were the main objectives of the ULMO, according to the ministerial decree n. 381, 15th April 1948:

- Oversee the collection of data necessary to study the issue of unemployment on a local level.
- Enable the employment of workers within the Italian Republic;
- Examine the requests of those who wish to expatriate for work abroad and assist migrating workers and their families, organising their relocation to the Emigration Centres;
- Perform a conciliatory role in labour disputes;

Initially created with the general purpose of micro-managing domestic employment,

⁹ The passage quoted is from Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*.

the ULMOs became the organisational outpost of the government's emigration strategy. Each division was in charge of processing the offers from abroad and advertising them in any way they saw fit: for example by employing bill-posting, local advertising and newsreels. They would also assist jobseekers by operating a first selection of suitable candidates, ensuring they met the medical and professional standards required; take care of the bureaucracy involved; procure passports and papers; and organise the candidates' transportation to the Emigration Centres, from which they would leave for their final destinations. The publicity generated by the local ULMOs about the recruitment for British textile industries would have been the principle means through which many young women discovered the Official Italian Scheme in the years 1949-51.

This is made plain by this recorded testimony preserved by the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, one of the six interviews to Italian textile workers preserved in their archive, which will be quoted more extensively in the following chapters. Interviewee A migrated to Shipley, near Bradford in Yorkshire in the early 1950:

Well, I have chosen to live in England...well, we had read in the paper they advertise people for coming to work in England so I say I am going in England. [...]

We went er... into the Employment...the Labour Exchange in Padua, ask...er, hours of the job. They say, "well, we can't guarantee but there's a firm there who wants a textile worker." They say, "If you want to go as a domestic you can go as a domestic, but usual is a textile worker" so I took the situation as a Textile worker. I came in Shipley.¹⁰

Another important service performed by the employees of the ULMOs was the

¹⁰ Interviewee A, BHRU, Acc. no. B0105.

sending of written reports, every six months, about the activities which took place in their offices. These reports offer invaluable insights into the everyday management of emigration as well, and we can see many of the various factors at work which influenced the implementation of the OIS and were, ultimately, responsible for its not entirely satisfactory outcome. As previously said, the quota of Italian workers which the British and Italian authorities wished to allocate to undermanned industries, the textile sector in particular, were never entirely fulfilled, and reading the reports compiled by the ULMOs we begin to understand why.

To begin with, there was the recognised problem that young single women were less eager to emigrate compared to their male counterparts or married women, because in their case, given the restrictions in place, this would have meant often leaving entirely on their own. This is exemplified in a report compiled by the ULMO of Asti, in the region of Piedmont, in 1950:

Trainee-Textile Workers – The number of candidates has been limited since it consisted entirely of female recruits, reluctant to separate from their families; only two women have been enlisted to wait for the departure-orders and call frequently to solicit this office.¹¹

This same report also offers an indication of the second problem weighing on the entire operation, which affected all people who were looking to migrate abroad, namely the impossibility to offer the candidates any reliable indication of how long they would have to

¹¹ “Apprendiste tessili – il numero delle aspiranti è stato limitato in quanto si trattava unicamente di elementi femminili, poco propensi a separarsi dalla famiglia; due sole lavoratrici attendono da tempo l’ordine di partenza e sollecitano continuamente questo provinciale.” ACS, Min Lav, direzione generale affari generali e del personale, div. VI, “servizio centrale dell’ispettorato del lavoro”, ‘attività degli uffici del lavoro e della massima occupazione’ b. 10, Asti.

wait between their first interview with the ULMO personnel and the moment when they would finally be allowed to depart. From the moment each candidate was enlisted by her/his local ULMO as awaiting for a placement abroad, months could pass before they were sent to the Emigration Centres to be selected by the foreign committees and, finally, allowed to leave. Often, by the time the summons from the Emigration Centre arrived, candidates had found another placement or were given insufficient notice of the imminent departure. Concerns about these delays were expressed often in the ULMO reports, such as this one from Novara, in 1950:

Of the recruitments requested by the Ministry, those which did not confirm the initial predictions of this ULMO are the placements of trainee-textile workers and domestics for hospitals in England.

In fact, for the two recruitments, 39 candidates were selected, of these 29 underwent medical evaluation by the English commission, 22 have been declared fit and are still waiting to be summoned for departure. It must again be brought to attention that the orders to depart or to present oneself to the Emigration Centres for medical or professional evaluation arrive with such short notice that the workers often have to delay of forgo departure because of the little time available to arrange their affairs.¹²

These issues were not, of course, exclusive to the recruitments destined to Britain but, rather, the effect of structural inefficiencies which affected the management of emigration for all destinations and they were constantly denounced in the reports compiled by the ULMOs all over Italy. It would seem that cases of eligible workers furnished with

¹²“Difatti per i due ingaggi sono state reclutate 39 lavoratrici, di esse 29 sottoposte a visita medica dalla Commissione Inglese, 22 sono state dichiarate idonee e sono tutt’ora in attesa dell’ordine di partenza. Si segnala sempre che gli ordini di espatrio o di presentazione ai Centri di Emigrazione per gli accertamenti sanitari o professionali pervengono con pochi giorni di anticipo e alle volte il lavoratore deve rinunciare o rinviare la partenza perché non ha il tempo materiale di sistemare i propri interessi.” Ministero del lavoro e della previdenza sociale, direzione generale affari generali e del personale, div. VI, “servizio centrale dell’ispettorato del lavoro”, ‘attività degli uffici del lavoro e della massima occupazione’ b. 14.

passport and all the required paperwork who had to give up their placement, because of countless delays, were overwhelmingly frequent.

Finally, the ULMO officials brought to the Ministry's attention a third matter of concern, that is, the financial prospects which migrants could expect in their new job. Those who were seeking employment abroad could not make an accurate assessment of what their wages would be because often, as in the case of textile workers, their contracts were not very clear. All wages and deductions were expressed in foreign currency and the candidates had yet no experience of the cost of living in their country of destination. The personnel at ULMO, in charge of advising them, could not provide but very generic indications in this regard and those migrants who could not rely on networks of contacts living overseas were given the impression of being thrown in at the deep end:

Not always, when it comes to the recruitments, the regional Offices are informed in good time of the conditions extended by the foreign employers. It has been observed that it is of fundamental importance that said offices are given the specifics when the recruitments are organised so that we can counsel the workers, who ask, first thing, exactly such information, to which their application is conditional.¹³

To compensate for the vague information offered by the institutions which were supposed to assist them, prospective migrants had to rely on the traditional "reflux of information from those who were already abroad or those who had returned"; This

¹³ "Non sempre, in occasione di reclutamenti, gli Uffici della regione sono stati resi tempestivamente edotti delle condizioni praticate dai datori di lavoro stranieri. Si rileva che è di fondamentale importanza che detti Uffici siano resi edotti di tali notizie nello stesso momento in cui vengono disposti i reclutamenti per poter rispondere ai lavoratori che si presentano loro, i quali chiedono per prima cosa proprio tali informazioni, alle quali è subordinata la loro adesione al reclutamento." Ministero del lavoro e della previdenza sociale, direzione generale affari generali e del personale, div. VI, "servizio centrale dell'ispettorato del lavoro", 'attività degli uffici del lavoro e della massima occupazione' b. 12, Milano.

phenomenon, as explained here by Andreina De Clementi in her most recent work on post-war migration, in actual fact, had the effect of limiting migration rather than promoting it:

Oral communication and word of mouth have had, in the history of Italian migration two symmetrically opposite effects: In the early 20th century they dazzled the sedentary by prospecting fabulous riches and concealing indescribable hardship, they acted as a multiplier of departures; in this phase [the post-war years] on the other hand, they emphasised the difficulties and adversities, discouraging those who were less determined and obstructed the Italian exodus.¹⁴

The Emigration Centre

Up till 1955, there were five Emigration Centres operating in Italy; one in Milan, opened in 1946, and one each in Genoa, Naples, the Sicilian city of Messina and Turin, which was merged with the Milan centre in 1947. As a rule, Milan served as the clearance point for all emigration directed to European destinations, including Great Britain, while the other centres, because of their proximities to sea-ports, controlled the traffic of transoceanic migration. For the purposes of this research we will consider the documentation produced by the centres of Milan and Naples, because the Neapolitan centre often functioned as a meeting point for the migrants travelling from the southern regions of Italy. In this instance, such people would be hosted and examined in Naples, then sent to Milan, from where they could cross the borders with the other workers. Michele Colucci has accurately described

¹⁴“La comunicazione orale e il passaparola hanno avuto nella storia dell’emigrazione italiana funzioni simmetricamente opposte: ai primi del secolo abbagliarono i sedentari magnificando ricchezze da favola e occultando inenarrabili privazioni, facendo da moltiplicatore delle partenze; in questa fase, invece, enfatizzarono disagi e avversità, scoraggiando i meno determinati e resero più accidentato l’esodo” Andreina De Clementi, *Il Prezzo Della Ricostruzione: L’emigrazione Italiana Nel Secondo Dopoguerra* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010), p.46.

what an important role these centres performed in the experience of Italian emigrants at the time:

To begin with, they represented for many emigrants the first stage of their journey and the last moment of transition, in Italy, before being transferred abroad, while for others, those who didn't pass the medical examination or who were repatriated against their will, these centres were the place where they grieved over the failure of their migration project.¹⁵

In the words of the director of the Milan Centre, it was here, in such centres, that a migrant received "the farewell of the homeland he is leaving". The personal accounts of migrants employed in this research are often quite vague and imprecise in their memories of the time spent within these structures; this has certainly a lot to do with the considerable time passed since the event, but it would also seem to suggest that, for those who were leaving, the experience of being "processed" by the centres, was often conditioned by a sense of anonymity, of submission to the incomprehensible directives imparted by authority.

This is indicated, for example, by Alba, one of the respondents interviewed for this research. Alba is originally from the province of Treviso, she left Italy to become a textile worker in 1949:

We went to Milan and in Milan we passed all the visits and we stayed one...two weeks there in Milan ...[...] Six of us...one from here, one from there, one from everywhere, one from Friuli, one who wasn't, we were all gathered there, you know, from the town...one had not wanted to come...they were scared...and later in Milan we passed

¹⁵ "Innanzitutto rappresentarono per molti emigranti la prima tappa del loro viaggio e l'ultimo transito in Italia prima del trasferimento all'estero, mentre per altri – i respinti alle visite mediche di selezione o i rimpatriati per motivi non dipendenti dalla propria volontà – nello spazio dei centri si consumò la delusione per il fallimento dei rispettivi progetti migratori" Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. p. 112.

all the examinations. [...] they.. they...and they told you... you have to undress completely, I had never undressed, no, but you must do it!¹⁶

The oral testimonies consulted on this subject are an interesting reminder of the peculiar organising processes which shape our memory. What most interviewees have in common is that they offer a vivid and compelling retelling of their life in Italy before they journey, the circumstances that made them aware of the job opportunities abroad, and then of their new life in Britain, in new, unfamiliar and often bewildering surroundings. As for those few weeks spent in the Emigration Centres, first, and then on trains and ships, crossing the frontier and arriving at their town of destination, personal memories become sketchy and evasive. Here, places and events are jumbled together into one confused segment of the time-continuum where, over and over again, papers and baggage were submitted for inspection, passports were stamped, clothes removed, bodies examined and assessed, questions answered.

Another respondent, Marina, who migrated to Britain from her native village near Udine following in her sister's footsteps, is a case in point:

So you left on your own?

Yes. My brother accompanied me to Milan and in Milan there's a lot of people, you know, that were leaving and they started chatting so we had company until...

And from Milan?

From Milan I sat on the train...and I arrived to London, I had to board the ship and all these things ...

So you... you travelled by train through France and then you boarded a ship?

Yes yes I took the ship, from the ship you know they examine you to see if you are fit

¹⁶ "Siamo state a Milano e a Milano abbiamo passate tutta la visita e siamo state una settimana due là a Milano...[...]Sei di noi...una da qua, una da là, una da tutte le parti, una friulana, una no, siamo trovate tutte là no dal paese era una.. non è voluta venire dopo avevano paura e dopo a Milano abbiamo passato tutte le

or if you are not and I always cried..."where do I go?" You know, you don't know anybody, you don't speak the language, it was bad so...we arrived here where you know... after London we took a train again with our papers in hand, you see? It was bad, where do you go? You cry... the bag is there...and so...we sat in the train...from London to come to Manchester. ...¹⁷

Marina, who came to Britain in 1953 when she was eighteen years old, has clearly confused the sequence of some events. She recalls the medical examinations as taking place on the ship, which is not correct, but that is understandable given that the ship was the first point of contact between the immigrants and the British border authorities, where a lot of questioning and document inspection took place. Her account, nonetheless, captures evocatively the subjective experience of people as they were "processed" through the emigration-machine. It is important to bear in mind this experience, the perspective of those who migrated, as we take a closer look to the final Italian leg of their journey, the Emigration Centre.

Milan and Naples

In Milan, the Emigration Centre opened its doors in April 1946 and was officially inaugurated on the 5th of October 1947 for the purpose of managing the emigration of

visite. [...] Ti ti... Eh e diceva ti devi spogliare completa io non mi ero mai spogliata, no, e lo devi fare!"

¹⁷" Perché lei è partita da sola...

Sì. Mio fratello mi ha portato fino a Milano e a Milano là è tanta gente sai che vanno che cominciavano a parlare e così abbiamo avuto compagnia fino ...

E da Milano?

Da Milano sono seduta sul treno... e sono arrivata fino a Londra da prendere la nave e tutte queste cose...

Quindi ha fatto... il treno fino alla Francia e poi ha preso la nave?

Sì sì ho preso la nave, dalla nave sai che ti fanno visite per vedere come stai come non stai e io piangevo sempre... dove vado? Sai, non conosci nessuno la lingua non la sai era brutto insomma... siamo arrivate qui dove diciamo... dopo di Londra abbiamo preso il treno di nuovo con le carte in mano, sai? era brutto dove vai? Piangi c'è la borsa lì... e insomma... e siamo seduti del treno... di Londra per venire a Manchester ho preso...."

Italian workers recruited by France, Belgium, Britain, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Luxemburg, Sweden and Norway. The centre was first located within a building connected to the central railway station; the available quarters were designed to function as dormitories and first reception for migrants in transit. This accommodation was soon understood to be inadequate, far too small to provide for large numbers of people and house the range of services which took place in the centre, so the Italian authorities assigned to it new premises. This was a building located in Piazza Sant'Ambrogio, a disused military barracks which the centre had to share with a unit of the Italian Police. Here in Piazza Sant'Ambrogio, the centre had 172 rooms at its disposal, divided on three floors, which hosted administrative offices, the foreign committees, medical staff, ambulatories, canteens and dormitories for the workers in transit, plus storage spaces, reading rooms and common areas. The two centres were both maintained in use, the Sant'Ambrogio structure performing all the main services, whilst the spaces adjacent to the train station were employed to provide temporary accommodation for migrants in surplus.

The Emigration Centre in Naples also faced considerable logistical problems, located, as it was, in another former military barracks, the “ Caserma Cesare Battisti” , in the peripheral area of Fuorigrotta. Because of the considerable distance from the city centre and from both the railway station and the maritime port, the centre had to incur substantial expenses to shuttle migrants from one place to the other. What is more, the buildings and the surrounding road network had suffered serious damage during the war. Reconstruction was slow and gradual; as late as 1952, the centre's personnel complained to the *Ministero del Lavoro* about the many problems caused by the use of bomb-damaged buildings, stagnant sewage and the presence of local evacuee families who had found shelter in some

of the edifices within the centre's compound.

In the experience of those who had to spend time in the emigration centres, this whole set-up had the effect of reopening those wounds that war-time experiences had left in the collective psyche, as these structures painfully brought to mind the evacuations, the deportations, the cramped air-raid shelters of recent memory. "The crowds awaiting departure, the sense of precariousness experienced by people in transit, their dependence on the dispositions of this or that public official, all these reminded one of situations and episodes occurred during the war, still very close in time" observes Michele Colucci, and this state of affairs was duly deplored by the Italian press and debated in parliament.¹⁸

The fact that the emigration centres were established within military structures only made matters worse, attaching to this stage of the migration process even more unpleasant associations. The time spent waiting for departure inevitably resembled a form of detention. These re-purposed barracks were, after all, structures where migrants could not come and go freely without controls and limitation, and where one was always in close proximity with officers in uniform.

In Milan, for example, where the centre's premises had to be shared with a division of the police's mobile units, the staff lamented, in the six-monthly reports addressed to the *Ministero del Lavoro*, that cohabitation was by no means pleasant. A report from 1950 mentions the discomforts created by noisy shooting exercises and "the indecency constituted by garbage being thrown in the centre's courtyard by the agents of the *Celere* [police mobile unit] through the overlooking windows and many other inconveniences". To

¹⁸"Le folle in attesa di partire, la precarietà delle persone in transito, la loro stessa dipendenza dalle disposizioni di questo o quel funzionario richiamavano alla mente situazioni ed episodi avvenuti durante la guerra, ancora molto vicini nel tempo." Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. p.112

overcome some of these “inconveniences”, it became necessary to build some partition walls in order to seal off the areas occupied by the centre since, according to the same report:

The absence of dividing walls enabled within them [the quarters assigned to the Centre] disgraceful daily and nightly infiltrations of individuals belonging to the Police unit.¹⁹

It has to be observed, nevertheless, that the encumbering presence of policing organs in the spaces designed to organise emigration was not only, like in Milan, an unpleasant effect of the edifice-shortage of the post-war years. There seems to have been, at the root, a political vision which looked at the task of hosting and processing citizens for work abroad as a matter of public order. In Naples, where the Centre occupied the entirety of the buildings allocated to it, there was nonetheless a resident police squad which was not only in charge of the surveillance of the compound, but also actively involved in the day to day management of the centre. The Neapolitan officials even went as far as to report that the number of police officers working in the centre was too small to effectively “ensure custody and vigilance both day and night of the structures pertaining to this Centre, a place which gives shelter to many people, including women and children”.²⁰

As Colucci has rightly observed, there was no real need for the police forces to be so heavily involved in the day-to-day management of the centres, and this practice probably reflects a peculiarly Italian mindset prevalent at the time. In his book, Colucci quotes an

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰ “assicurare la custodia e la vigilanza nelle ore diurne e in quelle notturne dei beni patrimoniali di questo “Centro” e quanto altro si rende necessario assicurare in un luogo di sosta di numerose persone fra le quali si annoverano in gran numero donne e bambini” Report for the year 1953 for the Emigration Centre of Naples, in ACS, Minlav, Dgpag, Div.VI, Centri di Emigrazione, b.31. Centro Emigrazione Napoli.

investigation published by the *Bollettino Quindicinale dell'Emigrazione* between the years 1947-1948. The *Bollettino*, a periodical published by the Milanese philanthropic society *Umanitaria*, compared the running of the Milan Emigration Centre to another similar institution, the French centre of Montmélian where migrants did not necessarily feel like prisoners: “Even the freedom to come in and out of the centre, within reasonable limits, is recognised and most of all it is comforting not to find oneself constantly surrounded by police uniforms”²¹.

The work of the Centres

The institutional tasks performed by the Emigration Centres were numerous, starting from the administrative processing of all the paperwork needed to enable the migration and repatriation of Italian citizens. Secondly, the centres had to provide accommodation and catering for the migrants in transit, three hot meals a day plus food packages to sustain the workers during their journey abroad. Both in Naples and in Milan, the preparation of meals had been subcontracted to a Catholic charitable institution, the Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza, which made use of the kitchen facilities within the centres themselves.

In third place, the centres were in charge of carrying out the medical evaluations and necessary tests, on behalf of the foreign recruitment committees, to establish whether the candidates were in good health. In addition, they had to be able to give medical assistance to all the people stationed here, often for as long as a few weeks; men and women waiting

²¹“Anche la libertà di entrare e uscire dal centro, con opportune limitazioni, è riconosciuta e soprattutto dà un certo conforto il fatto di non trovare attorno divise de poliziotti.” *Bollettino Quindicinale dell'Emigrazione*, 25th February 1948. p.99. Quoted by Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. p.117.

to be allowed departure or to be sent back home but also entire families on their way to join a relation who had found work overseas.

For these reasons, the centres needed functioning ambulatories and medical staff on duty day and night, as it was not infrequent that women in labour or sick individuals needed emergency treatment or immediate hospitalisation. In Milan, the medical facilities initially set up within the Centre had gradually been transformed, in the space of two years, into a small but fully functioning emergency ward, served by medical staff employed by the ENPI (Ente Nazionale Prevenzione Infortuni), and by nurses of the International Red Cross. These improvements proved very effective in reducing the costs and dangerous delays involved in having to treat all emergencies through external hospitalization.

The medical assessment of the candidates was one of the most important activities performed by the emigration centres; the specific exams involved could vary, according to the specific guidelines imposed by each recruiting-country and depended, largely, on the different types of employment. Usually, foreign delegations were content to leave the medical staff of the Centre in charge of performing the assessments, but sometimes, such as in the case of the selections for the British Tinsplate industries within the Naples' centre, the British delegation chose to use their own medical staff. Save such few exceptions, most of the recruitments for the United Kingdom were carried out by Italian medical personnel working on assessment protocols designed by the British Embassy in Rome. The assessors were instructed to exclude various conditions which would have affected the suitability of the candidates, such as "Mental illness, low intelligence, alcoholism. Tuberculosis, venereal disease, trachoma and vision impairment below 6/24. Deafness, diseases of the heart, lungs

and abdomen, urinary incontinence and chronic nocturnal enuresis, pregnancy.”²²

These were, in a nutshell, the institutional activities performed by the Emigration Centres as designed by the Italian Authorities for the purpose, to use Michele Colucci’s apt description again, of “enabling the highest possible number of people to leave Italy in the shortest possible time”²³. These definitions, though accurate, convey quite an unflattering portrait of these centres, as if they were nothing more than a depersonalising conveyer-belt, where people, like commodities, were to be collected, quality controlled and passed on. Indeed, many observers at the time concurred that these were dismal, gloomy places – see for example the many reports which appeared on the pages of the *Bollettino quindicinale dell’emigrazione*. This publication regularly denounced many of the problems we have already mentioned, such as the use of ugly barrack-like buildings and the omnipresence of the police forces where better, and more numerous, specialised civilian staff was needed. They also pointed out what inadequacies they observed in the assistance given to the migrants stationed in such premises, but this does not mean that offering assistance was not a matter that concerned those who worked in the centres themselves.

From the documentation produced by the centres’ personnel, such as the reports addressed to the *Ministero del Lavoro*, it would seem that finding ways to mitigate the harshness of this stage of the migrants’ journey was definitely an important matter for the officials in charge. It must be born in mind that around the emigration centres gathered a whole range of religious organisations, charities and individuals who looked at migrants as

²² “Malattia mentale, bassa intelligenza, alcolismo. Tubercolosi, malattie veneree, tracoma e necessità di lenti al di sotto dei 6/24. Sordità. Malattie di cuore, polmoni, addome, incontinenza e sregolatezza notturna abituale, stato di gravidanza.”²² ACS, Minlav,Dgpag, Div. VI, Centri Emigrazione, b.31, “Centro emigrazione di Napoli”, relazione annuale 1951.

²³ “se l’obbiettivo dei governi italiani – come ampiamente sottolineato – era far partire dall’Italia il più rapidamente possibile il maggior numero possibile di persone...” Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L’emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. p.119.

individuals in need of assistance and comfort, and this view, to an extent, was shared by those in charge of managing the institutional finalities of the centres. In Milan, for example, the directorship took the initiative of asking several charitable bodies to collect toys, books, clothes and blankets for the migrants, not just to compensate for the inadequacies of their personal baggage but to create occasions of entertainment and socialisation during their stay in the centre. These charities also organised film projections and lotteries as a means to offer some relief from the inevitable boredom that the long sojourns in the centres entailed. Anyone who worked in direct contact with the migrants themselves, it would seem, easily came to realise that dealing with emigration implied, in the most practical and basic terms, dealing with poverty and its consequences. It was, on a daily basis, a matter of clothing the naked, feeding the hungry and sheltering the (hopefully just temporarily) homeless, as it were. But were the centres' employees fulfilling, with what success is debatable, the purposes for which they were created? Did the Italian and British authorities share this understanding of the social implications of the migration process?

The Foreign Delegations

As mentioned, the Emigration Centres were the place where candidates met the foreign delegations for the first time and were inspected for recruitment. Britain had a permanent commission of representatives both in Naples and in Milan, composed of embassy envoys and personnel appointed by the Ministry of Labour. During times of intensive recruitment for one particular productive sector, or for a restricted number of private employers, it was not unusual that trade unions' or company representatives joined the recruiters' team.

The relationship between these delegates and the centres' personnel was complex and sometimes strained, as described by the anonymous compiler of this yearly report from Milan in 1954:

Delicate task, for example, not devoid of responsibilities, is the matter of establishing cordial relations with the Foreign delegations in the carrying out of our common work, aimed at fulfilling our mutual objectives such as those of the country of immigration in need of manpower, and those of our country which needs to promote emigration and offer relief to unemployment.

It will not appear an exaggeration to say that, more often than not, in our contacts with the foreign delegations it is necessary to use every, so to speak, diplomatic precaution to ensure that said objectives are achieved through mutual respect, with dignity and decorum.²⁴

This short passage is, despite the reticent prose and the circumlocutions employed by its author, quite revealing about the nature of the conflicts at work. The “mutual objectives” of the receiving nations, on the one hand, and of the Italian Authorities, on the other, were definitely not the same and they were only compatible to a point. It is not difficult to guess who had, on a regular basis, the last word since the foreign delegates were, according to the same report “endowed with ample powers and often quite autonomous in their decisions”.²⁵

A certain level of conflict affected in one way or the other the relationship with the

²⁴“Delicato compito, ad esempio, non scevro di responsabilità è quello di stabilire cordiali rapporti con le Commissioni Straniere nello svolgimento del lavoro comune, inteso a raggiungere la reciproche finalità quali sono quelle del Paese di Immigrazione richiedente la manodopera e del nostro Paese che ha necessità di favorire l'emigrazione soprattutto a sollievo della disoccupazione.

Non apparirà esagerato l'affermare che non poche volte occorre far ricorso a tutti gli accorgimenti , dirò così, diplomatici per fare in modo che nei contatti con i membri delle Commissioni Straniere tali finalità si raggiungano nel reciproco rispetto, con dignità e con decoro.” ACS, Minlav, Dgpag, Div.VI, Centri di Emigrazione, b.31, Centro Emigrazione Milano, Rapporto Annuale 1954.

²⁵ Ibid.

foreign delegations of every country, of course, though it would seem that the activity of the British mission was the one that caused the greatest frustration to the Italian officials; the problem was always the same, namely, the criteria followed by the British delegates when they selected the prospective workers. The director of Naples' centre, echoes Milan's assessment, in this yearly report written in 1952:

On the subject of the professional selections carried out by the British technical Commissions, it is interesting to observe that said commissions, when declaring our workers unsuitable, don't base their judgment simply on rigid criteria of falling within or without the desired category, like all other foreign missions, but they also follow certain other criteria, very difficult to define and that we could call "psychological".

The British experts don't declare someone fit for recruitment based on the mathematical sum of their medical and professional aptness, but during the professional evaluation they introduce a range of principles, mainly psychological in nature, such as the way the candidate presents him/herself, how s/he behaves and speaks during the interview, his/her general demeanour, clothes, how s/he reacts to certain questions: all this, however, very difficult to define and predict, because it is inspired by a certain subjectivity in the examiners' approach.²⁶

The documents produced by the British Ministry of Labour and its correspondence with their envoys in Italy do not shed much light on this matter, as the criteria applied in recruiting Italian workers is never discussed in much detail. Nonetheless, it is quite obvious

²⁶Nelle operazioni di selezione professionale compiute da parte delle Commissioni tecniche britanniche, è interessante segnalare che dette Commissioni, nel dichiarare non idonei i nostri lavoratori, non si basano soltanto su rigidi criteri di appartenenza o meno alla categoria richiesta, come più o meno fanno tutte le altre Missioni straniere, ma si basano anche su determinati criteri, molto difficilmente definibili, e che si potrebbero denominare "psicologici".

I tecnici britannici non basano la dichiarazione di idoneità soltanto sulla somma matematica dei dati di idoneità sanitaria e professionale, ma proprio in sede di esame professionale introducono una gamma di principi di natura prevalentemente psicologica, quali la presenza del candidato, il suo modo di esprimersi e di comportarsi durante l'intervista, il suo aspetto generale, il suo modo di vestire, il suo modo di reagire a determinate domande: il tutto tuttavia difficilmente definibile e inquadrabile, perché ispirato ad una certa soggettività da parte degli esaminatori." ACS, Minlav, Dgpag, Div.VI, Centri di Emigrazione, b.31, Centro Emigrazione di Napoli, Rapporto Annuale 1952.

that the delegates' conduct was largely influenced by the fact that they were, after all, recruiting workers on behalf of private companies. Even when no representative of the industry or the trade unions were actually present to the selection process, the British delegates were probably trying to second guess their opinions and modified their "screening" process accordingly. The recruitment of young women for textile work was, one suspects, a fairly straight-forward process, as no previous experience in this field of work was needed and the possibility of finding women who spoke English had been ruled out from the start. Employers, nevertheless, were likely to express a variety of concerns and biases which had to be taken into account.

The importance accorded to the moods of prospective employers was occasionally noticed by the Italian officials, such as in the case of this memorandum sent to the *Ministero del Lavoro* on the 14th of April 1950, about a recruitment of shirt-makers for a British company, which had recently fallen through:

[...] Mitchell [a British company) has verbally informed us that the representative of the mentioned company arrived from England to take part in the selection of women candidates, was forced to stop over in Milan because of the recent strike and there, having been informed by Mitchell that the selections were to take place in Naples and consisted of southern workers, he returned to England declaring that he refused to examine the candidates on account of the misgivings he had towards southern individuals.²⁷

²⁷“Sennonché la società Mitchell ha verbalmente precisato che il rappresentante della ditta interessata giunto dall’Inghilterra per effettuare la selezione delle candidate fu costretti a fermarsi a Milano a causa dell’ultimo sciopero e avendo colà appreso dalla Mitchell che le operazioni di selezione si sarebbero svolte a Napoli nei confronti di lavoratrici meridionali, rientrava in Inghilterra dichiarando di rinunciare ad esaminare le aspiranti per la sola prevenzione che aveva contro gli elementi meridionali.” Memorandum ardesse on 14th April 1950 by Mr. Casu to the ‘Direzione Generale Occupazione Interna e Delle Migrazioni’ , Div. VI, “Reclutamenti”. In: ACS, Minlav, Dgcm, Div.IX. b.466, emigrazione italiana in Inghilterra, sottofasc. “personale femminile”.

Whether the sudden departure of this company representative was really caused by the company's refusal to employ southern-Italian workers, or the Italian Official had just misinterpreted, we can only guess. What is important to recognise here is the great level of discretion granted to employers in this phase of the Official Italian Scheme.

But what were the most likely concerns shared by the textile industrialists involved? One subject of apprehension, which would have probably alarmed company owners and trade unionists in equal measure, was the possibility of admitting into Britain workers who had a strong affiliation to the Communist Party or could be expected to behave as "agitators" in their new workplace. Since the PCI (Italian Communist Party) was, after all, one of the strongest Communist parties in western Europe, with its over two million registered members and its links with the most important Italian trade union organisation, the CGIL, such anxieties were to be expected. This is made clear in a letter preserved in the files of the Ministry of Labour, written in September 1949, after the Parliamentary Secretary had undertaken an informal consultation with members of the Yorkshire wool industry employers' council, in order to assess their willingness to employ Italian labour. The author of the letter, who signed himself as J. Blake, reported how the employers were "still rather "cagey" about the screening arrangements in Italy as they do not want to import communists to Yorkshire".²⁸

As most women recruited for the British mills came from rural backgrounds and had no experience of factory work, it is hard to imagine that many of them would have had much involvement with Communist trade-unionism in Italy, but there exists at least one

²⁸ Letter signed by J.Blake to D.C. Barnes, 22nd September, 1949. in: TNA, LAB 8/ 1713, "Cabinet Office Production Committee: labour recruitment for the textile industries, from Italy and possibly Malta and Cyprus."

documented case in which the alleged “troublemaking” behaviour of two women in the early days of their new employment in Chorley, was explained as the result of their political track-record back in Italy. This appeared in a memorandum addressed to the Ministry of Labour Headquarters:

I was informed by Professoressa Magnino that Pardi was a Communist and was a ringleader of all the trouble which has arisen from time to time. Also that she was the one who together with Calugi went round at the time of the Minister’s visit and made the majority of the girls sign a round-robin of complaint.²⁹

The woman identified by the surname “Calugi” was repatriated as a consequence of her alleged disruptive behaviour, while “Pardi”, at the time when this letter was written, was reported as “appearing to have settled down” but that “it would be necessary to keep a watchful eye upon her”.

Saving such occasional fits of Cold War hysteria, the practice of screening prospective migrants and the conflict that this created between British and Italian authorities, would seem to reflect, again, the different finalities pursued by the two countries in the joint running of this recruitment scheme. On the one hand, the Ministry of Labour was striving to secure the kind of migration which would meet the least resistance from employers and trade union organisations, but which would also, in the long run, have the lightest possible impact on Britain’s social fabric and welfare provisions. It was, in short, a matter of “cherry-picking” the youngest, the fittest, the most able. Italian Authorities, on the other hand, adhered to their political brief which instructed them to find

²⁹ Letter addressed to G.E.D. Ball at the H.Q. of Overseas Department of the Ministry of Labour, dated 12th October 1949. TNA, LAB 13/822. European volunteer workers: policy in connection with recruitment of Italian women for employment in Great Britain.

a new outlet for the growing numbers of the country's poor. But can the issue of poverty ever be side-stepped completely when it comes to managing migration? Because of the very nature of the Official Italian Scheme, deployed as it was, mostly, for the recruitment of workers destined to a range of occupations that sat at the lower end of the social and professional spectrum – miners, brick-makers, trainee-factory workers etc – poverty would inevitably raise its ugly head at every stage of the process.

Clothing the Naked. Social implications of the Official Italian Scheme

From May 1949, some of the British delegates operating within the Emigration Centre in Milan, were permanently in charge of managing the recruitment of women for the textile industry. These were Judith Rathbone, an employee of the Ministry of Labour, and the woman identified as “Professoressa Magnino” in a document quoted earlier. Professoressa Magnino, worked as an interpreter and assistant during the selections and personally escorted many of the first contingents of Italian women during their journey to the UK. What we know about the day-to-day organisational aspects of the scheme can be largely surmised by the correspondence between Miss Rathbone, the Ministry's Headquarters in London and the Labour Attaché to the British Embassy in Rome, William Braine. Here we see how various issues, which the formal negotiations between British and Italian authorities had left somewhat vague and unresolved, had to be constantly readdressed in the early test-drive phase of the scheme.

Much of this correspondence is focused on the debate of such minutiae that there is little to be gained by accounting for it in great detail, as squabbles over the size of meal-

packages and last minute disputes over who should be expected to pay for what do not really add much to the purposes of this research.

One issue however, which has left a sizeable paper-trail in the folders of the Ministry of Labour, brings us right back to the problem of poverty, the proverbial elephant in the room of the Official Italian Scheme, and once again raises questions about the extent to which the British officials should have been expected to shoulder some responsibility in this matter – this is, namely, the amount of baggage, clothes and personal effects that the workers were supposed to bring with them, and who was responsible to integrate it if the workers turned up at the emigration centre with insufficient amounts of clothing to see them through their first months in Britain:

Women who arrived at the Emigration Centres were often short of suitable clothing and this would become a problem as soon as they crossed the frontier. From the time the women were selected to when they would be earning their first pay cheque, weeks would pass, and until then it was up to the British authorities to provide for them. It is not hard to imagine a number of reasons that could explain why so many women arrived in Milan with insufficient clothing, whether they underestimated the rigours of a Lancashire winter, or they simply did not possess adequate clothes. If, as it often happened, candidates were given very short-notice of their summons to the Emigration Centres, it is very likely that migrants would not have had much time to put together a suitable wardrobe to see them through their first months abroad.

This letter written by Miss Rathbone in April 1950, offers a picture of the extent of the problem and the way it was handled at the beginning:

The clothing problem, is, as you say, very difficult and I'm having endless discussions and arguments at this end [...] Yesterday I interviewed fifty-nine girls who were sent forward to Milan [...] Six of [them] had insufficient clothes and against protest from the Italians, but with the girls' consent, I insisted on looking at the luggage of three of them: there was no time for more. The worst was that of Gabriele Emilia who had practically only the clothes she wore for the journey, but these were adequate, for that purpose.

Twenty-three of the girls wore sandals and of these fourteen stated that they had shoes in their cases and were told to put them on.

Eight had no overcoats but all except three had short cloth jackets instead. [...]

It may be of interest though, for you to know that the Italians here in Milan do not consider that they are responsible for the adequacy of clothing as there is nothing about it in the origin agreement. At the present they have no stocks of clothes for emigrant in Milan. Dr. Casu, I also hear, is very much opposed to my inspecting girls' luggage.³⁰

As we have seen, the Emigration Centres did, as a rule, collect stocks of clothes and blankets for people staying on their premises, but these stocks always ran out very quickly and, in any case, they were usually intended for use within the centres themselves, not necessarily for everyone to take away. Miss Rathbone mentions in her letter that "The Italians" did not consider themselves responsible for the provision of clothing in this instance and in fact, according to the agreed schedule for financial expenses held in the Ministry of Labour's records, they were not. This note states clearly that the cost of supplying extra items of clothing was to be borne by the British Exchequer.³¹

³⁰ Judith Rathbone to H.A. Pass, 13th April 1950. TNA, LAB 13/822, "European volunteer workers: policy in connection with recruitment of Italian women for employment in Great Britain".

³¹ According to a "Schedule for financial arrangements" held in the files of the Ministry of Labour, expenses were divided as follows:

Expenses to be borne by H.M. Exchequer:

Transport to this country from agreed point in Italy;

Food and £1 travelling allowance on journey;

Transport to this country via Reception Centre to employment;

Hostel accommodation and pocket money;

Police registration fee and photographs;

Essential clothing if necessary;

Medical examination -4/- per head;

As girls continued to arrive “most inadequately clothed saying they have not been told to bring warm clothing” and British stocks of emergency clothing were running out, the British authorities seem to have become convinced that the workers were deliberately neglecting to bring their clothes:

I am not happy about this. I suspect that the difficulty arises from the fact that the Italian girls have made it known in Italy that we are issuing girls with supplies from our surplus clothing stores if they arrive short of clothing and the recruits give away or leave their own clothing at home. The first step, therefore, is to make it known to the Italians and to the girls who come forward for recruitment that we do not provide clothing.³²

Miss Rathbone took the initiative of compiling a list of “essentials” that each woman should be expected to bring with her as a condition to be allowed departure but this list was deemed rather excessive by the Ministry officials.

This list consisted, as it were, of a frock or skirt and blouse combination, full length coat or Mackintosh, strong leather shoes and stockings, plus two vests, two pairs of knickers, one petticoat, two spare pairs of stockings, one extra pair of shoes, two nightdresses, a cardigan or woollen jumper and six handkerchiefs (sic!) plus toiletries and towels.

Contribution towards preservation of Social Insurance Rights 10/- per month per person;

Costs of repatriation to the home area (except that no repatriation grant is payable).

Expenses to be borne by Italian Government:

Publicity in Italy;

Accommodation for selection Interviews;

Arrangements for completing moral character questionnaire;

Documentation in Italy;

Cost of transport to, and accommodation at, Assembly Centre.

TNA, LAB 13/822, “European volunteer workers: policy in connection with recruitment of Italian women for employment in Great Britain”.

³² H.N. Phillips to Ball, 19th April 1950. In TNA, LAB 13/822, “European volunteer workers: policy in connection with recruitment of Italian women for employment in Great Britain”.

It is not surprising that it was judged as excessive by the Ministry of Labour, these requests were rather rigidly prescriptive and probably not very reasonable, as many impoverished migrants leaving post-war Italy would have struggled to comply. Judith Rathbone was therefore told not to circulate the list but to use her discretion in order to assess if the women had or not the minimum necessary:

We hope that everything possible will be done at the Italian end to see that the girls are adequately clothed, but if Miss Rathbone considers that the standard falls below the absolute minimum, then, as I have said, she should tell the Italians at the Migration Centre that she cannot agree to the girl going forward. At that stage we think the Italians should do something to help the girl; they should not overrule Miss Rathbone.³³

These instructions suggest a series of considerations. The first is that, surprisingly, the responsibility of integrating each woman's luggage was, by a unilateral decision of the British authorities, assigned to the Centre's personnel, despite the fact that previous agreement obviously stated the opposite. Secondly, by advising Miss Rathbone to personally judge the adequacy of each worker's baggage, the British officials were introducing another one of those elements of imponderable discretion to the way the delegates carried out the selection process: another of those "principles of subjectivity" that the Centre's employees had observed and complained about in their reports. Finally, this decision puts the seal on a completely paradoxical scenario, given the circumstances, introducing the idea that one could not only be too old or unfit, or not sufficiently-skilled to migrate, but actually too poor. But who else did the British Authorities expect to take up

³³ G.N.D.Ball to W.Braine on 20th April 1950. in TNA, LAB 13/822, "European volunteer workers: policy in connection with recruitment of Italian women for employment in Great Britain".

their recruitment offer if not the poor?

As Andreina De Clementi observes, at the time the Atlee government displayed towards British workers an attitude that could be considered just as ruthless; in its quest to pursue full-employment and kick-start the domestic post-war reconstruction, the government adopted “policies which were the furthest away imaginable from the idea of a Smith-like ‘hidden hand’”

To overcome unemployment, the British working class was immediately subjected to a rigorous regime, exacerbated by exceptional rationing schemes made necessary by the burden of post-war obligations [...] The insistent urging to increase productivity were at one with the compression of wages, the curtailing of strikes, a spasmodic control of occupation...³⁴

So, this reluctance of the British authorities to engage with the social and economic disadvantage of the people they were seeking out to recruit, were they Italian migrants, or as we have seen in Chapter 1, the Displaced Persons selected through the other European Volunteer Workers’ schemes, could well be seen as an extension of the way Britain was handling its own domestic social and economic trouble. Such treatment, therefore, reflects the preoccupation, constantly displayed by the authorities in charge, that the recruitment of foreign workers would not be perceived as a threat to British society, by the workers, the captains of industry, the trade unions. In short, there were to be no free lunches, for anyone,

³⁴ “Il primo paese a raggiungere il pieno impiego fu l’Inghilterra. E lo fece sotto la guida del partito Laburista, uscito vincitore dalle elezioni del 1946, grazie a una politica la più lontana immaginabile dall’idea della “mano nascosta” di smithiana memoria. Per sconfiggere la disoccupazione, la classe operaia britannica venne da subito assoggettata ad un regime ferreo, inasprito da forme inusitate di razionamento dovute al fardello degli impegni postbellici per il sostentamento della Germania. La sollecitazione martellante all’incremento della produttività era tutt’uno con la compressione dei salari, il blocco degli scioperi, uno spasmodico controllo dell’occupazione...”De Clementi, *Il Prezzo Della Ricostruzione: L'emigrazione Italiana Nel Secondo Dopoguerra*. p.53.

in “Austerity Britain” – and correspondingly, no free clothes either.

The Years 1951-60 – Sponsorship and Direct recruitments

Together with organised migration, in 1954 there has been an increase of Italian workers entering Great Britain with individual work permits. Compared to the 4,067 individual permits issued in 1953, this last year 5,304 permits were issued to workers coming from Italy [...]

Of these 5,304 permits issued to our compatriots, 3,700 have been given to women workers and 1,604 to men, with an increase of 575 and 662 units respectively compared to the year before and with an increase in the numbers of male workers.³⁵

As this report suggests, three years after the closure of the Official Italian Scheme, the stream of Italian migrants finding work in Great Britain was still in full flow. Over the years, British undermanned industries would still periodically appeal to the Italian authorities, requesting contingents of varying sizes of workers. These recruitments took place much in the same way as those organised during the years 1949-51, with company delegates travelling to Milan or Naples in order to examine groups of aspiring workers and financing their travel to Britain. As we have seen, at any given time, finding high enough

³⁵“Al pari dell’emigrazione organizzata, nel 1954 si è avuto un aumento nel numero dei lavoratori italiani entrati in Gran Bretagna con permesso individuale di lavoro. Contro i 4.067 permessi individuali nel 1953, nello scorso anno ne sono stati rilasciati 5.304 ai soli lavoratori provenienti dall’Italia. [...] Dei 5.304 permessi rilasciati ai nostri connazionali 3.700 sono stati concessi a lavoratrici e 1.604 a lavoratori, con un aumento rispettivamente di 575 e di 662 unità in paragone all’anno precedente e con un accentuazione dell’afflusso di manodopera maschile.” “Rapporto annuale sull’Emigrazione italiana in Gran Bretagna” dated 14th February 1954, report compiled by the Italian Embassy of London ardesse to the *Ministero degli Affari Esteri*. Held in: ACS, Minlav, Dgcm, Div.IX. b.466, emigrazione italiana in Inghilterra, sottofasc. “personale femminile”.

numbers of suitable workers to satisfy the British requests proved a constant difficulty as the inadequacies of the organisational mechanisms put in place by the two partner-nations, and the rigidity in the eligibility criteria applied weighed heavily on the success of these recruitments. This is all the more true of the ones which targeted women workers.

Further impetus to the Italian migration to Britain was given by the establishment of a further, parallel procedure, which allowed British employers to recruit, autonomously, individual workers. The companies were supposed to present a request for workers – providing the names of those they wished to employ – to the British authorities and the Italian diplomatic offices. These then verified the trustworthiness of the companies and ensured that the contracts were in line with the employment parameters established by the bilateral agreements for each sector and passed the case on to the *Ministero del Lavoro* for the final *nulla osta*.³⁶

Finding suitable willing individuals could be done either by sending company representatives to scout willing workers in Italy, wherever they thought appropriate or, otherwise, examining the applications of prospective volunteers who had been brought to the company's attention by someone, usually a family member or an acquaintance, who already worked in the same company. This is the route followed by many textile workers in the years 1952-60 and also by some of the women interviewed in the course of the present research: Marina was eighteen when she travelled to Britain to join her sister. Having grown up in a family of nine children, it would appear that her family actually encouraged each sibling to migrate abroad, to escape poverty and send remittances back home. This is how

³⁶ I have largely paraphrased here, translating it into English the description of this procedure as it is summarised by Rinauro, "Percorsi Dell'emigrazione Italiana Negli Anni Della Ricostruzione: Morire a Dien Bien Phu Da Emigrante Clandestino."

Marina explains how she came to consider the possibility of migrating to Britain:

One sister is still in Italy because, well, she was young...and the others, one went to Argentina before me and another came here in England. After two years I turned eighteen and she made me come to work too... because you know we had no money...[...]

Yes... she worked in the cotton mill, she also worked there, my sister, and so, as soon as they came, what you call...the contracts, they sent the contracts in Italy and they made me come here..³⁷

This testimony introduces the most important novelty produced by the establishment – or re-establishment in fact – of these migration chains, namely the possibility of following in the footsteps of friends and relatives and finding, in Britain, a network of intimates to support them in their new life. Many sisters or close relatives had been recruited together during the OIS, but the British authorities were not obliged to ensure that they were placed in the same workplace. Now, women who had experienced the life in an English mill could get their sisters and friends to join them, often in the same factory, share accommodation with them, teach them both how to operate the machinery, the language and, generally, how to cope in their new environment.

The direct recruitments sometimes even allowed a chance to bypass the most crucial limitation of all, the prohibition imposed on women who were married and had children. See for example, One such woman was Lisa, another respondent, who, in 1957, migrated from Tuscany to Britain with her sister:

³⁷“Una sorella è ancora in Italia perché insomma, sì, era piccola e le altre una è andata in Argentina prima di me e una è venuta qui in Inghilterra, dopo due anni io ho avuto 18 anni mi ha fatto venir pure lei per lavorare per... per diciamo che non si aveva soldi...[...]Sì....nel cotone lavorava anche lei lavorava mia sorella, e così com'è venuto come dicono a contratto hanno mandato i contratti in Italia e mi ha fatta venire qui.”

So a girl from my town had come here, I don't know how...she... later this girl sent us the forms because there was a big hostel near the cotton factory where she worked [...]
So my sister, she came, she wanted to come here because she wanted her husband to come because in Italy there wasn't enough work. Now, I, at twenty years old, my sister was married...she had a child, my mum said "she is a married woman" in those days it wasn't right to go out into the world... "you go too" said my mother because she wanted me to learn the language ...³⁸

Lisa's account conveys a cheerful picture full of people, opportunities, converging projects and expectations. It is interesting to note, in this instance, that, although Lisa's sister had to comply with the eligibility criteria (she emigrated leaving behind her husband and young son, hoping one day that they could rejoin her in Britain) nevertheless she was allowed to leave. This would not have happened if she had applied through the official channels, and were she to be denied entry it is very possible that Lisa would not have emigrated either.

Once foreign workers were allowed to "sponsor" the employment of other prospective immigrants, traditional migration patterns, such as the rejoining of spouses could, within limits, take place. Italian men, as we know, were generally allowed to be joined by wives and children if they had stayed in employment for more than two years. Another one of our interviewees, Gabriella, who came to Britain in 1961, was able to find work as a textile worker as a result of her marriage to another Italian who already worked in

³⁸“Allora una paesana era venuta qua, non so come... questa... dopo questa paesana ha mandato a noi la richiesta perché c'era un grande hostel vicino a la fabbrica di cotone dove si lavorava sicché...[...] Un hostel! Sicché la mia sorella, lei, è venuta, voleva venire qua perchè voleva che suo marito venisse in Inghilterra perché in Italia c'era poco lavoro, ora io vent'anni, lei era sposata c'ha un bambino, diceva mamma “è una donna sposata” a quei tempi.. “è brutto andartene al mondo, vai anche te” dice la mamma perchè voleva che io parlassi la lingua”.

the cotton industry – a rare case since mills generally employed more women than men:

It was by chance, as they say, er...yes I had an uncle who lived almost near to him [Gabriella's future husband] a great-uncle, not a closely related uncle, and he used to always say to him "I have to introduce you to my niece" and "you must marry my niece" and he would say "but I don't even know her how can I marry her...I don't know her right?" and he'd say "and later you'll get to know her" so then, after a long time...

Because he already worked in England?

He had already come here, three years before me so he came in 1958 here in England and then, in 1961, we got married and we came here together.³⁹

Up till then Gabriella had lived close to her family in a small town near Avellino. She had worked as a domestic, living with her employees for many years. She and her fiancée wrote each other letters for three years before he travelled to her native town for their wedding, but, if they had so wished, they could have chosen to marry by proxy since that was a legal procedure in Italy at the time, widely deployed by Italian migrants worldwide. A marriage by proxy would have been an option open to many Italian women workers as well, as long as they could find employment for their husbands and see to the paperwork involved, but no relevant example was found in the course of this research.

All the personal testimonies provided here suggest that individual recruitments opened a range of new possibilities for Italian women in Britain as, indeed Marina, Lisa and Gabriella all benefited in some way from the flexibility allowed by this form of recruitment.

³⁹ "È stato un caso banale, diciamo, eh eh, sì [Mio marito] aveva un zio che abita quasi vicino a lui, zio in terzo quarto grado, non era proprio zio stretto, e diceva sempre "ti devo far conoscere a mia nipote, ti devi sposare con mia nipote" ma lui dice "ma io non la conosco neanche come faccio a sposarla...se non la conosco no?" e dice "e poi la conoscerai", poi dopo tanto tempo...

Perché lui lavorava già in Inghilterra?

Lui era venuto già qua, lui a 3 anni prima di me e venuto quindi dal 58 è venuto qua in Inghilterra, e poi nel 61 ci siamo sposati e siamo venuti qua insieme"

Nevertheless, once the limitations engendered by the regulation put in place during the OIS were no longer there, the range of opportunities available to the women now depended on the capricious turns of the job market. These women had not secured more rights as citizens and workers, simply they could now hope for a stroke of luck. Lisa's sister, for example, who had travelled to Manchester hoping to find work for her husband as well did not succeed in doing so. The lack of job opportunities available to foreign men in that area proved an insurmountable obstacle and Lisa's sister returned to Italy as soon as her two-year contract expired.

Flexibility, it would seem, often came at a price. In some cases the cost could be having to rely on chance and unexpected opportunities. In some other cases this new "deregulated" migration scenario brought with it new forms of exploitation and unforeseen setbacks.

Direct recruitments – Flexible or just insecure?

As we know, the Italian Authorities were supposed to carry out controls over each employer who applied to them to obtain permits for prospective workers, but as Sandro Rinauro in his essay on Italian illegal migration points out "frequent was the case of recruitments made by foreign companies or Italian companies operating abroad that evaded the prescribed controls from the Italian diplomacy and the *Ministero del Lavoro* regarding the regularity and quality of the employment contracts".⁴⁰ This passage does not relate to the British context specifically, as the author is writing here about migration to European destinations in general, but it is nonetheless an accurate assessment of the dangers which travelled hand

⁴⁰ Rinauro, "Percorsi Dell'emigrazione Italiana Negli Anni Della Ricostruzione: Morire a Dien Bien Phu Da Emigrante Clandestino."p.8.

in hand with the issuing of individual permits.

According to Michele Colucci, monitoring the activity of their workers abroad was difficult enough, for the Italian Authorities, even within the safer frame of the state-driven recruitments:

The problem was that the monitoring and assistance procedures guaranteed by the structures of the Ministero del Lavoro were geared towards the task of enabling migrant's departure, collecting data regarding their professional experience, their possible placement into the international job market, their expectations. All this work, however, was destined to disappear as soon as the workers crossed the frontier: the wealth of knowledge collected was set aside and the professional futures of the emigrants were no longer monitored and analysed.⁴¹

Direct recruitments multiplied the number of employers and companies which had to be checked and, also created new lucrative opportunities for a variety of "intermediary" figures, employment agencies or enterprising individuals, all "go-betweens" in the business of procuring Italian workers for the British job market. The activities of these intermediaries also needed to be controlled and closely monitored, as not all of them were above board.

In Britain, the migration of Italian women offers a good example of how the loosening of state control soon determined both a quantitative increase of job opportunities and, at the same time, made the new recruits more vulnerable, the best case in point being the employment of domestic personnel. Italian women had been employed for domestic work, in small numbers, even at the time of the OIS, mainly for hospitals, sanatoriums and

⁴¹“Il problema è che la rete di monitoraggio e assistenza garantita dalle strutture del Ministero del Lavoro si limitò a rendere efficace soltanto la fase della partenza degli emigranti, informandosi sulla loro preparazione professionale, sulla loro possibile collocazione sul mercato del lavoro internazionale, sulle loro aspettative. Tutto questo lavoro era destinato a sparire nel momento in cui i lavoratori varcavano la frontiera.” Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. pp.119-120.

large hotels. Now, the availability of individual permits increased the demand for young women to work in British households and soon enough labour exchanges and newspapers all over Italy were awash with adverts seeking girls for this kind of work.

According to Andreina de Clementi, the employment agencies who placed these adverts, promising bed and board in respectable homes and wages of £3 per week, were often little better than slave-traders:

To the job applications complete with photograph, the reply came in the form of a contract in English that no one cared to decipher; then followed the journey, the arrival in Victoria Station, the meeting with an Agency employee, a taxi and finally they were left to their fate. At best, the wages were no more than half of what promised. Some ended up in agricultural work-camps or as illegal migrants in guesthouses.⁴²

This kind of scenario, where migrants were left alone and vulnerable in a new environment, working in conditions which were not what had been promised to them, is certainly one of the most damaging forms of exploitation which could arise from the diminished protection offered by direct recruitments. The case of domestic workers was probably the most concerning, because of the circumstances of extreme isolation in which many women found themselves, working alone in a private home, in a foreign country.

The Italian authorities tried to limit the damage by issuing dispositions that allowed only a selected number of *bona fide* placement-agencies to obtain work permits for overseas employees, but there were always, inherent to the regulatory framework of direct individual

⁴²“Alle domande con fotografia si rispondeva con un contratto in inglese che nessuno si curava di decifrare; seguivano il viaggio, l’arrivo a Victoria Station, l’accoglienza di emissari italiani dell’Agenzia, il taxi e quindi l’abbandono al proprio destino. Bene che andasse, il salario non superava la metà di quello promesso. Alcune finivano in campi di lavoro agricolo o clandestine in pensionati.” De Clementi, *Il Prezzo Della Ricostruzione: L'emigrazione Italiana Nel Secondo Dopoguerra*. p.112.

recruitment, loopholes which allowed opportunities for enterprising profiteers. How to make sure, for example, that anyone with the right connections might not sponsor Italian migrants in exchange for money? There was no way to be sure, and the *buona mano* (good hand), as it was known in Italy, the amount paid to the go-betweens who found work abroad for aspiring migrants, seems to have been often considered by the workers themselves as a necessary expense, not worth mentioning in their interviews, to be factored in the cost of moving away as much as the price of stamp duty on a passport or the purchase of a new coat.

3. A NEW LIFE

In the following extract, Annalisa, one of the interviewees approached in the course of this research, remembers the day she met her future husband in Manchester a few years after she had settled there.

So I married this *napoletano*, I had met him in the street. He said, “Can you tell me the way to Queen Street?” and I said “sorry I don’t understand street here” “Ah!” he says “where you come from?” I say “Italy”... “And where from in Italy?” And I said “Trieste” because that was the closest city and he said “Ah! triestina!” So I asked “and you?” “From Naples”. “*Mannaggia alla pummarola in coppa!*”¹ I said, so he asked me “who taught you that?” “My brother when he was doing his military service” so we started chatting ...

After the meeting I told my employer “I have met a certain Vincenzo [...]. “Oh!” he said, “Where?” and “Bring him here at the house” and “call him in the morning and invite him here tomorrow evening”...and that is how...because they were friends.

So they knew each other?

“Yes!” They knew each other because they had landed together in a plane during the war, he [the employer] had come here in 1936 or 37, so...²

¹ “Mannaggia alla pummarola in coppa” is an idiomatic expression, usually used as an exclamation. The expression uses typically Neapolitan dialectal words such as ‘pummarola’ meaning tomato sauce, and ‘in coppa’ which is a specifically Neapolitan expression signifying ‘on top of’; for this reason it is often used, just as Annalisa has in this instance, as a way of making fun of a Neapolitan person.

² “e dopo mi sono sposata sto napoletano, l’avevo incontrato sulla strada dice “mi sa dire dov’è la strada Queen Street” ho detto “sorry i don’t understand street here” ... ah dice “where you come from?” I say “Italy”... “E da che parte dell’Italia?” E dissi Trieste perché è vicino perché non si sa e allora dice “ah

It is questionable whether Italians in post-war Manchester could be defined as a community by the standards accepted within social sciences nowadays – too few, too scattered and loosely connected. Nonetheless, Annalisa’s account of this chance encounter, of coincidences and converging paths reminds us that the “centuries-old coming and going of Italians in Britain, a flow that the war had reduced but never interrupted, had transformed every main English city into a potential migration crossroad.”³

Annalisa had come to Manchester as a nanny to the children of an Italian coffee merchant who had decided to relocate once the city of Trieste had been re-established within Yugoslavian borders. After two years, however, her employers migrated to Australia and Annalisa found new employment with a family of Jewish-Italians who had fled Italy in response to the Fascist racial laws established in 1938. When Annalisa met her future husband, a Neapolitan émigré named Vincenzo, she discovered that her employer and her new acquaintance had met before, during the war, when Italian prisoners of war and “enemy aliens” had all been rounded up and held in special detention centres. In what could seem a rather stupendous twist of fate, three possible paths leading Italians to Britain in the decade 1940-50 have converged: Jewish Italians fleeing fascist persecution, POWs who chose to remain in the UK after the war and, finally, the new post-war wave of Italian economic migrants such as Annalisa herself.

The present chapter focuses on the arrival of Italian women to the mill towns of

triestina!” e ho detto “e lei?” “di Napoli” “ah”, ho detto “mannaggia alla pummarola in coppa” e ha detto “e chi te l’ha detto questo?” Ho detto “mio fratello che era militare” e così abbiamo cominciato... fatto l’appuntamento c’ho detto al mio padrone ho incontrato un certo Vincenzo Lambiase “oh” dice “dove?” “Ah fammelo vedere qua” e ha detto “telefona domani mattina e domani sera fallo venir qua” e così... perché erano amici.”

³ Marin, *Gli Italiani in Gran Bretagna*. p.89.

Britain and their settlement here. Some of them returned to Italy after a few years, but many decided to stay and the process of “settling” came to mean something much more permanent – integrating, putting down roots, raising new intercultural families. But the word integration implies so much more than simply being able to pick up the language and adapting to the mores of a new country, as people are not machines that can be reset and reprogrammed to fit the desired cultural make-up. As will be shown, for many Italian workers settling would reveal itself to be as much a question of learning new things as of finding ways of perpetuating lifestyles and habits from their birthplace.

“For us was a holiday” – The reception camps

A memorandum addressed to the Italian *Ministero del Lavoro* by the British Embassy in June 1949 reported that the first contingent of textile workers had safely reached their destination:

The Italian women arrived in Great Britain at the end of July to work on the Lancashire cotton industry appear to have settled in well. Their arrival in London has created much interest and representatives of the British Ministry of Labour and of the National press were there to welcome them together with the Italian Embassy delegates. Before the women left London, the Labour Minister Mr. Isaacs has personally arranged to meet them and give them his welcome. Since then, both the Minister and his parliamentary secretary Mr. Edwards have visited the women in their lodging in Chorley. Professoressa Magnino has expressed herself satisfied with all that has been done regarding the accommodation and comfort of the workers and hopefully we'll be able to confirm soon that they find the work to their liking.⁴

⁴“Le donne italiane arrivate in Gran Bretagna alla fine di luglio per lavorare nell’industria cotoniera del

The contingents of women recruited through the *Official Italian Scheme* were, upon arrival to the UK, escorted to a reception camp where they would spend the first few weeks of their stay before taking up work in the mills. These structures were conceived by the British authorities as temporary buffer zones where the prospective workers could be familiarised with British culture, eased into their future employment by way of introductory briefings, language tutorship and moments of socialisation. They were also, as we have seen in the previous Chapter, the place where the authorities could refine the screening of new recruits and prevent troublesome elements from entering the workplace.⁵ The following quote, a report sent to the Ministry of Labour headquarters by the Manchester regional office, shows quite clearly how the provision of these reception camps was intended as an introductory welcome to the British way of life as much as an occasion to observe the Italians' behaviour at close range before they had finally scattered in their various places of employment:

We have had some little difficulties in getting some of the Italian women who have arrived in the region during the past month to settle down to conditions of life and work in the North West. We were not unprepared for such difficulties because our experience of the experimental party at Chorley showed us very plainly that the Italians were temperamental and very easily upset by any suspicion that they either as a group or as

Lancashire sembra si siano ben sistemate. Il loro arrivo a Londra ha creato molto interesse e rappresentanti del Ministero inglese del Lavoro e del Servizio Nazionale della Stampa britannica erano ad accoglierle insieme ai rappresentanti dell'Ambasciata italiana. Prima che le donne lasciassero Londra il Ministro del Lavoro e del Servizio Nazionale Mr. Isaacs andò personalmente a vederle e a dar loro il benvenuto. Da allora sia il Ministro che il suo segretario parlamentare Mr. Edwards, le hanno visitate nei loro alloggi a Charloy [Chorley]. La professoressa Magnino ha manifestato viva soddisfazione circa quanto era stato fatto in merito all'alloggio e al comfort delle lavoratrici e si spera di poter presto confermare che esse trovano il lavoro di loro gradimento" Memorandum sent by the Italian Embassy of London to the *Ministero del Lavoro*, Sept. 1949. in ACS, Minlav, Dgcm, Div.IX. b.466, emigrazione italiana in Inghilterra, sottofasc. "personale femminile"

⁵ I refer here to the episode quoted in chapter 2, p114, in which the behaviour of two Italian women, Pardi and Calugi, had caused the British authorities to look into their employment history back in Italy, and ascertain whether they had any communist affiliation.

individuals were not getting every advantage to which they were entitled. One learns to cope with these “storms in teacups” and our experience of the Italians at Chorley shows us that the initial difficulties can be overcome and that the Italians can and do in due course settle quite satisfactorily.⁶

What could have been the reasons for these “storms in teacups”? The correspondence never states this clearly, possibly because the British officials in charge were quite satisfied with the explanation that, as Italians, the workers were necessarily bound to be “temperamental” and “easily upset”. There was no need, therefore, to take their complaints seriously. Reading some of the recollections of workers who stayed in these camps can, however, offer us some clues. It is not difficult to imagine that, as every guest staying in the camps was experiencing an intense sense of displacement, the very fact that all of them were living in such close quarters can have easily led to a heightened feeling of being mistreated or, simply, outbursts of what the letter refers to as “temperamental” behaviour. The first contingents destined to the Lancashire mills had been installed directly in a large hostel in Chorley, but as this structure soon filled with workers servicing the nearby cotton mills, it was decided to welcome the new recruits in some of the “nine holding hostels where they [the EVWs] remained until placed in employment”⁷. These camps were managed, alongside the workers’ hostels in which the EVWs would soon take up lodgings, by the National Service Hostels Corporation, a body set up in 1941 to “provide accommodation in armaments areas and to co-ordinate the separate hostels opened by various government departments”.⁸ After the war, the NSHC remained in charge of the hostels which were now being reused as

⁶ Letter addressed to D.Ball, at the Ministry of Labour Headquarters, by the Regional office of Manchester, dated 23rd November 1949. TNA, LAB 13/822, “European volunteer workers: policy in connection with recruitment of Italian women for employment in Great Britain”.

⁷ Stadulis, “The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom.”

⁸ Ibid.

accommodation for foreign and homeless workers. Some of the camps were disused military buildings left over from the war effort, army barracks which had on occasion been used as detention centres for Prisoners of War.

The following is an abstract from an interview preserved by the Bradford Sound Archive, an Italian woman worker en route to a mill in Shipley; as we will refer to her anonymous testimony several times in the course of this chapter we will from now on refer to her as “Interviewee A” “This camp was someway off...Oxford; it was a military camp. We were all in the barracks, so...it was...it was a change for us because we’d never been anywhere”.⁹

And this is Alba, one of our interviewees, already mentioned in Chapter 1, who came from Treviso in 1949:

So they gave me a paper, a document that I represented and then they told us where to go and we went...when we arrived in England someone brought us to I don’t know where...somewhere where the Italian prisoners had been...

[...] Yeah, and there they all had gone...there wasn’t anything left...the prisoners...that place where there were soldiers, so we stayed there...

[...] Yeah just as in a hostel, so we slept in the soldiers’ ...beds , no?, and there we passed examinations and again a lot of questions before we could go...so many things...I think for two weeks and after that they sent us to Glossop and we arrived with a big bus...¹⁰

⁹ Two other Italian women were interviewed as part of the same project. I will from now on refer to each respondent as “Interviewee A”, “Interviewee B”, and “Interviewee C”. The quote above can be found in BHRU, Acc. No. B0105.

¹⁰ “E mi ha dato un foglio che io rappresentavo il foglio e allora loro ci segnavano dove dovevamo andare e siamo andate... quando siamo state in Inghilterra qualcheduno ci ha portato e sarebbe non so che parte che è dove erano i prigionieri italiani...

Yeah. e là erano tutti partiti non c’erano più cose... i prigionieri... quella là era dove erano i soldati, come no, e allora siamo state là...

Yeah. Si come hostel e allora abbiamo dormito sui letti dei militari no là, e abbiamo passate visite di nuovo tante domande prima di andare tante cose mi sembra due settimane anche là e dopo da là ci hanno mandato a Glossop, siamo arrivati col mini con il bus grande, mamma mia! questo bus ci butta giù non l’abbiamo mai visto prima e siamo arrivate là ci hanno portate all’hostel”.

It is worth mentioning that the practice of employing repurposed military barracks may in itself shed light on why many workers experienced some degree of distress during the first few weeks of their stay in Britain; after all, these women had already endured a long trip to get there and, before that, permanence within the Emigration Centres in Milan or Naples, as described in the previous chapter. The confinement in crowded and shabby environments such as the reception camps, together with the constant presence of government officials and staff can only have reinforced those aspects that made the process of emigrating to the UK heavy with unpleasant associations and a sense of being “interned”. In addition there was the language barrier; women staying in the camps were encouraged, to some degree, to explore their surroundings, but not knowing the language meant that the camp was the only safe ‘bubble’ in an otherwise unfamiliar and threatening landscape.

Nevertheless, for many women this first taste of Britain was not at all entirely negative, and Interviewee A remembers these few weeks in Oxford as a welcome break compared to what was to follow:

And there [in the camp] they teach us to dance, they teach us the traditions, they took us into the shop, they took us around. Well, more or less, they treat us like children. They offer us clothes, shoe, everything, and we find very good that moment, you know. For us was a holiday.¹¹

This quote suggests that this odd “foreign workers’ boot-camp” experience had, at least, one possible advantage: it made migrants feel, in a certain sense, welcome. Efforts

¹¹ Interviewee A, in BHRU, Acc. No. B0105.

were made to introduce them to their new environment and their prospective employment; their needs, as in the case of warm clothes and shoes, were taken notice of and addressed – even though we know from the inter-ministerial correspondence examined in Chapter 2 how unhappy the British Authorities were to see their stocks of emergency clothing depleted.

A stay in one of these reception camps typically only lasted two or three weeks and once it was over, foreign workers made their official entry in their new place of employment and the local community where many were going to spend much of their life.

The Hostels

As Elisabeth Stadulis summarised in her survey in 1952, 118 workers' hostels still accommodated the majority of the foreign workers employed in Britain at the time. Of these:

55 are standard in type; 32 are miners' hostels, built as such; 29 are sub-standard hostels (old military camps, where living quarters are Nissen huts and converted barracks); and two are for dependants of workers. With a capacity for 43,000, 33,000 persons were actually being housed in June 1951. Of these, 10,000 are E.V.W.'s (found scattered through all the hostels), 6300 Poles (P.R.C. men), 17,000 British, and approximately 135 coloured workers. In the standard hotels, a distinctly larger proportion of British residents is to be found than in the sub-standard, where the population is nearly all E.V.W. or Polish¹²

¹² Stadulis, "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom." p. 227.

Life in the workers' hostel looms large in the early recollections of the European Volunteer Workers who came to Britain, and the Italian women interviewed on the subject are no exception. If, on the one hand, the many EVW recruited through the *Westward Ho!* and *Baltic Cygnet* schemes had come to the NSHC hostels directly from the German DP camps, possibly regarding their new accommodation as an improvement of sorts, for most Italian workers the hostel was the place where they first experienced being "just one minority amongst the others" and a life shared in close quarters with workers of other nationalities.¹³ See for example Interviewee A, who had been moved from the Oxford reception camp to a hostel in Shipley in 1950:

Well, I presume...maybe after the war at home we were...freedom meant a lot. Here we didn't have a big wage, we wasn't free, because neither in the hostel we wasn't free. In the hostel we was four hundred women. I was in the attic, with three women, no furniture, nothing. We laugh about Pakistani now, but I think it was worse when we came. But....again the food wasn't our type of food. [...] It was overcrowded, number one. In canteen we have in our...was real overcrowded, and also was a sitting room we couldn't sit down.

[...] Trying to think, there was every day fight there. We was like...er, well, I don't know, it was terrible. I remember when they put us in the attic, and bathroom – we fight for the bathroom we fight for everything.”¹⁴

As Stadulis's report suggests, the quality offered by hostel accommodation could vary greatly from area to area and different lines of work. In places such as Scotland, where foreign workers were imported in much more limited numbers, accommodation was often much better and Clara Aceti, for example, was able to report in her letter to the Italian

¹³ Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. p. 186.

¹⁴ Interviewee A, in BHRU, Acc. No. B0105.

Embassy that she and her companions were staying in an “old stately mansion, surrounded by a big park, with views over the sea which even though Scottish is still very beautiful”.¹⁵

But this was certainly not the case everywhere. In due course, textile firms began to establish their own hostels, thus relieving the NSHC of the burden, and these smaller privately run dwellings were usually “more luxurious” even though they lacked the amenities and provisions for social entertainment that some of the larger NSHC hostels had.

The hostel in Chorley, also run by the NSHC, had accommodated the first pilot-group of Italian textile workers and seems to have been, according to an item of ministerial correspondence, almost like a small-scale village:

Consists of a group of small one storey buildings (called blocks) and scattered in a big wooded area. Each block has 20 to 25 dormitories, sitting rooms, bathroom and lavatories. The bathrooms have hot and cold water and the rooms are heated. Italian workers are accommodated as follows:

One party in a separate block provided for Italians, the rest are in groups of three and four scattered in other huts together with workers of all other nationalities. [...]

There are two beds in each room, two windows, one cupboard and chest of drawers, two chairs and two bed lamps. [...]

The hostel includes in a central building facilities as follows:

Sitting room where male and female workers can meet and entertain themselves. Snack bar, dining room, billiards room, ball room, cinema, Post Office and a store where things for general use can be bought.¹⁶

The smaller, company-hostels, on the other hand, were usually established in large

¹⁵“Dimoriamo in un antica casa signorile, circondata da un grande parco, e dalla quale si vede il mare che, per quanto scozzese è sempre molto bello.” Clara Aceti, letter dated 2nd December 1950, in ACS, Minlav, Dgcm, Div.IX. b.466, emigrazione italiana in Inghilterra, sottofasc. “personale femminile”.

¹⁶ Document undated and anonymous. It appears to be a translation of an Italian document, with the heading “Central Employment Office for Home and Abroad” Division X, subject: England – Recruitment of Textile Operatives”. Held in TNA, LAB 13/822, “European volunteer workers: policy in connection with recruitment of Italian women for employment in Great Britain”.

dwellings which had been adapted for the purpose of housing the workers, in rooms of three or four. An example is the accommodation provided by Brierfield Mills, based in Brierfield Nelson, Lancashire, that applied to the Italian *Ministero del Lavoro* in 1954 requesting fifteen trainee weavers and spinners.¹⁷ The company took the initiative of including with their request a small information sheet in Italian, intended probably for the candidates' benefit, which also included photos of their prospective lodgings, Spring Cottage. The photos show the façade of a large Victorian three-storey house, a park, and two interiors – a bedroom with two beds and a living room area showing armchairs arranged in front of a fireplace. Hostels such as this one were not able to cater for workers' entertainment and out-of-work necessities in the same way as the one in Chorley could, but they were closer to the workplace and, usually, tied more closely into the local community. So, it is fair to assume that, because of their resemblance to more common forms of shared lodgings, these company-hostels made foreign workers experience a lesser degree of spatial and cultural segregation and were, therefore, a welcome improvement.

There was no getting away, however, from the slightly regimented daily routines that life in the hostels invariably entailed. There were restrictions upon the time lodgers were expected to come back at night. Interviewee A remembers that:

“Well [the manager of the Hostel] she explain it all, she says “well, the rule in this hostel you have, if you go out, you have to come back ten o'clock, if anybody after 10 O'clock you are out, not open the door for you.”¹⁸

The “doors shut at 10” policy seems to have been the rule in women's hostels

¹⁷ Brierfield Mills Limited sent this template contract to the Italian ULMO of Milan in May 1954. It is held in ACS, Minlav, Dgcm, Div.IX. b.466, emigrazione italiana in Inghilterra, sottofasc. “personale femminile”

¹⁸ BHRU, Acc. No. B0105

generally. Lisa, for example, who had come to live in a hostel in Stalybridge, in the Greater Manchester area, in 1957, remembers a similar scenario:

You couldn't go out later than 10...you had to ask permission because the front door was locked, if I wanted to go...I was friends with a girl from my town who lived in Oldham...[...] On Saturday we would go and visit her but I had to ask permission, that I would not come back in for the night [...] so, in the evenings I wasn't free to come and go because later, I don't know, at ten or ten thirty the door was locked you see?¹⁹

The most bitterly resented limitation of all seems to have been the impossibility, at any given time, to choose what to eat. As dinners and breakfasts were eaten in the hostel and lunches in the company-canteen, for many Italian workers each meal represented a hard-hitting initiation to a foreign, strange and altogether unappealing food-culture.

Recollections of the early impact of a foreign cuisine are a familiar *topos* of migrants' accounts and memories. Because of the crucial role performed by food within the texture of every day life, it becomes a tangible, concrete representation of migrants' feeling of estrangement. For these reasons, a certain conservative attitude regarding culinary matters and a nostalgia for the foods of one's homeland have been often considered a common feature of the migrant's experience world wide.²⁰ Our Italian women were, in this regard, no exception. According to Lisa:

Mammamia what rubbish!

¹⁹ "Non si poteva andare fuori più tardi delle dieci bisognava chiedere il permesso perché il portone era chiuso, se io volevo andare... avevo un'amica una paesana a Oldham... [...] il sabato s'andava a trovarla però io dovevo chiedere il permesso, che non rientravo la sera, lei c'aveva il board perché contava le ragazze la sera, non ci..., ecco la sera non ho libera uscita perché dopo non so se erano le 10 o le 10 e mezza il portone era chiuso, capito?"

²⁰ Teti V., Emigrazione, alimentazione e culture popolari, in Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina, *Storia Dell'emigrazione Italiana: Partenze*. p.586.

Oooooh all those concoctions, potatoes, those stews, that gravy...everything, the meat all mixed up, the salad with no oil, no seasoning, like you feed to the rabbits, and we were there looking at the plates, ah! Tea with milk...when I, at twenty years old, who had ever tasted tea with milk! And they used to make it strong, black, with barely a drop of milk, then...the tears... My God how we cried...but the contract was for two years.²¹

In December 1949, an Italian journalist travelled to Chorley to write an article for the daily broadsheet *Il Tempo* investigating how the first contingent of Italian girls was holding up. “For no girl in the world would a sensible man go to Chorley” quipped amiably Edoardo Anton in the opening of his article, before adding: “but for 54...”. According to his report, the women were settling in well in the hostel and their new work place, however:

On the passive side I found confirmation of what I already conjectured, the usual difficulty in getting accustomed to the local food. All the Italians who come here in groups – whether sporting or working – are first surprised then horrified, not so much at the food as at the English cooking. [...] Our women workers have the canteen of the factory and of the hostel. In such places everything is usually clean, but insipid; a sticky mess, with sweets and wobbly jelly coloured with aniline, and sausage full of bread. Cooking for invalids, smothered with sauce. For our girls, who naturally all know how to cook, it is almost infuriating. There is little meat in England, all right, but at least don’t give it to them with apple sauce. And if there is fish, don’t serve it with gluey spaghetti. The most enterprising, however, are thinking of organising a mess of their own.²²

²¹“Mammamia che porcheria! Oooooh tutte quelle intrugolate, patate, quei brodi, il gravy... tutto, la carne mischiata, la insalata senza olio, senza condire, come si da ai conigli, e noi si stava lì sul piatto, eh!, Il te con latte, quello quando... vent’anni, chi l’aveva mai bevuto il te con latte quella intrugolata e poi lo facevano forte, nero, con un pochino di latte poi... le lacrime cascavano giù oddio che ha piantato... ma il contratto era per due anni.”

²² Edoardo Anton’s article appeared, in Italian, on the newspaper *Il Tempo*, in December 1949. However, a translation of it is preserved in TNA, LAB 13/822, “European volunteer workers: policy in connection with recruitment of Italian women for employment in Great Britain”.

The Italian men employed in other areas, such as the brick-making factories of Bedford, also shared in the surprise and horror summarised by the Italian correspondent. Evidence of this can be surmised by the fact that an entire folder preserved in the records of the National Archive holds the large correspondence generated by this inability of Italian men to adjust to the food-provisions of the NHSC hostels.²³ According to J.M. Jacques, an Immigration Officer who had recently inspected a National Service hostel in Derbyshire:

In reply to questions as to living conditions etc. in U.K., the almost invariable answer was that, while, on the whole, conditions are extremely good, the food provided is so different from the normal Italian diet that the men find it impossible to enjoy it. Many of them cannot eat enough of their meals to keep themselves fit for their work, which is often heavy labouring, and they feel that, were they given Italian food, they would be able to work much better than they do at present. Many of these Italians have expressed the opinion that the lack of Italian food is one of the underlying causes of many of the requests for repatriation, and it would appear to be capable to be rectified.²⁴

The complaints of male workers seem to have carried more weight than those expressed by their female counterparts because if, on the one hand, hostels catering for various nationalities could not be expected to provide each with their preferred menus, in those where Italians constituted the majority it was often possible to employ an Italian cook. Women workers, as we will see, seem instead to have followed a common pattern of surviving on a diet of bread and jam until they were able to buy a few things locally and cook for themselves when the kitchen facilities were not in use.

²³ This folder can be found in TNA, LAB 26/253 “Welfare of Italians employed in this country, including arrangements for provision of Italian Food in National Service Hostels Corporation hostels.”

²⁴ J.M. Jacques, H.M. Immigration Officer, Folkestone Harbour in Kent, addressed to H.M. Inspector. 12th January, 1952. Held in *ibid*.

The agony of Italian workers coming to grips with a new diet of milky tea and gravy might seem surprising, almost amusing to us now, but we ought to remember that these hostel meals were not a form of charitable subsidy, and that the workers themselves were paying for their bed and board by means of pay-deductions that could well amount to a third of their weekly wage. So when Italian women went out shopping in order to cook food that they could enjoy, they were effectively paying for each meal twice over.

Living in the hostels was a transitional experience for migrant workers, as all of them either returned to their home-country or put down roots, moving to different types of accommodation and then raising families. If, on the one hand, Michele Colucci is quite right in observing that moving away from the hostels was the only way to break out of one's spatial segregation and integrate in British society, we must also observe that the hostels served as a gateway to such integration and many workers found, within this context, the friends and partners of a lifetime. Interviewee B, from Bradford, remembers how her attitude gradually changed from the yearning for home she felt in those early days:

[...] we pass the time in the hostel with all of the girls, with all the girls in the hostel, we pass the time, we sit in sitting room with nice lovely fire, and talk about us in Italy, you know, about Italy. We want to go back, nobody want to stay in here, we want to go back, in fact, I, after two months I been in this country I want to go back, but after that I met my husband [...] I don't want to go back any more, because I love him and he love me, we like each other.²⁵

For women who had more often than not lived exclusively in the family home prior to their arrival to Britain, life in the hostels could be an eye-opening experience; as they

²⁵ BHRU, Acc. No. B0069.

came in contact with women from other countries they became exposed to life styles, customs and languages very different from their own. According to Lisa:

Q.: So did you communicate with the other foreign girls?

A.: Yes, with...with our hands. With the Austrian girls we became friends because Austrians...the German language is a little like English so they understood it, they learnt it quickly, we had two Italian girls, from my town, who already spoke English quite well.²⁶

Lisa, who stayed in a hostel in Stalybridge with her sister and a few close friends from her native Tuscan town of Careggine, has positive, untroubled memories of her relationship with the many Austrian and German girls she lived with. As she came to Britain in 1957, it would seem that the memories of war-time enmity and animosity were already a thing of the past. The memories of Interviewee A, however, regarding her stay in a hostel in Shipley in 1950, would suggest that this hadn't always been the case:

[...] another thing was the hatred between Italians and Germans. Was a hatred between Polish and Ukraines. So the hatred was always there. You see, straight after war was always the bitterness. The Italians blame the Germans, the Germans blame the Italians, you know, all the bitterness for the war.

[...] We stick Italians with Italians...in the beginnings. Very much Italian with Italians, and...er I think we starter to mix together after three of four years we was here. But in the beginnings...er, I don't know if it was because we didn't settle down. It was the people, everybody aggro or something [...]

We stick together. As Italians, very unusual, because we are like a gipsy, we mix with everybody. But in the beginnings we didn't.²⁷

²⁶“E con le altre ragazze straniere un pò vi capivate?

“Si, col col... coi diti. Con le austriache ci siamo fatte amiche perché l'austriaca e... il tedesco è quasi un pochino uguale all'inglese, loro lo capivano, l'hanno imparato presto, noi c'avevamo due italiane, due paesane io, lo parlavano già benino l'inglese.”

²⁷ Int. A, in BHRU, Acc.no.BO105.

The “mixing” was almost inevitable as the biggest amongst these hostels soon became places where scattered, isolated groups of foreign workers could meet up and socialise. The ballrooms and communal spaces provided by hostels such as Chorley, with their enticing promise of young single women living there, became a regular week-end destination for the thousands of EVW men working in the neighbouring areas. Because most of the government-led recruitments had selected single unattached migrants, it is easy to understand how the gender-segregated life in the hostels could lead to feelings of loneliness; hence, the popularity and high attendance-rates of these weekly dances. Alba, for example, remembers how many Ukrainian men she met at the dances hosted in the week-ends by hostel she lodged in:

Because we were at the hostel and they used to come to dance because there were lots of Ukrainian girls and also others, so most of us, like Marina married an Ukrainian, most of them are all with Ukrainians you see...²⁸

The excerpt of Alba’s interview quoted above also introduces a subsequent development which has been frequently remarked upon by contemporary observers and by scholars in equal measure: the fact that many of the Italian women who came to work in the British mills ended up marrying men from different nationalities, especially Ukrainian and Polish. As we will see in the next chapter, Catholic missionaries operating on the ground and sometimes even the Italian authorities themselves observed this phenomenon with great concern. For now, it will suffice to say that indeed, Italian textile workers had infrequent

²⁸ “

occasions to meet other Italian men, because of the smaller ratio of Italian men recruited within textile mills. So, for the many who married other foreign migrants, the process of settling in Britain was not a simple two-way process which involved shedding aspects of their own cultural make-up and acquiring those of their new environment, but a complex, rhizomatic experience that brought about peculiar challenges and surprising outcomes of its own.²⁹

Food narratives and the politics of identity and integration

As an essential component of communities' material culture, food consumption and eating habits are a much investigated subject within social sciences. Even within the disciplinary areas that intersect this research – ethnicity, migration studies, community history, gender history – food is a virtually inexhaustible quarry for our epistemic excavations. Cuisine is the locus where ethnicity and identity are asserted, more than that, they are constructed. In the words of Vittorio Teti, who writes knowledgeably and acutely about the importance of food culture in the history of Calabrese migration: “family and ethnical bonds are affirmed, strengthened, flaunted, sometimes re-discussed, negated and reaffirmed, through various forms of alimentary behaviours and rituals”.³⁰

The food-ethnicity nexus is all the more important in this context because of the way

²⁹ We will consider these issues in more detail in the following chapter.

³⁰ “I vincoli familiari ed etnici vengono affermati, rinsaldati, ostentati, talvolta messi in discussione, negati e riaffermati, attraverso varie forme di comportamenti e rituali alimentari.” Vito Teti, *Emigrazione, alimentazione, culture popolari*, in Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina, *Storia Dell'emigrazione Italiana: Partenze*. p.592.

it has been employed both in the literature regarding Italian expatriate communities on the one hand and, also, the formation of multicultural Britain. As Italian cuisine has acquired a worldwide popularity, scholars have looked into the making of this global phenomenon tracing its origins to migration, the Italian Diaspora, the *Little Italies* of the world.³¹ This is particularly true in the context of the United States, where scholars such as Donna Gabaccia have thoroughly investigated the role played by food in the creation and performance of Italo-American identity. In Britain as well, Italians had been bringing along with them their regional, local, familial food-cultures since the nineteenth century and, in addition, many of them found employment within the catering industries, making some aspects of the Italian diet known to the British public even before, as Panikos Panayi has put it, “cuisines became national”.³²

Our Italian textile workers were not about to found a new Little Italy or be absorbed within one of the already existing ones, even the women who settled in Manchester lived and worked far away from the city centre and a trip to the Ancoats Italian deli or for an ice-cream from one of the many parlours were a rare indulgence.

What is interesting about the food/identity discourse in relation to Italian migrants in Post-War Britain is what food can tell us about the encounter between Italian women and the cultural-local spaces they entered and began to inhabit. The fact that, so often, the respondents deliberately choose to talk about food – their reaction to the local food, accounts of sourcing, preparing an eating food – when asked questions about their early days in Britain, confirms the notion that food is one of the key symbolic loci where identity

³¹ Donna Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat : Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass ; London: Harvard University Press, 2000).

³² Panikos Panayi, *Spicing up Britain : The Multicultural History of British Food* (London: Reaktion, 2008).

and community meet each other. Because oral testimonies are also an act of story-telling, exercises in narrative elaboration, Alessandro Portelli, one of Italy's most thorough advocates of the importance of such sources, is quite right in observing that each one can be analysed, among other ways, as a *fabula*, a story constructed by the respondent as a means to convey her subjective experience.³³ As we have seen in the section about life in the workers' hostels, the respondents' accounts of those early days in the mill towns of England abound with references to food. Anecdotal retellings of their first experiences involving English food are used as examples intended to convey their early feelings of estrangement, the pain involved in adapting to a new environment, as in the abstract of Lisa's interview quoted earlier, in which she describes her first impressions of British cuisine.³⁴

In some of these testimonies, the rejection of this unfamiliar and unappetising diet, and the search for alternatives stand as signifiers of the exit from a state of estrangement, but most of all, of passivity (it is food they were made to eat) to a gradual reacquisition of agency. This process is exemplified by Alba's account:

So [the hostel manager] had assigned me to the kitchen to cook the morning meal before we went to work but wanted me always to cook milk with spaghetti, no one liked those, no, but in the morning you had to do it...in the evening there was a Polish woman who did the cooking, you know, the Polish they eat what they want, and who could eat that? "I'm out" I would say, I said "I don't want it" so they used to give me packets of jam, I would put them under the bed, when I was hungry I ate it...it was hard though.³⁵

³³ Alessandro Portelli, *Storie Orali: Racconto, Immaginazione, Dialogo* (Roma: Donzelli, 2007). Pp.9-11.

³⁴ "Mammamia what rubbish! Ooooooh all those concoctions, potatoes, those stews, that gravy...everything, the meat all mixed up, the salad with no oil, no seasoning, like you feed to the rabbits, and we were there looking at the plates, ah! Tea with milk...when I, at twenty years old, who had ever tasted tea with milk! And they used to make it strong, black, with barely a drop of milk, then...the tears... My God how we cried...but the contract was for two years"

³⁵ "mi ha messo in cucina a cucinare la mattina, prima che andavamo a lavorare voleva che facevamo sempre il latte con gli spaghetti, nessuno ci piaceva quelli no ma la mattina dovevi fare... la sera era un polacca che

Another of the Bradford respondents, who we will refer to as interviewee C, has similar memories of her time in the Hostel. Despite the fact that, as she remembers, there were many Italian women living there, the food available was rarely to her taste: “Well, what I eat, I eat bread and jam, sometime I cook some spaghetti but sometime and really I become very, very slim, because I no had enough to eat”.³⁶

In both these cases, agency is reclaimed by deliberately refusing the food provided but, for most Italian women, overcoming the constraints of the hostel environment was achieved by developing their personal knowledge both of the English language and of their surroundings. The anecdotal examples of their first forays into the local community, such as this one supplied by Lisa, capture this development well:

Once we said “lets go to Millbrook” and so we went near the hostel and we saw...it looked like an ice-cream shop, you know, from the street, so we said “Oh” “They sell ice-cream”...[...] So we put together the money and we go to buy the ice-cream, but there was such a crowd in that shop, it was fish and chips...when we got in you couldn’t see over the counter because there were so many people but there was such a stench, and we said what a stench, what a stench! [...] when it was our turn we’d say “three please”, like this, with our fingers, and then I remember they put all the potatoes in a paper, the fish in the paper, I...we had never seen those things, so we take them home and put them there, we don’t eat them because they were greasy!³⁷

cucinava, no, sai i polacchi mangiano quello che vogliono, chi gli piaceva?! io son fuori , io allora dicevo “io non la voglio” allora mi davano i pacchi di marmellata, li mettevo sotto al letto, quando avevo fame mangiavo... era brutta però”

³⁶ Interviewee C in BHRU, Acc.no B0069.

³⁷ “è stato brutto proprio, s’è sofferto in quel senso lì, una volta si dice “oh si passa al Millbrook” e allora si stava vicino l’hostel e si vide che... sembrava una gelateria, sa questi affari dalla strada, dice “oh vendono il gelato”... dice, oh, io e un’altra, dico “si va! lo vuoi te ? Sì, lo vuoi te?” ci danno i soldi si va a comprare questo gelato, ma c’era una coda in quella bottega, era fish and chips ... quando si entra dentro noi non si vedeva il banco dove serviva perchè c’era tanto di quella gente ma di quel puzzi uh dice oddio si dicevamo che puzzo, che puzzo! accidenti agli inglesi gli italiani non capiva nessuno e così quando toccava a noi allora si vedeva allora si diceva “three please” così si faceva, coi diti, allora mi ricordo ci misero queste patate in una carta, il pesce in una carta io non s’era mai visto quelle cose lì, si portano a casa si mettono lì, non si mangiano mica perché erano grasse!”

As Lisa recalls, sourcing food was a matter of trial and error, she remembers, for example a time when, having asked for a packet of lard, she was given a light-bulb: “we had forgotten how it was called...you know, all these things...and we would laugh a bit...see?”³⁸ In time, Italian women discovered how to interact with their new-found community in order to source what they needed. This was a learning process that implied many different things: acquiring the necessary language skills in the first instance; but also understanding the local customs; discovering which ingredients were available and which were not; developing cordial relations with shopkeepers, butchers, local farmers; finally, it required learning to negotiate around the constraints imposed by the rationing scheme. It was as much about discovering where to source what they wanted as it was about learning how to make the dishes they knew by substituting ingredients with what was more commonly available. According to Lisa:

You had to buy in the local shops, it was English stuff we didn’t know how to cook, so we used to buy pasta, oil, and in the evening me, the friends, we would cook pasta, the meat we would pan-fry it like we do, we used to do it ourselves...³⁹

Many respondents, both in Manchester and in Bradford, remember how the matter of buying food was made even more challenging by the fact that the war-rationing was still enforced. Marina, for example remembers “It was still rationed, they gave you one egg per

³⁸ “Una volta si chiese il pacchetto di lardo e ci diedero una lampadina, ci si era dimenticati come si chiamava insomma, tutte quelle cose lì... si rideva un pochino ma... ecco!”

³⁹ “Bisognava andarla a prendere nelle botteghe la roba inglese ma non si sapeva cucinare noi, sicché si prendeva la pasta, l’olio, e la sera io, le amiche, si cucinavamo la pasta, la carne si friggeva come noi, si faceva da noi...”

family, gosh! One egg! They gave you a little piece of butter, a bit of bread, you know, you came, you ate, we bought potatoes...”⁴⁰ Italian women however, often did not want to purchase some of the staples that were most in demand in British house-holds, such as tea or butter. For this reason, many respondents remember how they were able to barter with shopkeepers and, by foregoing some of the rations they were entitled to, could buy larger quantities of food they wanted. The following is interviewee A, from Bradford:

“For instance the chocolate, I wasn’t interested in it, so I gave it to the shop who are giving me what they call extra food when I have the baby, extra food for the baby. [...] I didn’t want the tea ration so I give them to the shop for somebody else. I say if they want it, then they’re giving me what other people don’t want. So once I found my way about, I didn’t found a struggle neither for that.”⁴¹

As Italian women gradually moved out of the hostels into lodgings or started their own families, this ability to source and cook food became all the more invested with meaning, because of the focus on providing and nurture inscribed in their gendered role within the household. With some pride, it seems, Interviewee A describes how she was able to buy rabbit and chicken and perform all the necessary skinning, plucking and butchering herself, therefore finding new use for the skills-set she acquired through her rural upbringing back in Italy:

Then when I found a farmer I went and buy my own live chickens, so I can do it, so I didn’t bought anymore. When I find a proper butcher – for us, even the head, the pig-head, the feet, we’re managing to...to eat it, you see, so for us we did manage, once we

⁴⁰ “era alla tessera ancora, ti davano un uovo alla famiglia, che caspita! un uovo! ti davano un pezzettino di burro, un pezzettino di... un pane, sai, arrivavi, mangiavi, compravano patate, facevano questi come... e sai...”

⁴¹ BHRU, Acc.no. B0105.

starting to understand the language, settle down, we didn't bother about rationing anymore, because we could make ends meet with many other things, what the English people maybe doesn't eat that, but we find our way to make presentable thing to eat.⁴²

Those women who married local Englishmen came to familiarise with typical British dishes and mostly, once they were in charge of preparing them, even came to like them. Women who, on the other hand, married other foreign nationals were in for a quite startling adventure in culinary-syncretism. Food in this context is just one aspect of the complex, unpredictable and entirely personal circumstances that came together in the making of these multicultural families.

Life in a British mill

Italian women arrived in the mill towns of Lancashire, Manchester and Yorkshire in what would soon be recognised to be a critical and transformative time for the British textile industry. The mills which had shaped the landscape of these areas and given employment to generations of local people were ill-equipped to face the challenges of international competition and were about to enter three decades of steady decline. There is a wealth of research dedicated to exposing the reasons of the industry's gradual failure to maintain its 19th century world leadership and, of course, much scholarly debate. There were, however, some key structural inadequacies which have been recognised as strong determinants in the industry's imminent downfall and impinged directly on the experience of migrant workers

⁴² Ibid.

employed within it.

It has been observed that the post-war cotton industry had inherited a legacy of small-scale ownership and labour-intensive old fashioned means of production. Despite these handicaps, according to William Lazonick “from 1946 to 1951, the British cotton industry experienced a dramatic boom, with yarn production increasing by 50 percent and cloth production by 56 percent. Mills that had been closed during the war, and whose plant and equipment had long since been written off, were able to enjoy profits on the basis of traditional production methods”.⁴³

The foreign workers hired by the British mills were, therefore, employed on the wave of a short-lived moment of financial and productive buoyancy but, as Lazonick has emphasised, the fact “that Lancashire cotton managers complained of labor shortage during these boom years was due to their continued reliance on labor-intensive methods of production”⁴⁴ and not, therefore, the result of successful marketing of British textiles worldwide. Quite the opposite in fact, the volume of textile exports was shrinking as British cotton could not compete with cheaper manufacturing countries, whilst the success and increased demand for synthetic fibres soon challenged the role of cotton and wool manufactures even within the domestic markets.

The government intervened twice to facilitate a general technological upgrade of the industry: once in 1948, with the Cotton Spinning Industry (Re-equipment Subsidy) Act, and again, on a far wider scale, in 1959, with the Cotton Industry Act. Both these programs were an attempt to subsidise the cotton industry by granting financial assistance for re-

⁴³ William Lazonick, "Industrial Organization and Technological Change: The Decline of the British Cotton Industry," *The Business History Review* 57, no. 2 (1983). p. 217.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

equipment and structural reorganisation, but the effects of these efforts were limited. Exports fell regardless and the labour-saving improvements took their inevitable toll: between 1950 and 1970 employment within the spinning section fell by 74,000 circa, while 94,000 jobs were lost within the weaving section.⁴⁵

As for the wool industry, on which the economy of areas such as the Yorkshire towns of Bradford, Halifax and Huddersfield heavily depended, the situation seems to have been much the same: wool manufactures enjoyed a brief moment of industrial expansion after the war, as it was to be expected, but within a decade, according to Peter Jackson “employment in the textile industry had fallen steadily [...] faced with foreign competition, cheaper artificial fabrics and outdated manufacturing plant. Textile employment in Yorkshire followed the pattern of national decline.”⁴⁶

In Yorkshire too, attempts were made to give its flagship industry a fighting chance. Rob Perks in his introduction to an oral history of Bradford mill workers summarises these attempts as follows: “In the mid-1950s many mills and foundries re-equipped, and in order to recoup their investment they introduced 24 hour shift working. Women, who still made up the bulk of the textile labour force, were barred by law from working the night shift”. In order to maximise output, the wool industry would soon employ large contingents of foreign workers, mostly male, from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.⁴⁷

As for Italian workers, and indeed for all of the foreign migrants employed within the textile sector at this time, the situation we have described above prompt us to consider

⁴⁵ These numbers are taken from : John Singleton, "Lancashire's Last Stand: Declining Employment in the British Cotton Industry, 1950-70," *Economic History Review* 39, no. 1 (1986).

⁴⁶ Peter Jackson, "The Racialization of Labour in Post-War Bradford," *Journal of Historical Geography* 18, no. 2 (1992). p. 195.

⁴⁷ The citation above is taken from Rob Perks' introduction to Olive Howarth and Tim Smith, *Textile Voices : A Century of Mill Life* ([Bradford]: Bradford Museums, Galleries and Heritage Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, 2006). p. 16.

some critical implications. Firstly, the work environment in which these women found themselves was not exactly state of the art. The out-datedness of the machinery alongside the pressure to maintain production costs to a minimum shaped the daily work experience of those employed within the mills, as we will see. Rob Perks has effectively summed it up: “Textile trade unionism was notoriously weak, hampered by a history of consistently low wages, labour shortages, a diffuse workforce, automation, and importation of cheap labour from other parts of Britain and overseas”. So, it is fair to say that the experience of these foreign workers, the “cheap labour” Rob Perks refers to, was going to be no different; in fact, their very presence was meant to ensure that wage-increases would be contained, health and safety standards would remain low and that trade unionism would have limited influence or power.⁴⁸ For all these reasons, in the space of a few years, foreign workers would soon be struggling alongside their British counterparts with the effects of the industry’s decline: firms closing, trade union unrest, loss of jobs. These issues will be discussed in the next chapter.

The decline of the textile trade had other consequences for the migrant workers employed within it. The foreign migrants who settled in these areas found themselves living in communities over which the damaging effects of industrial decline, on the one hand, and, on the other, the challenges of rapid multiculturalisation had transformative repercussions. There was no overseas Eldorado to be found in the declining textile districts of northern England and for most Italians, motivated as they were chiefly by financial need and lack of opportunities in their home country, this particular migration adventure was not likely to end with tales of fabulous riches and major social improvement.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Health and Safety

For many Italians the mill was their first experience of factory-employment, and for this reason their early impressions of such places could be almost overwhelming. Many accounts, such as Lisa's here, effectively convey a picture of vastness, together with an almost beehive-like frenzy of activity:

Was it a big factory?

Huge! Yes it was big and there was...downstairs where they did, I never worked there, where they brought in the cotton, because they had to treat their cotton to make the reels and then they came upstairs, to us, and then there was another big room where they made cotton to make sheets and blankets [...] so then I started doing that and the pay was better. But the dust, *mammamia!!*⁴⁹

It has been observed that the Lancashire cotton industry at this time had not embraced a pattern of vertical integration, meaning that, by and large, spinning and weaving were carried out by different firms. While the weaving sector mainly consisted of small specialised family firms, cotton spinning was generally better capitalised and organised in large amalgamations such as the Lancashire Cotton Corporation or Combined English Mills. The status of such amalgamated organisations, however, throws a deceptive light on their true dimensions and capability, for as Lazonick makes plain, they were often nothing

⁴⁹“ Ed era una fabbrica grande?

Grandissima, si era grande e c'era di sotto dove facevano, io non c'ho mai lavorato, dove... portano proprio il cotone che lo devono aggiustare questo cotone per farci le bobine e poi dopo vanno di sopra, venivano a noi, poi dopo di là c'era un'altra stanza grande facevano il cotone per fare le lenzuola le coperte i bimes, capito si chiamavano, allora i dopo facevo quello la paga era più grande... però la polvere mamma mia!!! E il rumore, il rumore quando si entra... non ci si sentiva parlare, ci si sentiva... con le italiane così con la bocca ci si capiva perché non ci sentiva, poi piano piano, si andava fuori...”

more than “loosely organized federations of largely autonomous units.”⁵⁰ These units were joint-stock companies but family businesses nonetheless, where “family control and management were often exercised”.⁵¹ The spinning sector had the greatest need for labour and most of the Italian workers were hired to work in such firms. But whatever work they were hired for, unfortunately, labouring in a cotton mill inevitably implied a high exposure to dangerous noise levels and particulate cotton fibres. This came as a shock to many workers, such as Lisa:

Ooh, I had never seen a factory, so much dust my God...So we bought a handkerchief yes! I even have the photos at home...I had the handkerchief you see...the dust was this high, you know? On the hair [...]

But could you wear...did you have to breathe in the dust?

No no, but in those days you didn't have those masks, you didn't...you had to breathe in everything through your nose, only a handkerchief...⁵²

The dust produced by cotton spinning could settle in the workers' lungs – leading to deadly pulmonary conditions such as byssinosis – or, by ingestion, cause liver, oesophagus and stomach cancer.⁵³ As our interviewees reminisced about those years in the mills and the

⁵⁰ Lazonick, "Industrial Organization and Technological Change: The Decline of the British Cotton Industry." p.219.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵²“ Ohh non ho mai visto una fabbrica, tutta polvere oddio...così! Allora avevamo comprato il fazzoletto sì! c'ho anche le fotografie a casa... avevo il fazzoletto, no... la polvere era alta così, sa?, su capelli, e dopo allora bisognava lavorare poi dopo si finiva si andava...

Ma poteva mettere... sì doveva respirare la polvere?

No no, ma Allora non c'erano quelle mascherine non c'era... si respirava tutto con il naso solo il fazzolettino.”

⁵³ A worldwide correlation between Textile work and such occupational health issues is well established and supported by ample literature. See for example: Peter Kirby, Transport, and Group General Workers' Union. *Textile, Death in the Textile Industry : A Proportional Mortality Study of 952 Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers Who Died between 1976-1980* (Bradford: Transport & General Workers Union (Textile Group), 1985), Charles Levenstein, Gregory F. DeLaurier, and Mary Lee Dunn, *The Cotton Dust Papers : Science, Politics, and Power in The "Discovery" Of Byssinosis in the U.S* (Amityville, NY: Baywood Pub. Co., 2002), Peter Neild and Institute Chartered Insurance, *Byssinosis : The Lancashire Disease* (London (20 Aldermanbury, EC2V 7HY): The Chartered Insurance Institute, 1982).

comforts of having a steady job and a salary, the notion that for some of their friends this experience resulted in illness and possibly even death was never far from their mind. See for example Gabriella, who came to work in the mills comparatively late, in 1961. In time, she would discover that one of her new colleagues and fellow Italian, had fallen ill:

Didn't you wear masks?

No no. There was nothing. You had to do the job like that...later they brought them in but at the beginning no, there was nothing. There is a friend of mine who lived here, she was from Calabria, she died of this thing and the doctors refused to acknowledge that she suffered from this thing until she died, I don't know why, but they said that if they recognised her disease then they would have to give her more money..⁵⁴

Alba as well, remembers how one of her friends relocated to Italy soon after she found out she had cancer:

We went once because one women was sent back to Italy because she was ill I can't remember how [...] And this Italian, later they discovered she was ill...and so...she had the cancer...so she had to go back to Italy and we accompanied her.⁵⁵

As for noise levels, studies were conducted over the years in Britain to assess if textile workers were vulnerable to hearing loss and it would indeed appear to be the case. It is safe to say, at the very least, that as in the case of much factory work, the loud constant

⁵⁴“ Non c'erano maschere?

No no. Non c'era niente. Dovevi fare il lavoro così... ma poi sono uscite dopo ma in principio no, non c'era niente, c'è infatti una mia amica abitava quaggiù, lei era calabrese, è morta di questa cosa qua e i dottori non hanno riconosciuto che lei soffriva di questa cosa finché lei non è morta non so perchè e loro dicevano così che se loro riconoscevano la malattia dovevano pagare un po' di soldi di più.”

⁵⁵ “Siamo andate una volta perché un'italiana la l'hanno mandata in Italia che stava male non mi ricordo nemmeno come, no, e siamo andate in Italia, siamo andate, no, e lei... Abbiamo dovuto pagare non mi ricordo nemmeno cosa pagammo siamo andate con la nave allora, no, e questa italiana l'hanno trovata malata dopo... e allora... aveva il cancer e ha dovuto partire in Italia così e l'abbiamo accompagnata”.

noise made for a difficult (and quite lonely) work environment. Much of the communication between co-workers and the reception of instructions had to be delivered through hand gestures. But since our Italian women entered the mills speaking little or no English, as suggested here by Gabriella's account, they relied on hand-gesture language to learn how to operate their machines in any case:

Of course, and how did she (the supervisor) make you understand? Because you didn't speak English...

Ah no! Little by little, like when one is mute and doesn't speak, just gestures...

That was the only way I could understand and then gradually I started to learn a bit and then it wasn't so bad.⁵⁶

Life and work in "Worstedopolis" – as Bradford had come to be known – presented similar problems: just as in the case of cotton manufacturing, wool processing had been linked to one potentially fatal illness such as woolsorters' disease (anthrax) and general ill respiratory health caused by airborne dust. Faced with increased competition and contracting sales, wool firms in the late 1950s and 60s generally shrank in size, while the larger surviving companies such as Courtauld's, diversified their products to incorporate man-made fibres, opening new plants elsewhere. "The early stages of wool processing, such as scouring and combing, were steadily moving overseas to those countries where wool was produced: Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and South America".⁵⁷ This was good news for British wool workers on at least one count, the health impact, since the early

⁵⁶ "Certo e come ha fatto a farle capire? perché lei non parlava italiano...

Eh no! Un po' alla volta come quando uno è muto che non parla, fa solamente le mosse...

Eh eh. Ho capito.

Io solamente così potevo capire qualcosa poi piano piano mi sono incominciata a imparare un po' allora non c'è stato tanto male."

⁵⁷ Rob Perks, "Introduction, in: Howarth and Smith, *Textile Voices : A Century of Mill Life*. p.16.

stages of wool processing are also the ones that produce the largest concentrations of airborne particulate matter and are, therefore, the most harmful.

It is impossible to condense here the whole history of occupational health in the British textile industry, but it is safe to say that in the aftermath of WW2 it was no mystery that labouring in the “dark satanic mills” could be dangerous work.⁵⁸ Much of the regulatory framework surrounding morbidity and mortality in British industries had been put in place at the end of the nineteenth century (the Workmen’s Compensation Act”, for example, was introduced as early as 1896) and many harmful practices such as cleaning machinery in motion or the use of some carcinogenic substances had already been formally banned.

The disease most commonly linked to cotton mill work is byssinosis. Nowadays the link between byssinosis and cotton dust exposure is well established but this only happened over a lengthy period of time, in fact the very existence of the condition had been long disputed. Much of the following facts about this disease and the way it has affected the health of textile workers in Britain can be found in a paper published in 2003 by Bowden and Tweedale.⁵⁹ These authors, however, stress the importance of a 1956 study of byssinosis which appeared in *The Lancet*, by R.S.F. Schilling.⁶⁰ Dr Richard Schilling was a physician employed by the Nuffield Department of Occupational Health at Manchester University in 1947 who compiled the first detailed investigation into a condition that the

⁵⁸ Health in the textile industry is rarely been the subject of historical research rather, the bibliography on the subject comprises many occupational health studies and governmental reports. The following are some of the most broad-ranging: Session International Labour Organisation. Textiles Committee and Programme International Labour Organisation. Sectoral Activities, "Working Conditions in the Textile Industry in the Light of Technological Changes," (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1991), R. G. Love and Medicine Institute of Occupational, *Respiratory Symptoms in Wool Textile Workers : An Epidemiological Study of Respiratory Health in West Yorkshire Wool Textile Mills* (Edinburgh: Institute of Occupational Medicine, 1986), M. J. Wilkinson et al., *Noise in the Textile Industry : A Bibliography* (London: H.M.S.O., 1989).

⁵⁹ Sue Bowden and Geoffrey Tweedale, "Mondays without Dread: The Trade Union Response to Byssinosis in the Lancashire Cotton Industry in the Twentieth Century," *Social History of Medicine* 16, no. 1 (2003).

⁶⁰ R.S.F. Schilling, "Byssinosis in Cotton and Other Textile Workers," *Lancet*, no. ii (1956).

government was largely neglecting. According to Bowden and Tweedale, Dr. Schilling “returned byssinosis to the occupational health agenda and prompted a steady stream of medical studies through the 1960s and 1970s.”⁶¹

Compensation to affected workers had been officially granted by the Government in 1941 but the criteria were very stringent and made somewhat erratic by the fact that not enough research had gone into understanding the disease: despite a progressive widening of compensation parameters, between 1941 and 2000 only 6000 workers in Britain received compensation. Six thousand out of how many actual sufferers from this condition? It is very hard to say, because diagnosis went hand in hand with the history of byssinosis’ gradual, and often contested, according to Bowden and Tweedale, recognition as a disease:

The scanty historical literature partly reflects the obscurity of byssinosis. The disease is now well-defined medically, but it has not always been so. The symptoms and prevalence of byssinosis were disputed until the late twentieth century. Inevitably the accuracy of the historical picture is constrained by the quality of the surviving evidence, which is frequently deficient.⁶²

The available statistics relating to the number of newly-diagnosed cases of the disease between 1942 and 2000 are heavily influenced by the debate that surrounded byssinosis in those crucial years. The number of people diagnosed peaked sharply in the years 1955-60, to an average of 500 per year, but that is probably a reflection of how many cases had remained undiagnosed in previous years.⁶³

⁶¹ Sue Bowden and Geoffrey Tweedale, "Poisoned by the Fluff: Compensation and Litigation for Byssinosis in the Lancashire Cotton Industry," *Journal of Law and Society* 29, no. 4 (2002). p. 567

⁶² Bowden and Tweedale, "Mondays without Dread: The Trade Union Response to Byssinosis in the Lancashire Cotton Industry in the Twentieth Century." p.80.

⁶³ Statistics can be found in Schilling, "Byssinosis in Cotton and Other Textile Workers."

Several factors conspired in delaying the recognition and effective eradication of byssinosis: the difficulties of diagnosing the illness, government reluctance to introduce schemes that would lumber the textile sector with extra costs, the even greater reluctance of employer's organisations to accept them, the strategies pursued by trade unions which – though deeply concerned about dust exposure and occupational health in general – chose to focus more on the issue of compensation rather than policies that would have more effectively enforced prevention and dust control.

What is the significance of all this for our Italian migrant workers? As foreign and female members of the workforce they were largely employed within the spinning sector, where the danger from dust exposure was higher – being particularly high in the initial stages of fibre processing such as sorting, scouring and carding. If, as it appears, enforcement of preventive measures and support for workers effectively depended on whether the competent trade unions were able to assert collective pressure, it is possible that foreign women workers were likely to incur a double disadvantage. As foreigners, their relationship with trade unions was problematic – their arrival had been received by unions with attitudes ranging, as summarised by Kay and Miles, from “outright hostility to reluctant acceptance”⁶⁴ and throughout their employment in Britain it would appear that, mostly, EVWs were reluctant, insufficiently informed and at times even too scared to join trade unionist activity.⁶⁵ As women, the support they could expect was limited by the particular structure of trade unionist representation within the cotton industry which penalised, de facto, female workers. It has been observed time and time again that, as

⁶⁴ Kay and Miles, *Refugees or Migrant Workers? European Volunteer Workers in Britain, 1946-51*.

⁶⁵ Phillips, Hallett, and Abendstern, "If We Depart from These Conditions...": Trade Union Reactions to European Immigrant Workers in the Textile Industry -1946-1952."

various sectors of the industry each had a fairly gender-homogeneous workforce, there was a consistent tendency for the male-workforce dominated ones to be generally better paid and, more importantly, served by larger and stronger trade unions.⁶⁶

No wonder, then, that when it came to compensate workers who suffered from byssinosis the eligibility criteria remained, for a long time, consistently exclusive. According to Bowden and Tweedale : “the original scheme compensated only totally disabled male workers who had worked in cotton rooms, blowing rooms, and cardrooms for 20 years”⁶⁷. This despite the fact that, in Lancashire, card room operatives were for the majority female – the gender ratio being also reflected within the pertinent union membership, the Amalgamated Association of Cardroom, Blowing and Ring Room Operatives.⁶⁸ Bowden and Tweedale, despite being strong advocates of trade unions’ role in fighting for workers’ health generally, seem to agree :

Moreover, not all workers were exposed to the same dust levels and degree of risk. The fact that the majority of workers in the preparation stages (59 per cent) and, within this, in the carding rooms (73 per cent) were female did nothing to increase the pressure from male-dominated unions for action.⁶⁹

Entitlement to compensation was certified by Medical Panels whose position in relation to the industry was ambiguous. They often rejected claims and were consequently

⁶⁶ The gender asymmetry on matters of pay and status of relative representative’s organisations is as old as the loom itself, see for example the study on Italian silk mills in the early modern age: Carlo Poni, *Tecnologie, organizzazione produttiva e divisione sessuale del lavoro: il caso dei mulini da seta* : Renata Ago and A. Groppi, eds., *Il Lavoro Delle Donne, Storia Delle Donne in Italia* (Roma: Laterza, 1996). For a transnational perspective, see: Chapkis and Enloe, *Of Common Cloth : Women in the Global Textile Industry*.

⁶⁷ Bowden and Tweedale, "Mondays without Dread: The Trade Union Response to Byssinosis in the Lancashire Cotton Industry in the Twentieth Century." p.86.

⁶⁸ Phillips, Hallett, and Abendstern, "If We Depart from These Conditions...": Trade Union Reactions to European Immigrant Workers in the Textile Industry -1946-1952." p.138.

⁶⁹ Bowden and Tweedale, "Mondays without Dread: The Trade Union Response to Byssinosis in the Lancashire Cotton Industry in the Twentieth Century."p.88.

accused of bias by trade unions, but clearly, the accusation of some unions carried more weight than others.

To conclude, when our interviewee Gabriella remembers how her friend “died of this thing and the doctors refused to acknowledge that she suffered from this thing until she died “ adding “they said that if they recognised her disease then they would have to give her more money”, she is effectively remembering an all too common occurrence that prevented many workers from obtaining compensation: the onus of proof of one’s illness laid on the worker herself and those without a strong union behind them to substantiate their case were unlikely to succeed.

Joining the workforce – politics of integration in the workplace

The extract quoted below comes from a kind but, unfortunately, anonymous letter sent to the author in response to an appeal published in a Manchester local news paper in June 2008 as part of this research:

I worked with many of these people in the mills of Stalybridge and Hyde. If I remember they were called Displaced People. There were many Italians, Poles, Ukraines, and others. All lost souls who soon settled in the area. Hard working, pleasant and friendly. We taught them our skills, in return they taught us many things. I myself made many friends.

How welcome were the new foreign recruits in the mills of Manchester, Lancashire and Yorkshire? To answer this question there are two possible avenues of inquiry: oral history, on the one hand, and an examination of trade union related –sources on the other.

Both areas have been looked into before, and both have their merits and limitations. Oral accounts, used as they have been to gauge the early impressions that native and foreign workers had of one another, can be influenced by a number of factors. These include the normalisation of said relationship that has occurred over decades, for example, they are influenced by everything that happened to the interviewee after the encounter actually happened. This is not to say that these sources are without use, on the contrary, they widen our knowledge by revealing the variety of different responses provoked by such encounter. Oral sources are not surveys or questionnaires, they do not provide us with statistical data, they help us “problematise” our questions and most importantly, according to Alessandro Portelli, they “tell us not just about the facts, but what they meant for those who experienced them and retell them; not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, believed they were doing; their motivations, changes of mind, judgements and rationalisations”.⁷⁰

Trying to understand how Italian workers were assimilated into the textile workforce by looking at trade union responses, on the other hand, can offer us a somewhat limited and gloomy picture. The opinions expressed by union representatives are not simply the articulation of their members’ feelings, they can often be informed by insights and preoccupations that the workers are not necessarily aware of or share. In the case of the EVWs recruited by the British mills, it is plausible to suspect that trade unionist opinion of how these workers were fitting in has been influenced by the fact that they were strongly opposed to their recruitment in the first place. What is more not all articulations of the

⁷⁰ “Ci informano non solo sui fatti, ma su quello che essi hanno voluto dire per chi li ha vissuti e li racconta; non solo su ciò che le persone hanno fatto, ma su ciò che volevano fare, credevano di fare che credono di aver fatto; sulle motivazioni, sui ripensamenti, sui giudizi e le razionalizzazioni”. See Portelli, *Storie Orali: Racconto, Immaginazione, Dialogo*. p. 12.

relevant Trade Unions' organisation responded to foreign recruitments in the same way, and Kenneth Lunn is right in pointing out that we must not underestimate differences in local attitudes and the importance of "an evaluation of local political cultures, social and economic contexts". The danger is that in our zealous search for "instances of opposition" we might be guilty of a "self-fulfilling prophecy".⁷¹ After all, it is true that the TUC received many complaints from disgruntled members of local union branches on the subject of migrant workers but how likely were the satisfied members to write and express their lack of concern?⁷²

Aside from different local attitudes, McDowell in her study of Latvian EVWs reminds us that foreign workers were not necessarily all received in the same way within the workplace and gender was a strong determining factor.⁷³ Male-dominated trade unions closely guarded entry into the most sought after and better paid jobs within the industry, so the challenge posed by male foreign workers was much greater. Those unions that possessed a majority female membership on the other hand, according to another recent study by Hallett, Phillips and Abendstern, welcomed the new foreign recruits with a "greater degree of tolerance",⁷⁴

The problem that hindered integration within the workplace between native and new foreign workers, of course, was the perception that the newcomers were a contributing factor in keeping wages down and were willing to accept working conditions which were unfair. As for the wages, we know this to be true. As for the competition, it is not surprising

⁷¹ K. Lunn, 'Immigration and reaction in Britain, 1880–1950: rethinking the "Legacy of Empire" in Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, eds., *Migration, Migration History, History : Old Paradigms and New Perspectives* (Bern; New York: Peter Lang, 2005). pp. 337, 345.

⁷² These letters of complaint are held in TUC Papers, MSS292/103.2/1-4, Foreign Workers.

⁷³ McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*. p. 119

⁷⁴ Phillips, Hallett, and Abendstern, "If We Depart from These Conditions...": Trade Union Reactions to European Immigrant Workers in the Textile Industry -1946-1952." p.138.

that some British workers felt threatened, this is how an English mill worker from Bradford remembers the work ethic of Polish and Eastern European workers:

We as English people, were content to work five days a week all the year round, but some of the foreign workers would work Saturday, Sunday, and they'd add another day and hope the Lord wouldn't see it. The Eastern Europeans would work every hour that God sends, and we weren't prepared to do that. We were content with a steady income every week, so we found then that things did change quite a lot. But I learned a lot of Italians how to do the knots and how to work the machines. I worked mainly with Italians and one or two Polish people. They were very good hard working people. But with piece-work the antagonism started to creep in. We found that the bosses preferred to employ these people who were willing to work dreadfully long hours.⁷⁵

Some British workers understandably resented how much work the EVWs were willing, or too scared not to, put in. Others, on the other hand, saw the new-comers' inexperience and the language barrier as problems that made their own work-life harder, as in the case of this other Bradford textile worker quoted in Howarth and Smith's book:

They brought some Italian girls, about thirty, forty years since. And they brought these girls in, and we were on the old machinery then [...] Well it was most difficult because they'd never seen anything like it before, and they'd come straight from home. [...] Well I couldn't speak Italian, so you'd to do it by sign language you see, you'd to say "one, two, three, four." We gradually got them learned, but it were a very difficult job.⁷⁶

That said, it would be unfair to assume that such feelings inevitably made native workers unfriendly or resentful, the same respondent quoted above, for example,

⁷⁵ Interview abstract quoted in Howarth and Smith, *Textile Voices : A Century of Mill Life*. p. 100. Name of respondent not given, identified as "Woman. Born 1924."

⁷⁶ Also quoted in *Ibid.*, Respondent identified as "Woman. Born 1921".

remembers how she and her colleagues bonded with the new Italian girls on the first Christmas they spent together:

Now the first lot they brought, they came just a month before Christmas. Well it was pathetic, because they were away from home and their parents and everything at Christmas, and we'd bought them a Christmas present, and of course buying them this Christmas present upset them because they knew we were trying to be friends with them and they were so far away from home.⁷⁷

To what degree, then, did the entry in a work environment such as the mill contribute to the integration of foreign women workers? According to McDowell “The long tradition of women’s work in Lancashire and Yorkshire textile towns meant that EVW women’s lives paralleled those of locally born working class women and [...] meant that they did not feel so very different from other women in their position”.⁷⁸ This is an important consideration; it shows how, in so many respects, EVW women could view themselves as ordinary working-class women amongst others within the “gendered local culture” that all textile workers shared. As the second abstract quoted from Smith and Howarth’s Yorkshire “Textile Voices” suggests, however, the peculiar daily routines enforced within the workplace were not conducive to much bonding between co-workers and this is something often remarked upon by the respondents interviewed for the present research as well. The division of work between different shifts meant that some firms deliberately chose to allocate their foreign and native workforce to separate shifts, so the two groups did not always interact on a daily basis. Plus, factors such as the high noise

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*.p.194-

levels, the short lunch breaks and the constant monitoring necessary for the operation of many machines actively discouraged interaction during work hours. This is how Gabriella remembers the difficulties involved in getting to know people in Manchester, especially in the workplace:

I found it curious because people they all minded their own business, it wasn't... it wasn't like in Italy that you go out and you run into a friend and you start chatting, no, all different!

And in the factory, was it the same?

But in the factory too, with all that noise that the machines make...you can't hear a thing...and so when lunch time came they gave us so little time so you had to eat quickly and go back to work so there wasn't much time to...⁷⁹

For all of these reasons, it would seem that EVW women relied mostly on existing family ties or friends acquired by sharing hostels and private lodgings to build their supportive networks. As we will see in the next chapter, religious missions and churches were to perform a key role in the following years in the establishment of such networks, but as their activity targeted people according to specific national and religious criteria it reinforced rather than challenged the creation of ethnically-homogeneous communities. Marriage soon revealed itself to be a decisive factor in linking together all these scattered groups of people. Marriages between Italians and British, but also marriage between Italians and other foreign nationals; in this sense, Italian women workers were destined to create more multicultural and less segregated community-networks than, for example, their

⁷⁹ “mi sembrava un po’ curioso perché la gente ognuno si faceva i fatti suoi non è... non era come in Italia che tu esci fuori trovi un’amica ti metti a parlare queste cose, no, tutto diverso!

Ma in fabbrica poi con tutto quel rumore che fanno le macchine ... non capisci niente... allora quando era il momento che mangiavamo ci davano quel poco di tempo allora doveva mangiare presto e ricominciare a lavorare così non c’era tanto tempo da...”

Latvian counterparts, who were more frequently able to marry other Latvian immigrants. Another foreign textile worker based in Bradford, quoted by Howarth and Smith, reflects here about how mixed marriages could bring about a more harmonious co-existence between natives and migrants:

These British people, you know, had such strange ideas about foreigners in those days. I suppose marriage did help a bit, with our boys marrying English girls, it helped to break the stupid notion that foreigners were so much different to their own people.⁸⁰

The anonymous respondent quoted here is obviously not Italian, and might not even be a woman, but his/her insight is a pertinent, and important, one: out of this transformative time for the textile towns of England, new communities were born, new, and different, “narratives of belonging” were imagined and experienced. This happened despite the way in which company managers and government officials effectively introduced foreign workers to the mills – a strategy which can seem at times inspired by an almost *divide et impera* approach to human resource management. It happened despite the fact that many practices enforced by the unions – the “closed shops”, the restriction to a maximum quota of 10% foreign workers for each department, the “first in, last out” clause – were divisive and fostered hostility and distrust amongst native and foreign workers. It happened, as we will see, despite the fact that religious groups in charge of the EVWs’ pastoral care in many cases outspokenly condemned these mixed, inter-faith marriages.

⁸⁰ Howarth and Smith, *Textile Voices : A Century of Mill Life*.

A new life

This is how Annalisa remembers her early perceptions of Manchester as a newcomer:

It was beautiful, Oh! [...] you could walk around in the street at one o'clock at night as it were nothing, no one messed with you, no one...nothing! It was beautiful then, so beautiful you could leave the milk bottles out and I would leave the money out on the porch and no one touched it...imagine that! Now...you can't do like that anymore they'll steal from your pockets! But before it was beautiful and so I really liked it a lot, so much I said 'I'm not going back'...'Ah! I have found my America I am not going back to work there anymore',⁸¹

The years that followed the arrival of EVW workers to the mills would bring about great changes in the life of British people and that is all the more true for the communities living in the textile towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Working in the mills, something that for centuries local working class people had come to consider their "birth-right", in some respects, or a life-sentence in others was soon to become a far less inevitable/ reliable way to provide for their livelihoods.⁸² Our Italian women workers too were about to witness, participate in, live through such changes; the very notion of 'Britishness' was about to change as immigration and multiculturalism challenged the boundaries of British

⁸¹ "Era bello, oh! [...] tu potevi camminare per la strada all'una di notte come niente nessuno ti urtava nessuno ti... niente! una volta era bello così bello potevi lasciare la bottiglia di latte e mettevo i soldi là sul verandino e nessuno li toccava... figurati! Adesso... non puoi far niente più così te rubano anche in tasca! prima era bello e allora a me mi è piaciuto tanto ho detto non vado.. "oh ho trovato l' america non vado più io via a lavorare là"

⁸² The wonderful designation of work in the mills as "birth-right" can be found in Howarth and Smith, *Textile Voices : A Century of Mill Life*.

nationality, identity and citizenship in ways that would have been unthinkable in the pre-war years. Italian women, with their complex net of familial and emotional ties that connected them to their new local community but also to other communities far away, naturally came to embody this new type of British citizen.

4. POOR WAIFS, FALLEN WOMEN, OR JUST WOMEN?

On the pages of *La voce degli Italiani*, a newspaper published in Britain for Italian readership, there was a regular column entitled *Il missionario risponde* – ‘The Missionary Replies’. Like an agony-aunt specialising in torments of the soul, it invited readers to write about what doubts they had regarding their faith and how their life choices stood in relation to appropriate Catholic practice. In February 1957, the magazine published a letter from an Italian woman who wanted to know whether she was allowed, as a Catholic, to act as witness to her friend’s wedding. Her friend was about to marry a Ukrainian man of Christian Orthodox faith, and the wedding was to be celebrated according to such rites. The Missionary’s reply, with all its bristling capitalised nouns and upper-case admonitions, was nothing less than stern:

Under no circumstance it is permissible for you to act as witness at your friend’s wedding, because it would mean lending your cooperation to the evil your friend is committing by marrying outside the Catholic Church and said cooperation is against the principles of Catholic Morals. If the Wedding was to be celebrated in an Orthodox, or any non Catholic Church, then your participation as witness would amount to ACTIVE PARTICIPATION in acts of non-Catholic worship formally prohibited under

the can. 1258 of the Code of Canon Law.¹

In Britain, Italian workers were a minority amongst others. In some locations, such as the Midlands area where various small contingents of Italians had been employed in the Tin Plate industry and other manufactures, their number was negligible enough to make any attempt to create a support network of fellow countrymen very unlikely to succeed. Those in charge of delivering pastoral care to Italian migrants in the UK were, it would seem, unwilling to view mixed-marriages as an inevitable outcome of the migrant's circumstances and the attitude displayed in the Missionary's response quoted above was not at all exceptional. This is made plain by the reply to another letter, written by a young Italian woman based in London who wished to marry an English divorcee. Her question is an interesting one: since her fiancée had not celebrated his first marriage in a Catholic church and was now divorced, did it not follow that, having first converted, he would be allowed a Catholic wedding? No, apparently:

Your man is not at all free, because the Church considers every form of marriage, lawfully undertaken by non Catholics as well, as binding; for this reason the indissolubility of the marital covenant applies to them also, and no law or human court sentence can break it until both subjects are alive. Only the death of a spouse renders the other free. So, you as a Catholic cannot, under such conditions, marry this man ... If your Faith is truly important to you, you should withdraw from this relationship and pray the Lord to give you the courage and strength you need to do so.²

¹ "In nessun caso le è lecito far da testimone al matrimonio dell'amica, perché sarebbe prestare la sua cooperazione al male che l'amica fa sposandosi fuori dalla Chiesa Cattolica e tale cooperazione è contro i principi della Morale Cattolica. Qualora poi il Matrimonio fosse celebrato in Chiesa Ortodossa, o comunque non Cattolica, allora la sua partecipazione in qualità di testimone, assumerebbe il valore di PARTECIPAZIONE ATTIVA ad atti di culto acattolico formalmente proibita dal can. 1258,1 del Codice di Diritto Canonico". *La Voce degli Italiani*, February 1957. p.12.

² "Il suo uomo non è affatto libero, perchè la Chiesa considera valida ogni forma di Matrimonio, legalmente contratto dai non Cattolici e pertanto sussiste anche per loro l'indissolubilità del vincolo matrimoniale che nessuna legge, o sentenza di tribunale umano può spezzare fino a che sono in vita le due parti contraenti. Solo

These two exchanges suggest eloquently the problematic nature of the relationship between the new Italian migrants and the Catholic missionaries that ministered to them. Terri Colpi is quite right in her high regard for the activity of the Italian clergy, as “they were crucial in setting up the [Italians’] institutional and organised life and they initiated the procedures to establish bureaucratic links between the Community and the encapsulating society, as well as links with the Italian authorities. In short, they acted as social workers”.³ Italian missionaries, in other words, were working hard to promote the welfare and the integration of migrants in their new society, but their concept of integration was a particular one (in sociological terms we could say they worked to promote multiculturalism, but not assimilation); the religious framework that informed their attitudes and actions clashed with the more secularised ways of their adoptive country, and prompted them to take quite a negative stance on individual choices that could arguably be considered the inevitable by-products of integration itself. The ambiguous consequences of this issue must be understood in the context of the strong bonds that linked Italian foreign workers to their ethnic church, and it is important, therefore to offer some background.

la morte di un coniuge rende libero l’altro. Pertanto lei come cattolica non potrà in queste condizioni, sposarsi con l’uomo in parola. E se veramente le sta a cuore la sua Fede dovrebbe lasciare la relazione e pregare il Signore perché le dia il coraggio e la forza sufficienti per farlo.” *La voce degli Italiani*. The article appears in a loose, undated page held in: AGS, Fondo F ‘Documentazione Varia sulle Migrazioni’, coll. FN ‘Inghilterra’.

³ Colpi, *The Italian Factor : The Italian Community in Great Britain*.p. 234

An Italian Church for Italian Migrants

The Catholic church had traditionally seen the assistance of emigrants as an important part of its evangelical mission and Italian migrants had particularly benefited from the support network that the Church provided. This is all the more true in the British context, as what we will refer to as the 'Native Catholic Church' (characterized by a strongly Irish based hierarchy) had traditionally co-existed with a number of 'Ethnic Catholic churches', such as the Italian one. Terri Colpi, has justifiably wondered "why Catholic immigrants to countries with established Catholic minorities, such as the United States, Australia and Great Britain" had "with differing degrees of success, felt the need to form their own separate national or ethnic parishes."⁴ As both Colpi and Umberto Marin have emphasized, the answer to this question initially lay not just in the important role of an ethnic church when it came to "organise and maintain the group as a functioning community" but also in the fact that "the cultural expressions of faith common to Italian and Irish people were at opposing ends of the Catholic spectrum and therefore did not merge readily."⁵ It always proved difficult, it would appear, to incorporate Italian Catholics within the existing native church, so even as early as the mid nineteenth century, the Italians of Britain could count on a few, important, religious points of reference.

The epicentre of Italian ethnic Catholicism was, undoubtedly, London, where Italians even had their own dedicated church, St. Peter, established in the area of

⁴ Ibid. p.232.

⁵ Ibid.

Clerkenwell, near Soho, in 1863. This was the only Italian church in the whole of Britain with national parish status and complete independence from the local Catholic hierarchy. It was established by a congregation of missionaries with an historical connection to migration: the brotherhood of S. Vincenzo Pallotti. Catholic institutions had bound the Italian community of London together by providing both assistance and spaces of socialisation; aside from the church, Italians had their own hospital (also staffed and funded by religious organisations), schools, Sunday schools and catechism, newspapers and clubs. Until 1921, the church had assumed an unrivalled leadership in all these “community building” enterprises.⁶

Elsewhere in England, the presence of Italian religious institutions was patchy but still pervasive and in the cities with the highest Italian populations Italian missionaries weren’t uncommon. In Manchester, for example, the two Roman Catholic churches of St. Michael, in the Ancoats area, and St. Albans, though formally dependent of the native Catholic Diocese of Salford, had traditionally ministered to Italian families and had consistently, though not exclusively, been served by Italian priests.⁷

The leadership of the church over the associate life of expatriate Italians, in Britain as in the rest of the world, only really came in to question during the twenty-year rule of Mussolini’s fascist regime. Then, as Claudia Baldoli has engagingly described in her 2003 study, “wherever an Italian community existed, the *Fasci* Abroad sought to transform the Italians into Fascists” through the combined action of Italy’s government-led

⁶ For the Italian community of London, see: Lucio Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Britain : Realities and Images* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988).

⁷ For the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Italian community of Manchester see: Anthony Rea and Neil Richardson, *Manchester's Little Italy : Memories of the Italian Colony of Ancoats* (Manchester: Neil Richardson, 1988).

diplomatic/political institutions and the appropriation of all pre-existing arenas of Italian expatriates' aggregate life: education, youth organisations, clubs, newspapers etc.⁸ In the space of twenty years, the *fascistisation* of Italians abroad had been thoroughly accomplished. This also meant that, once the regime met its end, in a sense, all of the Italian organisations which had “melted into the *Fasci*” died with it. This was the fate of formally Catholic-led organisations as well, as they had been either co-opted by Fascism or had withdrawn under its pressure, and now stood, in the post-war scenario, either discredited because of their fascist leanings or in a state of complete disarray.

The phenomenon was not limited to the British context, of course. This is how Matteo Sanfilippo sums up the way Catholic missions capitulated under Fascism's takeover of expatriate communities abroad: “During the *ventennio*” the ‘twenty years’ as the Fascist regime is often called in Italian historiography “the Prelate for emigration works in fits and spurts: between 1929 and 1931 the office is even left vacant. In the meantime, troubles arise with the missions abroad, which are not getting reinforcement during the Thirties. The old missionaries are profoundly divided: a part of them favours the fascistisation of Italian communities, the other opposes it. To avoid tension some congregations, such as the Salesiani, reduce their commitments, despite the urgings of consular authorities. The clergymen loose their leadership over the community to the consuls and in many cases find themselves implicated in scandals and financial crimes”.⁹

⁸ Claudia Baldoli, "Italian Fascism in Britain : The Fasci Italiani All'estero, the Italian Communities and Fascist Sympathisers During Grandi Era (1932-39)" (Thesis (Ph.D.), University of London, 2002). For a wider perspective on the fascistisation of Italian communities world wide see: Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo, *Il Fascismo E Gli Emigrati : La Parabola Dei Fasci Italiani All'estero (1920-1943)* (Roma [etc.]: GLF editori Laterza, 2003).

⁹ “Durante il ventennio, il Prelato per l'emigrazione funziona a scartamento ridotto: dal 1929 al 1931 l'ufficio è addirittura vacante. Nel frattempo nascono problemi con le missioni oltreoceano, cui non sono inviati rinforzi negli anni trenta. I vecchi missionari sono profondamente divisi: una parte favorisce la fascistizzazione delle comunità italiane, l'altra si oppone. Per evitare le tensioni alcune congregazioni, in prima fila i salesiani, diminuiscono gli impegni nonostante i richiami delle autorità consolari. I sacerdoti

The post-war scenario marked a new phase in the development of the Italian ethnic church not just in Britain, but in all the countries of destination of the new wave of Italian migration. This is largely because of the Vatican's intense focus on the subject of Catholic apostolate overseas at the time, the renewal of its commitment now that the difficult years of Fascist interregnum were over.

Matteo Sanfilippo has effectively summarised the very long history of the Vatican's involvement with Catholic migrant communities world-wide, and it is from his work that I have gathered much of the basic information on the new post-war developments. The post-war years saw a renewed effort in this direction: in 1949 the *Pontificio Collegio per l'Emigrazione* was reopened and entrusted to the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles, a religious organisation founded by Giovanni Battista Scalabrini in 1887, dedicated to ministering and assisting migrants and refugees. In 1951 another institution was created: the *Giunta Cattolica per L'Emigrazione*, for the purpose of lobbying governments and, also, coordinating the activity of the many Catholic institutions that assisted and ministered to migrants worldwide.

All this fervent activity found a regulatory framework within the Apostolic Constitution written by Pope Pius XII in 1952, *Exul Familia*. According to the papal document, special pastoral policies had to be put in place for the purpose of assisting foreign nationals within Roman Catholic dioceses, because immigrants were entitled to maintain a certain degree of 'cultural autonomy'. On a practical level, the document stated clearly that Catholic migrant communities abroad were to be provided with ministers of

perdono la leadership comunitaria a favore dei consoli e in molti casi si trovano anche invischiati in scandali e malversazioni finanziarie." The translation is mine. The passage is quoted from Sanfilippo. M. Chiesa ordini religiosi ed emigrazione, in Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina, *Storia Dell'emigrazione Italiana: Partenze*. p.140

their own nationality. In this respect, *Exul Familia* was only restating or formalising a tendency that, as we have seen, was already the accepted praxis within the Catholic world. Nevertheless, it had important consequences for the Italians living abroad in general, and those living in Britain, in particular: native churches were now explicitly requested not to minister to migrants themselves, but rather, welcome and accommodate foreign missionaries coming to Britain for this purpose. It also meant that new Italian missions were to be established in the areas affected by the recent influx of Italian migrants

The Scalabrinians opened their first Italian mission in Bedford, in 1954, and built here the new parish church of S. Francesca Cabrini. They then went on to open another mission in the town of Peterborough, and they took over the directorship of *La Voce degli Italiani*, the one surviving Italian newspaper, which had been managed and published in recent years by the Brotherhood of S. Paul.

In addition, a nuns' order, the Comboni missionary Sisters from Verona, arrived in England in 1946 and soon after established a convent in Chiswick, London. Here they ran a hostel for Italian women aimed chiefly at women employed as domestics, a pre-school day care and a retirement home.

Italian priests established an Italian mission in all the main areas where Italian migrants were settling, Umberto Marin gave us the complete list in his 1975 study 'Italiani in Gran Bretagna': "1952 Manchester, Birmingham and Bradford, 1954 Bedford, 1956 Bristol, 1957 Peterborough, 1958 Nottingham, 1964 Lea Valley and Swindon, 1965 Watford and Worcester, 1966 South London and Leicester, 1971 Woking".¹⁰

It must be borne in mind, however, that with the exception of Bedford and

¹⁰ Marin, *Gli Italiani in Gran Bretagna*. p.145.

Peterborough, these missionaries came as individuals, not as part of a religious order or a dedicated group. They were, therefore, expected to work alone, attach themselves to the nearest Catholic parish (in the hope that their relationship with the local clergy remained cordial), live in private lodgings and travel often considerably long distances every week to various churches in order to celebrate masses in Italian and assist their small, scattered flock.

It was lonely, and often hard, work. Many of these missionaries were young priests fresh from Rome and, by and large, once they took up post they found themselves living as immigrants among immigrants. The isolation and dislocation that Italian workers were experiencing, was something that many of these missionaries experienced themselves. It was in circumstances such as these that, in 1952 a young priest called Tolmino Taddei, recently appointed Missionary of Leeds, took pen to paper and addressed the Italian authorities expressing all his anger and frustration with what he saw happening to the many young women in his care. This caused, as we will see, a veritable stir.

The land of divorcees, bachelors and adventure-seeking foreigners

Father Taddei addressed his letter to the Head Quarters of the “Patronato ACLI” the Association of Italian Christian workers, in September 1952; but the document was subsequently forwarded to the *Ministero del Lavoro*, which forwarded it to the *Ministero degli Esteri*, which in turn passed it on to the Italian Embassy in London.

The main thrust of Taddei’s argument was that, by sending all these young *signorine* to England with no further inquiry about their welfare, the Italian authorities had unwittingly provided fodder for a “white slave trade”. These girls found themselves, upon

arrival to Britain “swept up within the most absolute mingling of refugees from various nations of Eastern Europe and the Baltic; mingling that happens not just within the same industrial cities, but among the same factories, among the looms of the same sector, I dare say, in the same lodgings”. And most of these refugees were, the letter continues, young, male and unattached.

From such a mingling could not derive but the following consequences; so many girls have lost their youth, of these, some will not repatriate until forced by the police. Others have had to submit to legally-void relationships, marriages that will in all likelihood be short-lived. God only knows how many abortions have occurred and are occurring now. I am aware of several cases of girls becoming sterile as a result of botched-up abortions. It must be borne in mind that England, especially the industrial areas, is the land of the divorcees, of bachelors, of foreigners in search of adventures, even of negroes from the West Indies, etc.¹¹

No matter how troubling these accounts of back-street abortions and ‘lost youth’ undoubtedly are, it is very hard to read these passages, today, without cringing first and foremost at the language deployed, the paternalistic attitude, and the frankly racist connotations that underpin the main arguments of Taddei’s letter.

But what to make of the priest’s account? After all, what Taddei describes as a “white slave trade” seems to amount, simply, to the occurrence of relationships, and marriages, to non Italian men, as there are no references to specific dangers such as exploitation, violent crime, prostitution, all the things we might associate with that term. Is this a balanced assessment of what was happening delivered by a direct eye-witness or was

¹¹ ACS, Minlav, Dgcm, Div.IX. b.466, emigrazione italiana in Inghilterra, sottofasc. “personale femminile”

Taddei simply assuming that any relationship between an Italian woman and, say, a divorcee, a bachelor, or a foreign national of a different faith was inevitably doomed? And, what is more, is there a way to verify his claims?

The Italian officials that handled the report at the time, it would appear, felt themselves compelled to take Taddei's findings with a pinch of salt, not least because accepting them in their entirety meant shouldering the blame for not having intervened before. In the response drafted by the Italian Embassy and subsequently dispatched to all the relevant bureaus, the officials conceded that women younger than twenty-one should not be considered for overseas employment and that efforts in this direction were already standard practice amongst the authorities in charge of the selections. It also gave assurance that procedures were now in place to operate a kind of vetting of the households and private agencies that applied to the *Ministero del Lavoro* for domestic personnel.

When it came to the more general observations made by Father Taddei, the Embassy statement contained the following:

Regarding both the textile workers and the domestics, however, it seems to me that it would be very difficult to subject the Italian female workforce in this country to vigilance of a moral nature. The mores and customs adopted here are inspired by a complete freedom of action and the life of our compatriots is affected by the environment in which it takes place.

The danger mentioned by Father Taddei is inscribed within emigration itself. Caution and disciplining can be exercised, within limits, but the issue of moral conduct is something that depends ultimately on the individual.¹²

It is worth mentioning that, within the small bibliography dedicated to Italians in

¹² *ibid.*

post-war Britain, Taddei's letter is omnipresent – no wonder, considering how many copies of it are held in the relevant ministerial archival collections. Being one of the very few direct insights into the life of these women it has generally been taken rather seriously. Andreina De Clementi in her 2009 study mentions Taddei's letter and the way it was dealt with by the Italian officials. This is her opinion of the Embassy's reply we have just read: "So, although the chaplain's fears ought to be put in perspective, the tendency was to wash one's hands clean. The girls were effectively projected into unknown and risky environments, abandoned to themselves, and so much for the erotophobic morality of society and the ruling class of the time..."¹³.

De Clementi maybe right in pointing out that Italian officialdom did nothing in this respect; it did not subject the young women's moral conduct to vigilance, and what little was being done in terms of disciplining the activity of private employment agencies and other forms of migration "sponsorship", was probably not enough.

As Michele Colucci pointed out, the problem with how the Italian Authorities managed the emigration flows probably lies in the lack of any effectual monitoring once the workers had crossed the border.¹⁴ This is a broader issue, of course, but amongst the many consequences that this lack of state-support had for the welfare of Italian migrants worldwide there is also this: what information we do have regarding the lives of Italian expatriates in Britain, but possibly elsewhere as well, when we cannot rely on the accounts of those directly involved, comes from religious sources.

The frontline engagement of Catholic organisations with Italian migration has

¹³ De Clementi, *Il Prezzo Della Ricostruzione: L'emigrazione Italiana Nel Secondo Dopoguerra*. p.111; see also Luciano Cheles and Lucio Sponza, *The Art of Persuasion : Political Communication in Italy from 1945 to the 1900s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Colucci, *Lavoro in Movimento: L'emigrazione Italiana in Europa, 1945-57*. pp.119-120.

shaped and informed our sources on the subject, and this is particularly problematic when it comes to women migrants. Umberto Marin, for example, himself a Catholic priest, in his history of the Italian community in Britain, reinforces the picture painted twenty years earlier by Father Taddei, a picture that sees Italian women essentially as victims:

In the north of England the higher ratio of women has favoured the occurrence of mixed marriages, especially between Italian girls and Polish or Ukrainian men [...] In the first instance it appeared that the girls had, therefore, attained complete fulfilment, both economic and marital. In the space of a few years however, marriages made in haste or for convenience began to show their unreliability, radical and incurable differences in mentality emerged. Not even the most tragic cases, for various reasons, found a solution in divorce (negligible is the number of divorces according to the 1971 Census records) so often the woman became the irrecoverable victim, reaching such a state of frustration and loneliness that her nervous system was affected.¹⁵

These are baffling statements, especially because Marin does not offer one shred of evidence to support them. There are no footnotes to clarify on what basis he drew these conclusions and there are no statistics (aside from the Census records which, by his own admission, do not shed any light on the matter) that we can verify. The hardship and isolation experienced by Italian women migrants should not be underestimated, but there is a worrying hint of hear-say about these description of their troubled marriages.

Terri Colpi, whose book *The Italian Factor* was published in 1991, again echoes

¹⁵ “Nel Nord d’Inghilterra la preponderanza dell’elemento femminile ha favorito i matrimoni di mist nazionalità, specie tra ragazze italiane e uomini polacchi o ucraini, residui degli eserciti che trovarono rifugio in Gran Bretagna. In un primo tempo parve che le ragazze avessero così ottenuto la sistemazione piena, economica e matrimoniale. A distanza invece di alcuni anni i matrimoni affrettati o di convenienza cominciarono a rivelare la loro precarietà e vennero a galla radicali e insanabili opposizioni di mentalità. Neppure i casi più tragici, per ragioni varie, trovarono lo sbocco nel divorzio (pochissimi infatti sono i divorzi, secondo un censimento del 1971.), per cui spesso la donna diventa vittima irrecuperabile, giungendo a volte a un tale stato di frustrazione e di solitudine da risentirne gravemente il sistema nervoso.” Marin, *Gli Italiani in Gran Bretagna*. p.106.

Marin, and what she provides by way of evidence is the example of two Italian sisters based in Halifax who married “in haste” a Latvian refugee and a Yugoslavian expatriate respectively and relocated to Bedford some years later:

These sisters remain in Bedford today but, like many of their contemporaries in the north of England, rather regret their youthful rush to marry men from a different culture. They feel trapped since they are unable to return to Italy with their “foreign” spouses and they suffer considerable isolation from their families in Italy. Like their ‘sisters’ in Yorkshire and Lancashire, the women regret their emigration and feel a little bitter about the way they were treated and abandoned for use as work machines without any guidance or help.¹⁶

One must assume that the two sisters are respondents that Colpi has met and interviewed directly, as there are no references to other sources in this section, and she is faithfully relating their account. But, then again, ‘cherry-picking’ testimonies to support one narrow interpretation, one generalised narrative, with no further inquiry into the dynamics that created said narrative in the first place only serves to give oral history – or the use of witness accounts – a bad name.

The experiences of the respondents gathered for the purpose of this research show that the narrative is not as straightforward, and not so univocal. While it can certainly be maintained that women textile workers often endured hardship and a sense of displacement, the accounts of those respondents who married British men or other foreign nationals reveal a whole range of different attitudes, experiences and personal outcomes, as we will see. As there is really no statistical foundation to the idea that these women were victims, that they

¹⁶ Colpi, *The Italian Factor : The Italian Community in Great Britain*. p.147.

all suffered within ‘unreliable’ – to quote Marin –violent or dysfunctional marriages, one can only surmise that this idea has little to do with evidence, but it has a lot to do with the opinions held by Catholic missionaries that ministered to these women. If this is the case, it will be useful to explore the ideological framework underpinning the activity of these clergymen, especially in the following respects: their understanding of what their mission consisted of, their concept of the aims, problems, needs of ‘Christian’ emigrant communities, and, finally, their concept of the role, problems, duties of ‘Christian’ women.

‘Alas! how many have fallen!’- Migration, Womanhood and the Catholic Church

We have made references in the course of this chapter to two newspapers for the Italians of Britain. One is ‘La Voce degli Italiani’ founded in 1947 and published, from 1962 by the Scalabrinians. This paper, issued fortnightly, was the one that enjoyed the widest circulation and highest number of subscribers. Though managed by a Catholic organisation, La ‘Voce’ was the product of many authors, many of them secular, and it did not contain a great deal of religious content aside from a brief regular update on the activity of the various missions and the previously mentioned ‘Letters to the missionary’ column . The paper covered a broad range of topics, including a digest of Italian and international news, the activity of the Italian cultural institute, deaths and marriages, useful articles on legal procedures of interest to UK immigrants (such as how to renew passports, arrange a wedding by proxy, etc.) and even hosted a regular column on women’s fashion.

La Squilla, on the other hand, was, as declared on the paper’s header, the ‘The news

bulletin of the Missions of Great Britain'. Formally registered as a supplement to *Operaio Cattolico* and printed in Italy, it changed names several times, from *La Luce* to *La Squilla* and finally *L'Italiano* until 1968, when it was incorporated into the *Voce degli Italiani*. Finding archival collections of papers such as *La Squilla* is difficult, they circulated in relatively small numbers and little thought was put into indexing and collecting them. As Sanfilippo says 'the world of [Catholic] bulletins is difficult to survey. Some papers are created locally, others are printed in Italy and all of them are difficult to find now, they were produced for immediate fruition and archival preservation was not thought of'¹⁷

The few issues available for consultation can be found in the Scalabrinian Archive of Rome within the folders preserving the documentation related to their English missions.¹⁸ These issues are interesting because they reflect the concerns and agenda of Italian missionaries much more clearly than, say, *La Voce degli Italiani* in which clergymen were not actively writing so much of the paper's content. *La Squilla* also devoted much more space in its pages to straightforward religious instruction, so it is a good place to start in order to get an idea of the prevailing attitudes of Catholic missionaries in Britain regarding how they expected/wished Italian immigrants to behave.

La Squilla targeted women very explicitly, by dedicating a lot of space and effort to listing all the virtues that the perfect Christian woman, particularly the Christian emigrant woman, should possess. It is a message that consistently calls for self-abnegation and sacrifice, in such emphatic terms that one wonders to what extent could women seriously

¹⁷ "D'altra parte il mondo dei bollettini è difficilmente censibile. Alcune testate nascono localmente, altre sono stampate in Italia e tutte sono ormai difficilmente reperibili: pensate per una fruizione immediata non prevedevano l'archiviazione" in Matteo Sanfilippo, "Araldi D'Italia? Un Quadro Degli Studi Sulla Stampa Italiana D'emigrazione," *Studi Emigrazione* II, no. 175 (2009). p.686.

¹⁸ The issues of *La Squilla* preserved in the Scalabrinian Archive are not indexed but can be found in: AGS, Fondo F 'Documentazione Varia sulle Migrazioni', coll. FN 'Inghilterra'.

take them to heart. In June 1956, the bulletin published, by way of an exemplary tale, a short story entitled “Si ama una sola donna” (One loves only one woman), in which a neglected wife welcomes back her emigrant husband from whom she had not received any news or financial support for many years. The husband, who had been living ‘in sin’ with another woman in Holland all that time, is so touched by his wife’s unquestioning act of forgiveness that he cries bitter tears of remorse for his careless treatment of her.¹⁹

A few months later, the September issue contained the ‘Ten commandments of the bride’ (Il decalogo della sposa), which urged married women to, amongst other things: love their husband above all except the Lord; consider him a guest of honour and a special friend; welcome him with a tidy home and a cheerful face upon his return; remain by him even if everyone else were to abandon him; worship his mother and finally:

If he strays away from you, wait for him. If he takes a long time to come back, wait for him. Even if he were to abandon you, wait for him; because you are not just his wife but the honour of his name and one day he will come back and bless you.²⁰

Somehow, these do not sound like the words of someone who has a woman’s best interest at heart. These are just a few examples as, indeed, many more could be made in order to convey the way this bulletin, obviously written from a male perspective and a religious male perspective at that, addressed women. The frequent instructions to ‘wait’ for their husbands, forgive them as they wandered away and strayed, devote themselves to the care of children and the home, remind us that the women that the missionaries had in mind

¹⁹ ‘Si ama una sola donna’, in *La Squilla*, June 1956, p.1.

²⁰ “Se si allontana da te, aspettalo. Se sta molto a tornare, aspettalo. se anche ti abbandonasse, aspettalo; perché tu non sei soltanto sua moglie, ma l’onore del suo nome ed egli un giorno tornerà e ti benedirà”. ‘Il Decalogo della Sposa’, in *La Squilla*, September 1956. p.1.

were chiefly the ones who performed a ‘traditional’ role within an emigrant family. They are imagined as either ‘left at home’ in Italy, wedded to an emigrant husband, or abroad themselves, having migrated as part of a nuclear-family unit.

But reality, as we know, was not always like that. Alarmed by the frequency with which Italian women were choosing to marry non-Italians, *La Squilla* echoed the concerns of Father Tolmini by explicitly addressing on many occasions what they saw as ‘rushed weddings’. There are articles of explicit religious instruction warning that marrying outside the Catholic faith was strictly prohibited unless special dispensation was issued, and there are others, more sympathetic in tone, reminding young women of the dangers incurred by those who married in haste (to foreign men). It is a strange case of the proverbial iron fist in a velvet glove, an ambiguous message, one part thundering threats of excommunication and one part lachrymose warning against the unhappiness that lay ahead.²¹

These attitudes are evident in the very long article published in January 1956, entitled ‘La Corsa ai Matrimoni’ (The rush to marriage). The article begins by deploring the well known state of affairs, so many young Italians had married other foreign workers since “the loneliness and isolation that many women workers have experienced, the need for affection and the company of someone who can understand and help, have played a non negligible part in so many marriages”. But, alas “in the face of a high number of marriages to foreigners that can be considered a success, there is an equal or higher number of unhappy marital unions”. A third of all marriages between an Italian girl and a foreigner, according to the author, “ends up in court or requires the frequent intervention of the missionary or the police”.²² A third of all marriages; one would like to know how the

²¹ ‘Matrimoni misti’ in *La Squilla*, June 1956.

²²!La solitudine e l’isolamento in cui tante lavoratrici si sono trovate; il bisogno d’affetto e della compagnia di

author of the article came up with such a figure.

As we have said, judging from material published by *La Squilla* and from Taddei's letter, the view taken by Italian missionaries on the subject is that 1) marrying outside the Catholic faith was wrong in principle; 2) those who did marry outside the faith were destined to unhappiness; and 3) women had to be actively discouraged from doing so. The importance of the latter must be stressed, because from the sources considered so far, there does not seem to be any particular preoccupation, no focussed effort towards preventing Italian men from marrying foreign women. It could be argued that maybe it just did not happen, or not as frequently, but were statistical considerations really the issue?

The missionaries serving the Italian expatriate communities of the post-war years were the last in line of a long tradition of ministry to emigrants, as we have seen. Ideas about what purposes this ministry was supposed to fulfil were informed by this tradition, but it is also true that, at the time in which the Vatican redoubled its effort in this direction, these clergymen were probably imbued with the ideological dictates and principles that stemmed from Rome's agenda.

Historically, the activity of Catholic mission abroad might well have been a matter of protecting the faith of the emigrants as much as assisting them materially and culturally; what is certain is that in the early 1950s these two fundamental aspects of the missionary's duty were reinforced and inextricably intertwined. The pronouncements of Pope Pius XII on the matter of emigration are in this respect very revealing. The Apostolic Constitution *Exul*

una persona che dimostri di comprendere e di aiutare, hanno giocato una parte non piccola in tanti matrimoni"; "Di fronte a un numero elevato di matrimoni con stranieri che si possono considerare dei successi, sta un numero eguale o superiore di unioni matrimoniali infelici"; "Senza timore di errare nella valutazione, si può dire che, nel dovuto giro di tempo, un terzo di tutti i matrimoni tra una ragazza italiana e uno straniero, finisce in tribunale o richiede il frequente intervento del Missionario o delle polizia". All in "La Corsa ai Matrimoni", in *La Squilla*, January 1956.

Familia Nazarethana, often described as the *Magna Charta* of Vatican emigration policy, reads, right from the choice of the title, as a manifesto. The document begins by declaring that “The émigré Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family”. By establishing an essential identity between the migrant family with the holy family, fleeing persecution into a foreign, “pagan” land, the Pope had effectively put the family unit centre stage, indicating it as the template of the emigrants’ life. The role of the Church, therefore, according to the document, was what it always had been, as “She sought to preserve intact in them [the migrants] the Faith of their Fathers and a way of life that conformed to moral law”.²³

The role of the missionary as ‘good shepherd’, guardian of the faith of his flock is emphasised again in the papal address to the national congress of Diocesan representatives for emigration in July 1957. Here, Pius XII makes clear that the missionary “will be a vigilant pastor, prudent and patient. He will keep a sharp and watchful eye to prevent false teaching and perverse morals taking root amongst the emigrants under the pretext of adaptation to local circumstances. Where the host country would like to assimilate foreigners, the missionary will ensure that this is done without prejudice to natural rights and the sacrifice of religious and moral values. And these are often closely bound up with the traditions of the homeland.”²⁴

In all this focus on the resistance to assimilation and the regard for the Catholic family as the ultimate bastion against the loss of Christian values and the traditions of the homeland, the role performed by women was critical. Much of the Church’s battle against

²³ The complete text of *Exul Familia Nazarethana* can be found in English at the following website: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/p12exsul.htm>

²⁴ This address “The Church and the Emigrant” was published in English translation in Pope Pius XII, “The Church and the Emigrant,” *The Furrow* 9, no. 4 (1958).

the secularisation of personal mores could not be won without exercising a direct influence on women and their life-choices: divorce, abortion, contraception, and premarital sex were all issues which Catholic hierarchies singled out as morally problematic, they still do of course, and they were all matters which depended largely on women's agency. Once again, we can refer to the words of the Vicar of Rome himself, to clarify the complex nexus between women and secularisation: This is an extract of an allocution given by Pope Pius XII to "the Catholic woman of today" in September 1947:

But here is the great tragedy: without the faith, without Christian education, deprived of the help of the Church, where can bewildered woman find the courage to face unfalteringly moral demands surpassing purely human strength? And that under blasting assaults against the Christian foundations of marriage, of the family, of all personal and social life, by enemies who know how to exploit in poor women and young girls the anguish and destitution which are theirs. Who could hope to see them always hold fast through their mere natural strength? Alas! how many have fallen! Only God knows the number of these poor waifs, left to their despair after the loss of their purity, their honour.

It is a sorrow and a shame to have to mention and confess that even among Catholics, false doctrines on the dignity of woman, on marriage and the family, on conjugal fidelity and divorce, even on life and death, have stealthily infiltrated souls, and like gnawing worms have attacked the roots of the Christian family and of the Christian ideals of womanhood.²⁵

In many respects, the Vatican's focus on the role of women and family in the context of migration can be seen as a mere extension of its programme for the Catholics of Italy or, for that matter, any nation with a distinct Catholic identity. However, the existing research on the subject of gender and family within the history of Italian migration seems to

²⁵Allocution of Pope Pius XII to the Congress of the International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues, Rome, Italy, September 11, 1947, available at: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/P12WOMAN.HTM>

point towards the existence of a profound identity-defining cultural discourse revolving around women, motherhood, family as the foundations of Italian identity worldwide.

Reflecting on her study of Italian women migrants in Ireland, Carla de Tona defines this as “a collective nationalistic sense of belonging” that “is intrinsically related to women as the makers of identity and the keepers of its boundaries (as argued by Anthias and Yuval-Davies). With their heroic and self-sacrificing model, Italian women as mothers have come to embody the nation, its ethos, its future, and its cultural and symbolic boundaries”.²⁶ Indeed, despite the fact that for a long time the role of women in migration had been neglected by scholarly literature, Baldassar and Gabaccia observe that, strikingly, “across cultures, Italianness is often associated with or symbolised by femininity, passionate emotions or elements of domestic life – the Italian mother, a peculiarly ‘Italian intensity of family solidarities...’”²⁷ If De Tona, Gabaccia and Baldassar are right, the whole issue of mixed-marriages can be seen in a much clearer light. The Italian women who were marrying other foreign nationals, may not, after all, be committing an extreme transgression of their gendered role – as we will see, the respondents accounts of their married life don’t seem to hint towards any substantial challenge of typical gender relations – but if “mothers embody the nation” and its symbolic borders, as De Tona suggests, what symbolic nations were these women embodying?

Certainly Roman Catholic ideology and its community-building efforts are tied in to this larger framework that informed and shaped Italian migrant communities. It is not

²⁶Carla De Tona, *Mothering Contradictory Diasporas*, in Baldassar and Gabaccia, *Intimacy and Italian Migration : Gender and Domestic Lives in a Mobile World*. p.102. De Tona, in the extract quoted above is referencing another important work, which is Nira Yuval-Davis, Floya Anthias, and Jo Campling, *Woman - Nation - State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

²⁷ Baldassar and Gabaccia, *Intimacy and Italian Migration : Gender and Domestic Lives in a Mobile World*. p. 1.

surprising, considering their general outlook on family, the role of women, and migration, that Catholic missionaries were alarmed by the fact that these Italian women were now very far removed from the normative influence of their families and native culture. Bearing all this in mind, it is now time to consider to what extent the women concerned agreed with their opinion.

‘They are people like us’ – Settling in and finding love in post-war Manchester.

Undoubtedly, upon their arrival in the UK Italian women discovered that in the textile towns there was a lot of the sort of ‘mingling’ that so alarmed Father Taddei taking place. The largest hostels had become, as we discussed in the previous chapter, popular destinations where both local and foreign youth could socialise, dance and make acquaintances. Certainly, it would appear that the presence of so many young foreign women proved to be quite an attraction. Hostels aside, there were many dance halls, national-clubs and bars where the newcomers could find entertainment and enjoy their spare time.

It is interesting to note that many Italian respondents interviewed on the subject, remarked on how ‘safe’ their new environment felt, how confidently and easily they went about their daily business in those early days. This is, for example, how Lisa remembers

those first evenings in town with her friends:

When I was at the hostel, on Saturday evenings we would go out with my friends too, there was the Italian club in Manchester, all us Italians would take the bus from Millbrook, going was easy but the last bus was at twelve [...] Imagine this, at twelve thirty we would walk home, we used to hold our shoes in our hands, we would walk without shoes because [...] There was no danger at night, no danger here, there weren't the scoundrels that there are nowadays.²⁸

Annalisa, another interviewee, echoes Lisa's account. She too was struck by how she was able to walk about at night feeling safe:

It was lovely, oh! It was good weather and I walked without a jacket, just with...like that in a dress [...] coming back at one o'clock at night and nothing, you could walk in the street at one o'clock like it was nothing and no one approached you, no-one...nothing! In those days it was so good, so good you could leave the milk bottle with the money on the porch and no one would touch them...can you imagine! [...] it was good back then and so I liked it very much, so much that I said 'I'm not leaving... I've found my America and I'm not going back to work there'.²⁹

The kind of safety Annalisa and Lisa refer to is many-sided, to some extent they are both remarking about the apparent absence of street crime, but they are also implying something else: as young women they experienced their everyday interaction with people

²⁸ "Quando ero all'hostel il sabato sera con le mi paesane, anche, s'andava, c'era il circolo italiano a Manchester, tutti gli italiani si prendeva l'autobus da Millbrook, andare era facile pero a mezzanotte finiva [...] Lei pensa a mezzanotte e mezzo nella strada si camminava a piedi, le scarpe si tenevamo in mano si camminava con le scarpe in mano perché [...] Ma non c'era pericolo la notte, non c'era pericolo, non c'era i mascalzoni che ci sono oggi.

²⁹ "Era bello, oh! era bel tempo sempre sono andata senza neanche una giacca solo con... così con il vestito [...] tornata all'una di notte e anche niente, tu potevi camminare per la strada all'una di notte come niente nessuno ti urtava nessuno ti... niente! una volta era bello così bello potevi lasciare la bottiglia di latte e mettevo i soldi là sul verandino e nessuno li toccava... figurati! [...] prima era bello e allora a me mi è piaciuto tanto ho detto non vado.. "oh ho trovato l'America non vado più io via a lavorare là"

(and with men particularly, it would appear) even when walking about at night, as non-threatening and they relished this new found freedom. Annalisa's account even suggests that this safe and carefree atmosphere marked quite a change from what she was used to back at home, in Italy. In any case, it is a far cry from the dangerous Gomorrah portrayed by Taddei's letter.

It is in circumstances such as these that all the respondents met the men that they would eventually marry; Annalisa, as we have seen in the opening of Chapter 3, met her Italian first husband by chance in the street. Others, like Lisa or Alba, found their life-partners amongst the scores of young men that orbited around the worker's hostels.

Lisa married a local English man a couple of years after she had moved to Manchester. No member of her family could attend her wedding, but Lisa remembers how her mother had written to her many times before the wedding, to make sure her daughter was marrying a decent, honest man. Nothing here to suggest that the wedding was made in haste or that the families were not consulted on the matter:

Yes, we married in St. Peter in Stalybridge, we married in Stalybridge. The children were christened in St. Mary. Yes, and I didn't have anyone of my family at my wedding. In those times, you had to come by train...eh one thing then another, they couldn't make it. My mother would say 'be careful' I still remember all those letters, I still have them somewhere. My mother said, when I told her I was getting married to an Englishman 'Be careful, what is it worth to have thick carpets if someone is bad' and 'what sort of family does he come from'. And I replied 'No Mum, no...I know the family well...his brothers and sisters. They are a normal family, a good family'. And she said 'and is he a good man?' And so like that. Later she was happy, my mother, the first time I brought him over, they would speak English together.³⁰

³⁰ "Sì a S. Peter a Stalybridge, abbiamo sposato sì a Stalybridge, i bambini sono battezzati a S. Mary. Sì, e non c'avevo non c'era nessuno della mia famiglia al mi matrimonio a quei tempi, allora bisognava venire col treno, eh, una cosa e quell'altra, non son venuti, mia mamma dice "stai attenta" io mi ricordo quelle lettere ce

For some, the intermediation of sisters or friends, often already married or engaged to other foreign nationals, played a significant role in facilitating their acquaintance with their future husbands. This is just the kind of scenario that *La Squilla* condemned in the most emphatic terms “it is deplorable that Italian women, often already married to a foreigner, with more or less successful outcomes, invite in their home naïve young Italian girls, maybe just arrived from Italy, for the purpose of introducing them to foreign men with a view to marry them off” and lastly “such women hold a terrible responsibility before God, because they expose these inexperienced girls to grave moral danger and open the way to marriages that will presumably be unhappy”.³¹

Marina joined her sister in Manchester when she was just eighteen and lived with her and her Ukrainian husband for the first couple of years. In many ways her story matches the blueprint traced by the Catholic bulletin. One of her brother in law’s Ukrainian friends worked with her in the mill, he “had a beautiful smile” she remembers. He was a regular guest of the household, though at the time Marina imagined that the purpose of these house calls was to visit her brother in law, not courtship.

Marina’s sister played a very active role in encouraging their relationship, one could say she even pressured her; she tried to teach her Ukrainian, unbeknownst to her she even

l’ho sempre da qualche parte diceva la mamma quando ho detto mi sposo un inglese “guarda stai attenta che vale a camminare sui tappeti alti se è una persona cattiva, di che famiglia viene” dico “no mamma no conosco la famiglia, la famiglia... con fratelli sorelle, una famiglia normale, una famiglia brava”, dice “e lui è bravo?”... e così. Poi è stata contenta la mamma la prima volta che l’ho portato... la mamma parlava inglese con lui.”

³¹“Per esempio, è quanto mai deplorabile che signore italiane già sposate a stranieri, in matrimoni più o meno riusciti, invitino alle loro case delle ingenue ragazze italiane, forse appena giunte dall’Italia, per fare loro incontrare stranieri in vista del matrimonio. queste signore a volte sono spinte a ciò dal marito, che ha amici o parenti che vogliono sposare una ragazza Italiana. Qualunque sia il motivo di questi inviti, tali signore so creano una terribile responsabilità dinanzi a Dio, in quanto mettono delle ragazze inesperte in gravi pericoli morali e aprono la via a matrimoni che presumibilmente saranno infelici.” in ‘La Corsa ai matrimoni’ in ‘La Squilla’,

took the initiative to write to their parents in Italy requesting them to send over Marina's birth certificate and papers, clearing the way for marriage procedures. Marina however, reserved for herself the right to make her own mind:

But I didn't know she had done this, the two of them had acted in cahoots! When the papers arrived [...] she said 'now that you have the papers the two of you can get married' 'Oh you are...' We rowed and for a week we didn't speak to each other 'You mustn't dare...you are not my mother...you are not..' So I kicked up a fuss, so to speak, and later, gradually, you know, she said to me 'you see, if our parents sent you the papers, it means they are happy about it'. You know how it is in families, you start arguing and that's that. Then gradually things calmed down and we did finally get married...after 2, 3 years.³²

Marina and Alba both married Ukrainian men and their wedding was celebrated by a Ukrainian pastor. As far as their religious life was concerned, both women seem to have slipped comfortably into a habit of worshipping in either church, and seeking the assistance of both the local Italian or the Ukrainian priest depending on which one was more readily available. Alba, whose husband had been gravely ill for many years, has become used to attending the Ukrainian mass 'on her husband's behalf' and interacts regularly with the minister so that he would visit her husband at home:

We married in the Ukrainian church, They organise functions and gatherings, you know, now they often have mass so I go to mass with Marina, you know, because he [the husband] can't go. Every now and then I call for the priest, Ukrainian, he is just as good, because now here there are no Italians, like in Ashton [...] they have changed.

³² "Ma io non sapevo che lei faceva questo, che mandava le carte, facevano loro due! [...] "che qui c'hai le carte potete arrangiarvi adesso per sposarvi" "ma tu sei..." uh ci siamo bisticciate per una settimana non ci parlavamo "tu non devi... tu non sei mia madre... tu non sei..." così insomma ho fatto un po' di casino, diciamo, insieme... e dopo man mano, sai, lei dice "vedi i genitori te le hanno mandate, loro sono contenti e tu così!" sai com'è in famiglia che cominci a bisticciarti e insomma niente man mano siamo stati calmi calmi

One [of the Italian priests] was special, he used to visit...now this new one doesn't even know...no.

And did you also go to the Italian mass?

I always went, oh, always, when there's a religious celebration...at Christmas. The priest in Ashton comes to celebrate mass for us especially! Many times, we invite this priest over, who speaks English and Italian, we book a time at the English church. Oh, I have never skipped church, always gone to church...we have gone on trips with the priest, so many things.³³

It is interesting to note how the stance of Catholic hierarchies in condemning as a matter of principle mixed marriages and, really, any contact between Catholics and churches of other confessions is completely at odds with how Alba experienced her devotion and her spiritual needs. She is not, after all, what we could call a 'lapsed Catholic', she has actively engaged with church activities throughout her life. Her syncretism, it would appear, is not the result of a lack of devotion but, rather, a belief that when it came to worship, both churches would do.

Alba seems to be aware that there is a certain stigma attached to marrying a Ukrainian man, we do not know how explicitly the Catholic missionaries she came in contact with reproached her on the subject, maybe they did not. Alba, however, appears to know that there was a general expectation that, because of her husband's background, her marriage was likely to be unhappy. In the course of her interview, she volunteered this

calmi e così è stato che finalmente siamo sposati... dopo 2 anni, 3 che ero qui."

³³ Ci siamo sposati in chiesa ucraina. Loro fanno feste fanno coso, no, adesso fanno tante volte, fanno la messa e allora vado io alla messa con Maria, no, perché lui non può andare, una volta ogni tanto faccio arrivare il prete, ucraino, è bravo lo stesso, perché qui italiani adesso non ce ne sono, come a Ashton [...] sono cambiati uno era speciale che veniva fuori... adesso questo è nuovo non sa nemmeno, no...

Lei alla chiesa italiana... alla messa italiana, ci andava?

Io sempre sono andata, oh sempre sempre, quando che è la festa... quando che è la festa a natale. il prete italiano viene a farlo a Ashton apposta per noi! facciamo tante volte facciamo arrivare sto prete che parla l'inglese italiano e facciamo la parte alla chiesa inglese oh non ho mai mancata la chiesa, sempre stata alla chiesa... abbiamo fatto tante gite col prete tante robe."

information directly, and not in response to a direct question:

But you see, often people would say ‘you have married a Ukrainian’, well, most Italians married the Ukrainians, I can’t see anything wrong in the Ukrainians, they are people like us. It’s not like he is boss, ‘you must do this’ ‘you mustn’t do that’, no no, I work like he works, no, I don’t mind, anyway, I don’t mind...³⁴

Some of these relationships underwent times of great hardship, most respondents recount such struggles but most of them were connected with ill health, poverty, loss of jobs, the premature death of their spouse. From the sample of interviewees considered for this research, there is really not much to report regarding problems arising from cultural or religious differences. A significant exception in this regard is Marina who, for many years, had to share a house with her mother-in-law, a violent, abusive, possibly mentally ill refugee from Ukraine who had relocated with her son to the UK. The labour emigrants of the post-war decade were, of course, a generation that had experienced war at close range and had been scarred, in various ways, by this. This is all the more true of those contingents of Ukrainians recruited within the EVW schemes, men and women coming into Britain directly from the refugee camps of Germany, who had experienced internment, displacement, the loss of family and homeland. As Marina found out in the worst possible way, for some people such as her mother-in-law, leaving the past behind was not easy.

According to the views of Catholic ministers such as those expressed on the pages of *La Squilla*, Italian women were likely, by marrying men of other nationalities, to suffer as a result of isolation from their ethnic community, and lose their cultural links to Italy and

³⁴“Però vedi tante volte dicono che hai sposato un ucraino, beh la più parte degli italiani hanno sposato gli ucraini io non ci trovo niente negli ucraini. Sono uomini come noi. Non è dire comanda, “tu devi fare” o “tu non devi fare”, no no, io lavoro come lavora lui, no, io non mi dispiace, anyway, non mi dispiace...”

their faith. Credit must be given to the activity of missionaries themselves for the fact that, by and large, this rarely happened. Catholic priests, with their knowledge of every Italian living in their area of ministry, worked with dedication towards bringing them together, organising gatherings and social events, trips to Italy or holidays, assisting individuals with everything from letter writing to finding employment. Terri Colpi is quite right in describing the missionary's role as akin to that of a social worker. These efforts proved very successful in the Manchester area, where the missionaries were able to bring the two Italian communities – the long-established, Ancoats-based 'Little Italy' and the scattered groups of new migrants living in the Greater-Manchester districts – together. It is largely because of the intensive networking undertaken by the Italian priests that, to this day, all these emigrants know each other and socialise on a regular basis. In areas such as Lancashire and Yorkshire the missionary's legacy was less strong, in the absence of a pre-existing Italian community onto which the new one could be grafted, the associate life of the local Italians fizzled out once Italian missionaries left these areas and the migrants themselves grew into old-age, dispersed and relocated.

For all the importance that these community-building efforts undoubtedly had, it is also important to reflect on the fact that the support networks each migrant relied on might not have been strictly Italian, but they were communities nonetheless. The respondents' memories of their life in England are crowded with mentions of extended-family relations of various nationalities, sisters-in-law who shared with them the burden of child care, neighbours, co-workers and friends. These references are too numerous and sketchy to be quoted extensively but, as a token example, here is what Alba had to say about her support-network:

I can't complain about married life, about life in England, no, nothing. Many times my brothers [in Italy] complain that they are not well that no one looks after them and they say 'what about you?' but I say 'we are fine here, we are lots of Italian women, you know, and lots of people, of neighbours, now that I live alone the neighbour says to me 'Alba, if you need anything you knock on the door I'll come even at night' and the other family the same...they have always been good to me, always...that is how life is, you see.³⁵

Alba now lives alone because her husband had to move to a care home, but her account, just as the others, by no means suggests a picture of isolation and lack of support. What, they do suggest, however, is that different national identities, religion, cultures, possibly account for less than one might be led to imagine.

Father Taddei and Italian women in Bradford

The present chapter is prevalently focused on the Italian workers of Manchester and those respondents interviewed for the purpose of this research. There are two reasons for this: firstly, the selection of Bradford interviewees quoted so far belongs to a collection compiled in 1984 by different interviewers that did not necessarily share the same research agenda. This means that the Bradford respondents were not working through the same questions and did not, therefore, discuss the same issues as the ones from Manchester. Furthermore, since one of the objectives of this chapter is to provide an overview of the lives and choices of a

³⁵“Però non mi lamento della vita sposata, della vita in Inghilterra, no, niente, no niente, tante volte i fratelli parlano che stanno male che nessuno li guarda e dice “tu, cosa tu fai?” dico “stiamo bene qui, siamo tante italiane, no, tanta gente anche vicini di casa, come che sono vicina, là son sola” e l'uomo dice “tu Alba se hai bisogno bussa alla porta io vengo su di notte” quell'altra famiglia lo stesso... sono sempre stati bravi, no, sempre stati bravi... e così è la vita vedi...”

number of respondents over time, the inclusion of a greater number of interviews, and shifting the focus back and forth from Manchester to Bradford would only make the narrative flow and the summarising of certain developments less easy to follow. In regards to the ways in which the respondents reflect upon their experiences of their new community and family life, the Bradford sample mirrors the Manchester one quite closely, so quoting more of their interviews would not really add much in the way of different subjective perspectives.

In order to finally exhaust the subject of the missionaries' perspective on the difficulties encountered by Italian migrant workers, however, it is interesting to introduce here a brief notation about the workers of Bradford, because they were the ones encountered by the author of the letter that sparked the whole controversy about the 'white slave trade', Father Taddei himself. As a matter of fact, one of the respondents, which we have referred to so far as Interviewee A, was the woman in whose house Father Taddei lodged during his time in Bradford, as commuting all the time from his assigned residence in Leeds had proven to be impractical.³⁶

Interviewee A was a women from Padua who travelled to Shipley in 1950. Extracts of her interview have been quoted frequently in the previous chapters, especially in regards to her early memories of life in the workers' hostels and her descriptions of how she was able to source food despite the problems of rationing and the language barrier. Further in her interview, this respondent remembers how she met her future husband, a Ukrainian

³⁶ The Bradford interviews are supposedly anonymous, however Interviewee A's first name is mentioned a couple of times in the interview. This allowed the author of this research to realise that this respondent and her Ukrainian husband are the couple mentioned by name and surname, in the pages of *La Squilla*, as landlords to Father Taddei in Bradford. Assuming that the interviewers identity was not disclosed as to the respondents wishes, the author will not disclose her name either.

émigré and how her family back in Italy opposed their plans to marry, to the point of contacting the local ecclesiastical authorities, both Catholic and Ukrainian, to talk them out of it. The Ukrainian minister of Bradford, which Interviewee A refers to as Father Ratushinsky had received a letter from the Catholic Bishop, and went to meet the respondent:

But...er, as he say, he told me I shouldn't marry my husband because we didn't succeed, all sorts; everything he told me was true but anyhow, I didn't believe him, and I went...I got married, more or less, after...a couple of months afterwards. And...er, I went on, and they say he [the husband] is very ill, he's...he never done hard work, everything, he said, you will not succeed with him. But I did insist I want to get married. [...] He [Ratushinsky] said, but if you want writing to your parents, you write to your parents. Your parents want a proper man. And...er, in that moment I couldn't care less. So I got married.³⁷

It is not easy to entirely make sense of Interviewee A's account, however, it would appear that her parents' opposition to the marriage was not just based on her husbands' nationality and religion but also, on the fact that he was in poor health. And indeed, the respondent then goes on to reveal that her husband suffered of T.B.

It was during a very hard time for the respondent, when her husband and her first child were both taken ill and hospitalised, that, as she remembers, she first encountered Father Taddei:

Oh, I remember the day when he come. I was very sad, as I say. My son was in hospital, my husband was in hospital [...] I didn't have no money to come so...no income come...
[...] so I...I was at home...cry...I was crying there, the landlord knock on my door,

and he say, “[name omitted] somebody want to come and see you. It’s a priest”. I say, “I don’t want to see him...anybody”. “It’s a priest” he say.

But the usual was the Ukrainian priest always come and see me, or the English priest. I say, “I don’t feel like talking to nobody”, and I hear this language, he say “I’m sure” – in Italian – “I’m sure you’re liking to see me”. And when I saw him I say “Oh, Father” I burst out laugh...I cry, I mean, I burst out crying, crying, crying.³⁸

Arguably, no source could convey the importance that Italian missionaries had for the immigrants they assisted better, or more evocatively, than Interviewee A’s description of her relationship with Father Taddei and what it meant for her. The missionary helped the respondent to get through her ordeal, with his assistance she managed to navigate her way through the bureaucracy involved in obtaining the allowance her husband was entitled to during his sickness, and he finally persuaded her to learn to speak English. In exchange, Interviewee A became Taddei’s assistant, helping him to organise events for the Bradford Italians and keeping house for him.

Father Taddei remained in Yorkshire for eleven years and this final quote from the respondent’s interview clearly suggests something about his character and, possibly, his state of mind in 1952, when he penned his famous letter:

Oh yes, he was very, very kind man, very nice man, very quiet and...er, very nice. Very simple man, very simple. And everybody...um, well, the other priests, they say, “what was with the Father Taddei, say, they don’t finding to us?” I says, “You know, Father, what was wrong? We was lonely. When we saw him, we saw God.” [...] I say Father Taddei was everything for us. Even if we see him once a year, for us it was shelter. I think Father Taddei found a lot of sadness when he came to this country.³⁹

³⁷ BHRU, Acc. No. B0105.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

Interviewee A's memories of Father Taddei portray him as a young, sensitive man, burdened by the 'sadness' he found amongst his fellow country-women in Yorkshire. As his letter was written in 1952, just months after he was appointed chaplain of Leeds and met the respondent and the other Italian women, it is easy to see how affected he was by their hardship.

To some extent, up till now, this survey of how our respondents' found their partners, families and friends has been framed as to address, by way of counterexample, the judgements expressed by Catholic ministers and subsequently repeated – rather unquestioningly in my opinion – by Umberto Marin and Terri Colpi. This was done because it is important, when researching women in migration, to fill the gaps in the existing knowledge and challenge die-hard stereotypes. It was necessary, therefore, to explicate the bias and preoccupations that underpinned the views expressed by the clergy and show that reality was, indeed, much more complex. But the subject of this study is the life of the women themselves, not of Italian missionaries, and it is time, therefore, to consider the interviewees' memories of their middle and later years.

Putting down roots – Work and family life

The textile mills that had given work to so many Italian women were soon to undergo a phase of great change and turmoil. As MacEwen Scott has effectively summarised: "Since 1961 there has been a massive restructuring of employment in textiles. This has involved a dramatic reduction in the total numbers of employed in the industry, the virtual abolition of

part-time employment, and a progressive ‘masculinisation’ of the remaining workforce”.⁴⁰

As employment prospects in this industry underwent such significant changes, the presence of Italian workers within the textile mills greatly reduced over the years. The recruitment of European women by cotton manufacturers gave way to increased recruitment of Asian and West Indian men. This explains partly why less Italian women moved to the UK from the early 1960s onwards, and also why many of the ones who had arrived through the OIS chose to move back to Italy in due course.

All the respondents interviewed in the course of this research are women who have settled in England permanently, put down roots. They became part of their local community, an increasingly multi-racial, cosmopolitan, population of factory workers and labourers. To what extent is the Italian background of these women still important, still a defining factor of their personal experience? This is a question not dissimilar to the one pondered by Linda McDowell in the last pages of her study on Latvian textile workers. Many of McDowell’s observations about the lives of Latvian women apply just as well to the Italians, as “in both arenas [family life and the work place] their lives had certain similarities to those of indigenous working women, especially those living in the industrial and mill towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire”.

Both Latvians and Italians, to a point, suffered from stereotypical labelling and felt singled out at times but, having been recruited partly because of their ‘whiteness’, because they were ‘suitable’ migrants, they ‘neither threatened or challenged idealised images of Britishness’ in a society in which “skin colour has continued to have a malignant resonance right through the post-war history of immigration policy”. Drawing from the case of

⁴⁰ Alison MacEwen Scott, *Gender Segregation and Social Change : Men and Women in Changing Labour Markets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). p.302.

Latvian workers, McDowell's contention is that that EVW women "clearly illustrate the limits of the notion of assimilation that was so influential in both academic and policy discussions of immigration policy in the early post-war years", as they saw themselves as different and clung to their ethnic identity.⁴¹ These are interesting insights, which will have to be kept in mind as we read more about how the Italian respondents describe their life in England.

Work

As the respondents describe their family life, the challenges of paid work, childcare, marriage, it would seem that in many respects their situation did not differ to a great extent from that of their English counterparts. These accounts show quite clearly how the economic changes in the areas they had settled in affected their lives, as each of them negotiated around the demands of family life and the necessity of paid work.

In Chapter 3 we have outlined the progressive decline of the textile industry and, because of this, of many mill towns of the North. Many companies tried to maximise output by increasing the number of shifts and employing even more foreign labour, many others found they could not compete or restructure effectively and closed. Mill workers had to respond to these fluctuations in the demand for employment by embracing very flexible work patterns.

The contemporary diminished availability of part-time shifts and increased masculinisation of textile work had a significant impact on the lives of the respondents, as these changes happened at a time when most of them were having children and, as young

⁴¹ The extract quoted are from McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*. Pp. 192-197.

mothers, found themselves pushed out from textile employment. The respondents' accounts convey a variety of individual different responses to these transformations.

Marina had arrived in Manchester in 1953, she and her husband were both employed within the textile sector, originally in the same company. As they did not have children for the first seven years of their marriage, Marina maximised her earning capacity by taking up two jobs at the same time. As she remembers "I was always working...I worked full-time but when I was finished in one factory, at five o'clock, then I started in another, from six to ten"⁴². Marina worked in the factory in Glossop until she was six months pregnant and then stayed at home for two years. When she started work again she would work daily full-time shifts, alternating with her husband who worked night shifts.

Gabriella too, who came to Manchester in 1961, resorted with her husband to a pattern of alternating shifts once they had children. "Yes, so we could take care of the children, and my sister in law would keep them in between shifts, because she lived not far from me, when I went out I would leave them with her and go to work. Then he [the husband] would come back, pick them up and take them home. Ah, a bit of sacrifice for the children, what else to do?"⁴³

Gabriella is, of all the respondents, the one who arrived in Britain last and for this reason her employment history illustrates how difficult it had become to secure jobs in the textile industry:

Ah, when I came here from Italy, I think I started work after two months, since my

⁴² "No no io lavoravo... lavoravo full-time ma quando finivo alle 5 in una fabbrica, dopo dalle 6 alle 10 lavoravo in un'altra."

⁴³ "Si così ci guardavamo i bambini e poi mia cognata nell'intervallo che lei non abitava lontano da me, quand'ero nell'altra casa e allora li lasciavo da lei e io andavo a lavorare poi lui tornava li prendeva e li portava a casa, eh un po' di sacrifici per i bambini ma come fai?"

husband wasn't keen to have children yet I said 'Ok, I will start work then' and he found me a job where he worked.

But I didn't stay there long...It was hard work and I wasn't used to it, you see? So I stopped there, and went to another factory, then, I changed many factories, one after the other, of cotton, I didn't like it, and then at the end, I found one and I stayed there until it shut down. Because later they started closing the factories.

In 1980, in 1975, like that. It happened that one day one would close, then another one and the cotton mills were less and less, until there were none left...all closed.⁴⁴

For eighteen years Gabriella worked in various cotton mills, changing employer many times. The reason for this is partly to do with the restructuring and closing of many of these companies, and partly with the fact that, as Gabriella recalled, the work had become increasingly hard. Requesting workers to take double shifts became the norm, and Gabriella herself, for many years, fell into a pattern of working a six to two o'clock shift, and then after an hour's break, another shift until ten o'clock at night.

Gabriella also remembers that, in order to maximise production, workers were expected to work at a pace that she found unsustainable:

They used to make profit, because they would run the machines at speed, so they would produce more and we would kill ourselves because the cotton would break more often and you had to run because everything got tangled...and with knives and crochet hooks we had to pull everything out, and you couldn't stop a moment, because they wanted more production and set the machines to go faster, you see? And if they worked faster they would break more because the cotton thread was fine and broke easily...it was a

⁴⁴“Eh quando sono venuta dall'Italia mi sembra che 2 mesi dopo sono incominciata a lavorare perché tanto lui, mi marito, ancora non voleva bambini allora dico va bene allora incomincio a lavorare e mi ha trovato il lavoro dove lui lavorava.

Ma ci sono stata poco... poi dato che si lavorava troppo io non ero abituata tanto, no? Poi mi ha fermato lì, me ne sono andata in un altro posto poi, ho cambiato diverse fabbriche una dopo l'altra di cotone che non mi trovavo bene e poi l'ultima mi sono fermata in una fabbrica che lì sono stata finché non si è chiusa perché poi sono incominciate a chiudere le fabbriche...

Nell'80, nel '75 così incominciava che una volta chiudeva una, una volta chiudeva l'altra e le cotoniere sono andate sempre diminuendo sempre di meno e così all'ultimo non ce sono proprio... sono tutte finite...”

real problem.⁴⁵

As the prospects of doing the work they were trained for dwindled, each respondent had to find placement elsewhere. After eighteen years of mill work, Gabriella found a job in a baking factory and she worked there until she retired, in 1997.

Lisa also undertook a number of different jobs. Before she got married, she worked in the evenings in a pub, washing glasses, after her shift in the mill. Later she would spend her holiday time from the mill working in a factory that processed fruit. In the mill she worked for, in Stalybridge, she progressed from her initial traineeship and became a beamer in the weaving section. This was a highly specialised skill that was much in demand and enabled Lisa to work when it most suited her. “Because I did this important job the manager used to send someone to pick me up every morning, with the car they picked me up every morning” she remembers.⁴⁶ Lisa took time off when she had her children and returned to work once they were old enough to attend school, from then on she took on part-time shifts. But in her case too, the crisis of the textile industry significantly affected her prospects and her earnings. Once the company she worked for closed its plants Lisa was forced to leave her job and work in a nursing home, where she stayed for twenty-two years, until she retired.

⁴⁵ “Loro il profitto lo prendevano loro perché mettevano le macchine che speedy che facevano più produzione e noi ci ammazavamo perché poi i capi di cotone si rompevano di più tu dovevi scappare di più perché si tutto avvolgeva... e con i coltelli che tiravamo tutti quelle uncinetti di ferro tiravamo tutto fuori, che non ti potevi fermare un po’ che andava tutto intorno lì, perché loro volevano più produzione e mettevano le macchine che andavano più di fretta, no? e se scappavano di più e si rompevano di più il cotone era fino non, non lo sopportava e si rompeva... era proprio un guaio proprio.”

⁴⁶ “Perché facevo questo lavoro importante il padrone mi manda a prendere tutte le mattine a lavorare... a... con la macchina mi veniva a prendere.”

Holidays, recreational activities, social life.

Because all of the respondents settled in the Greater Manchester districts, they all had a greater access to networks of fellow Italians compared to those who lived in other areas. From what we have seen, Italian women appeared sufficiently well adjusted in their work environment, their local neighbourhoods, to life in Britain amongst British people. Most of them, however, were keen to spend their free time in ways that allowed them to reconnect with their Italian background. None of the respondents seem to have ever contemplated the idea of joining their English co-workers in recreational activities, for example, though of course there must have been occasions, as company managers and trade unions traditionally promoted all manner of out-of-the-work activities for mill workers such as sports, football clubs, concerts and holidays by the sea-side. Italian workers, however, seemed to prefer spending time with fellow Italians.

Lisa, for example, remembers how she and her friends would often travel to Manchester city centre on week-ends where they could enjoy food, browse shops selling the latest Italian fashions and meet other Italian people:

There were Italian restaurants there, many. We would go to eat pizza then, on Saturdays. We would go because there were shops that sold stuff 'made in Italy', shoes, because they had to be with high heels, you know how it is when you are young, you wear stilettos, I'm used to it, I still wear them now...anyway they had to have high heels and we would come to Manchester to buy shoes made in Italy, like that. And then we used to go to Manchester, in these Italian restaurants, to us it felt like going to Church, Oh mamma! it was a holiday, and we would buy some pizza from an Italian 'where are you from?' we would chat 'I'm from Tuscany'. They are all from Naples, there was no one from my neck of the woods.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Cerano ristoranti italiani molti si andava a mangiar la pizza allora il sabato s'andava perché [...] poi c'erano le botteghe made in Italy le scarpe, perché dovevano essere con i tacchi più alti sai quando s'è giovane, va con lo stiletto, io ci sono abituata, le porto anche ora quando mi cambio insomma, ehm, dovevano essere alti e si

As we have said, the activity of Italian clergymen played a key role in bringing this little community together, and all of the respondents remember with particular fondness Father Giovannelli, who was the appointed missionary for Manchester until he left for Canada in 1967. Father Giovannelli, aside from his ministering duties, visited the respondents regularly, accepting cups of coffee and welcoming confidences, he organised parties and religious celebrations, holiday trips to Blackpool but also to Italy. Thanks to him, all the respondents got acquainted with each other during the years and have kept in touch even once he left. The tradition to organise dances and parties lived on as well.

Lisa remembers these parties to which she would bring her English husband along:

Oh yes, yes, I used to always go, because my husband liked Italians, even before we met he had Italian friends. [...] and he liked going, but later as time went by, because there was a lot of dancing in Belleview, he wanted me to go by myself, he said 'listen, you all speak Italian, I don't speak Italian well enough, you'll have more fun if I'm not there because you like to dance'. And so, sometimes he came too, sometimes he didn't, yes he often did. And then at the time the other Italians would come visit us and we would go and visit them.⁴⁸

Interestingly, Gabriella's husband, who was also Italian, did not enjoy these socials. Despite being the only all-Italian household of the ones considered here, they engaged with the community significantly less than the others. Only after her husband's death did

veniva a Manchester a comprare le scarpe made in Italy e così poi si andava [...] a Manchester questi ristoranti italiani a noi sembrava di andare in chiese uh mamma era una festa e si comprava la pizze da un italiano "da dove vieni" "io sono dalla Toscana" son tutti di Napoli non c'era nessuno dalle mie parti...

⁴⁸ "Sì, sì, ci andavo sempre perché al marito gli piacevano gli italiani che mi marito prima di conoscere me c'aveva gli amici italiani. [...] e a lui gli piaceva però dopo col tempo perché facevano la danza a Belleview voleva che io andassi perché lui dice "sta a senti, tutti parlate l'italiano, io lo parlo poco, te ti diverti di più se non ci sono io perché a te ti piace ballare", e... delle volte veniva delle volte no, però sì sì si veniva anche lui, sì si veniva ... e poi dopo allora gli italiani venivano a trovarci e noi si andava a trovare loro."

Gabriella begin to spend more time with her country-people:

After my husband died yes, before I didn't. I wouldn't go because he didn't like it much, friendship also, because so many people had a habit of speaking behind other people's back and my husband had realised this and preferred to be alone. He didn't care, he watched TV, some times he liked to go to Blackpool, he would organise a day out there.⁴⁹

Alba and Marina also enjoyed getting together with other Italians; because they were both married to Ukrainian men, however, they cultivated ties to both communities, and divided their time accordingly.

Interacting with fellow Italians was one of the ways in which the respondents were able to maintain a connection with their native culture through the years. It is certainly very important now that most of them are widowed, live alone and are less able to travel. In the early days of their married life, however, it was the relationship with the family that they left behind that sustained their sense of belonging, their Italian identity.

At a time when travelling was time-consuming and expensive, time off work difficult to budget for, these precious trips to visit family were an important lifeline for the respondents. For the women who had married other foreign nationals, every trip abroad was an important occasion, as each spouse was introducing the other to their family and native land, making an effort to keep familial ties alive across boundaries that were geographical but also cultural and linguistic. This was a complex interweaving of practices and customs, it implied travelling to Italy and Ukraine, sending money regularly to the families left

⁴⁹ "Dopo che è morto mio marito, prima no, prima non mi mettevo perché a lui non gli piaceva non gli piaceva tanto amicizie neanche perché poi tanta gente c'hanno l'abitudine di parlare male di uno e l'altro e mio marito se ne è accorto di questo e voleva star da solo non se ne importava guardava la televisione, qualche volta andava a Blackpool tanto che gli piaceva Blackpool ogni tanto andava un giorno lì a fare una giornata fuori."

behind, keeping the communication channels open by writing letters or speaking on the phone, welcoming and helping family members to relocate to Britain, teaching their children their native languages and striving to pass some of their heritage to the next generation.

The following extract is taken from Marina's interview, these are several passages in which she describes the trips to Italy she was able to make with her husband. Marina's father died soon after, so it was a great comfort to her that she was able to introduce her husband to him before it was too late:

Oh yes, yes, we went three times to Italy together, the first time it was 1962 after we were already married, and after that we went another two or three times on, how do you say? Holiday!

We visited the family, the sisters, you know, and he [the husband] was very happy because my Father, he liked to drink grappa. [...] An so, he was happy when we spent time there, and he got to know my parents and they liked him, his character, everything.

And did they manage to communicate in spite of...

Sort of...My Father would speak and I would translate, poor dad he liked a good time, he would call him 'Stefan, come have a glass of wine' [...] then they would go work in the field together, to give water to the corn crops, and he would go, early in the morning with my dad to help^{.50}

⁵⁰ O si si siamo stati tre volte in Italia con lui, la prima volta nel 62 che eravamo già sposati e dopo siamo stati 2 o 3 volte come ah che si dice? Holiday!

Si si a trovar la famiglia le sorelle come adesso, no, diciamo, e lui è rimasto tanto contento perché mio padre lui gli piaceva...[gesto della mano come a indicare un bicchiere]

Bere?

Bere la grappa. Yeah! E così diciamo lui è rimasto contento quando siamo stati e dopo lui ha conosciuto i genitori e loro gli hanno piaciuto lui il carattere che aveva tutto sai ma...

Ci riuscivano a comunicare col fatto del...

Insomma... papà parlava e io gli dicevo a lui... povero papà gli piaceva giocare pure lui gli diceva lo chiamavano Stefan vieni a bere il vino lui gli piaceva così poi... dopo andavano in campagna a fare come mandare l'acqua sai l'estate che non è acqua sul granoturco... in campagna mandavano l'acqua e loro andavano presto il mattino con mio padre a aiutare.

Maintaining that sense of familial and cultural belonging was, in many ways, a task of ever increasing complexity. Their native towns and villages back in Italy did not remain frozen in time, they began to change beyond all recognition as the nation underwent its own post-war economic boom. The native families of the respondents changed too as parents aged and died, siblings moved to big cities, migrated abroad, scattered. Their new families, on the other hand, lived at the intersection of several different identities and the children they bore, grew up into fully assimilated, English men and women.

To various degrees, most respondents tried to instil in their children a sense of their heritage, by speaking to them in Italian or Ukrainian, bringing them to meet their family on holidays. Lisa sent both her children to an Italian after-school, she is glad to boast a little about how, to this day, her sons show an interest in her Tuscan hometown, one of them has even bought a house there:

I sent them to the Italian school, in Hyde, they went on till year three but once they were grown up, once they were older they were ashamed to go, so enough!

Then later, the younger one has taken classes on his own, in the evening, he speaks Italian well, he goes on the computer, he has found out all about the history of Careggine, Massa, Viareggio...he knows everything, everything! He looks on the internet [...]

And do they go to Italy, do they travel?

The younger one likes to go a lot, he has bought a little flat in Castelnuovo. The eldest goes, for a week and then...it's too quiet in the town, the eldest is more lively, he speaks Italian a lot but less well...he has even learnt to swear!⁵¹

⁵¹ Io li ho mandati a scuola italiana!

A scuola italiana? Dov'era?

Sì, a Hyde, hanno fatto fino alla terza poi dopo son cresciuti, i grandi avevan vergogna, basta! Poi dopo quello più piccolo ha fatto corsi per conto suo, la sera, parla bene l'italiano lui, va nella computer, ha trovato tutta la storia di Careggine, di Massa, di Viareggio... lui sa tutto, tutto, tutto... lui è molto interessato, tutto su internet... passa su internet, ha trovato... lui trova uhhhh "tu lo sapevi?" e io "non lo sapevo!" dicevo...

E ci vanno in Italia, viaggiano?

E quello piccolo gli piace troppo, che ha comprato un appartamento a Castelnuovo, quello grande una settimana e poi è troppo calmo al paese, quello grande è più vivo quello grande l'italiano lo parla tanto ma lo

Growing up in an Italo-Ukrainian household in Manchester, Alba's three children all displayed slightly different responses to their parents' cultural and linguistic legacy. As Alba describes:

The eldest yes, he always goes to Italy because he likes it, he wants to buy a house there. The girl understands a bit, you know? Many times she'd say to me 'Oh mum, speak English!' She understands both, but...the youngest boy was never interested in languages, only speaks English, no, the youngest only English.⁵²

The degree to which the children of these families engaged with the culture of their parents as they grew up is, of course, extremely variable. However, these interviews seem to mostly suggest that although the respondents as mothers took considerable care to speak Italian to their children and encourage them to learn, their husbands didn't.⁵³ This could be explained in terms of the different outlook that many Eastern Europeans might have had over their prospective life in the UK, compared to that of Italian migrants who never faced any external obstacle to their possible return. As many EVWs despaired or plainly refused to contemplate the idea of ever settling back to their homeland, it could be argued that maybe this discouraged them from teaching their children a language that they would not ever need. This explanation, however, becomes unconvincing when we consider that, according to Linda McDowell, all the Latvian women she interviewed except one, taught

parla meno perfetto... sa anche bestemmiare!

⁵² Quel più vecchio si perché va sempre in Italia perché ci piace, vuole comprare la casa in Italia, la bam... la ragazza, la bambina... capisce qualcosa, no tante volte dice "oh mamma parla in inglese", capisce lo stesso ma... quel giovane non è mai interessato di lingue, parla solo inglese, no... quel giovane no, solo inglese...

⁵³ This seems to have often been the case for the Italian women in Bradford as well. Two of the three respondents we have examined so far, one married to a Ukrainian and the other to a Hungarian man, questioned on the subject replied that their husbands did not speak to their children in their native tongue.

their children to speak Latvian.⁵⁴ The feelings of Latvian women about their refugee status, the fact that their country had been firmly established behind the 'iron curtain', and their sense of exile are all comparable to the feelings of other Polish, Ukrainian or Hungarian EVWs. If, as the interviews considered here suggest, those Eastern European men that married outside their ethnic community failed to transmit their language to their offspring, this might have more to do with the fact that, within the gendered roles taken on by each spouse within the family, it commonly fell upon women to educate children in such ways. This would indeed chime with Anthias, Yuval-Davis and Campling's theories about the role of women in migrant families as reproducers of ideologies and transmitters of culture and signifiers of ethnic/national differences, and with much of the literature about migrant women.⁵⁵

A home of sorts

Since, to this day, statistical data regularly suggest that the population of the industrial north has a shorter life expectancy than nearly everywhere else in England, with male life expectancy being even shorter than women's, it is perhaps not a surprise to discover that, with the exception of Alba, all of the respondents have lost their husbands, and many have been widows for a considerably long time.

The network of Italian friends that, as we have described, these women acquired

⁵⁴ McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*. p. 174.

⁵⁵ Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Campling, *Woman - Nation - State*.

through church activity and socialising is even more important to them now that children have moved away and they live alone. These are, after all, women that have chosen not to go back; even now that they are retired and alone, Italy does not entirely feel like home anymore and they prefer to stay close to their children.

Nevertheless, those of them who are still in good health, travel back on a fairly regular basis, visiting family and friends. Most respondents watch Italian television, thanks to satellite reception, and keep up with what is news in their home country. Taking all this into account, once again it would seem that there are many parallels between Linda McDowell's findings about Latvian women, and the Italians.

According to McDowell, in their later years, engagement with aspects of their cultural identity has become more important, not less, as "in their middle years, quite clearly other aspects of their everyday life also took on a significance in their sense of themselves as, for example, paid workers and as mothers, but their Latvian identity and their participation in communal activities and events was maintained throughout these busy years and in retirement gained a new significance"⁵⁶

Her opinion, ultimately, is that for Latvian migrants there really was no such thing as 'assimilation', she is sceptical about applying notions of fluid or mobile identity to the subjects of her case study. But then again, maybe this is exactly where the parallels end. Reflecting on the testimonies she collected, McDowell reflects "these women reformed my initial research agenda for me by their insistence on the significance of their exile and their refusal to accept that their long lives in Britain were as important as the events in their own land that shaped their identities as Latvians throughout their lives".⁵⁷

⁵⁶ McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*. p.195.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 198.

The Italian respondents' accounts collected for the purpose of this research in no way convey a similar detachment from the events occurred after they moved to Britain, quite the opposite in fact, it is in Britain that most of the things that the respondents hold as 'significant' in their life, happened. This might well be explained by the fact that Italian women had not entered the UK as exiled, displaced, civilian collateral of war, but they came freely, viewing emigration as an opportunity, sometimes even as an exciting prospect of a different life. In this last, following extract, Alba, in her interview, sums up her feelings about her particular journey, she appears to think that her life in Manchester has indeed been meaningful and she also seems aware that her experience is, just like everyone else's, unique:

So we lived, we bought a house, we have sorted the children out, what more can one want? Now they are like lords because they don't have the life we had, no, and sometimes they'll say 'Mum, you are this' or 'you are that' And I say 'well, I am old, you don't know stuff, there will be a time when you will know too',⁵⁸

⁵⁸ "Abbiamo vissuto, abbiamo comprato la casa, abbiamo messo i figli apposto che vuoi di più? adesso sono signori perché loro non hanno la vita di noi, no, e tante volte dicono a me "mamma tu sei qua, tu sei là" "beh io son vecchia, tu non sai, verrà il tempo anche per te..."

Conclusions

Studying the lives of those Italian women who migrated to Britain to work as textile operatives felt, at times, as a process of extracting knowledge out of the jaws of oblivion. As this author set about defining her research agenda, the small number of references on this subject in the various sets of literature consulted was discouraging, particularly in the case of the existing bibliography on post-war Italian migration. In the first months of research planning, the very existence of the subject appeared somewhat doubtful. In his 1958 study of the European Volunteer Workers Scheme, Tannahill only mentioned the Official Italian Scheme in passing, adding that, as far as he knew, most of the economic migrants recruited through the OIS and the Northern Sea Scheme had been repatriated after their first two-year contract had expired. And yet, the studies of Umberto Marin and Terri Colpi and Lucio Sponza, all written many years later, mentioned textile workers and other Italian women who had travelled to Britain as economic migrants and settled here.

As for the official documents, aside from the documentation produced by the government bodies in charge of the recruitments, Italian women migrants are almost invisible. This was challenging. There was ample information about the way textile workers were ‘processed’ by the bureaucratic machine put in place by the Italian and British authorities, and yet, these women seemed to almost ‘disappear’ once they arrived in the UK. Italian migration historians had not investigated the subject, and British literature dedicated to migrants’ communities in the UK was mostly focussed on the migration waves coming from the Commonwealth or with the other EVW schemes.

To make things worse, finding former Italian textile workers willing to be

interviewed took months of, often frustrating, investigative work. Appeals were published in the local Manchester papers, but to no avail. Just as the author had begun to seriously consider whether Tannahill had been right all along, she discovered the Manchester Italian Association of Ancoats which, as luck would have it, was able to present this research project to several Italian women who had worked in the cotton mills.

It has to be said that only once the author managed to meet these women in the flesh, was she entirely free of the suspicion of having somehow conjured them into existence in her imagination alone.

Further research revealed that the arrival of these women, together with the other foreign migrants absorbed by the British textile sector, in the mill towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire was an instance that, in as much as it was largely ignored by historical research at a national level, was nonetheless important, defining, for the local communities that were touched by it. It is in those texts that have assumed oral history as their source-basis, such as *Textile Voices*, by Tim Smith and Olive Howarth that we find a true indication of how the entry of foreign workers in the textile mills has been a phenomenon full of historical relevance for the economy and socio-cultural reality of the Northern English textile districts.¹

The study of Italian textile workers proved to be an interesting context from which to engage, and sometimes challenge, many of the current debates occurring within the area of migration studies. In the following pages some of the key issues that emerged within this research will be summarised.

¹ Olive Howarth and Tim Smith, *Textile Voices: Mill Life This Century* (Bradford: 1989).

Women as economic migrants

By deliberately selecting a case study of women economic migrants, there was always the risk that this act would be seen as an implicit acceptance of the superior importance of economic migration compared to ‘passive’ migration that has informed traditional research for a long time. The accepted distinctions within migration studies, between migrant workers and dependants, usually women, can be challenged not just by finding, and investigating thoroughly, those examples of female migration that did not conform to the model, but also, crucially, by challenging the implied superiority of one over the other. Maddalena Tirabassi, quoted in the introduction, remarked on the importance of “reconstructing the economic role performed by women through their work both within and outside the home”, and indeed, it would appear that underestimating the economic role of women migrants, stems from a more general underestimation of the economic role of women in general, their work, whether in the labour market or in the home.²

The present research has tried to work towards both goals, examining a little known episode of female economic migration on the one hand, but on the other, keeping in mind the importance that the domestic sphere, family life, motherhood and marriage had in the life of the women involved. The respondents’ account that form the basis of this study, reveal that their role as wives and mothers was crucial to their perception of themselves. Also, as examined in Chapter 3, the manner in which the respondents chose to describe how they gradually settled into their new local environment was, again, strongly gendered, as they frequently relied on narratives about shopping for sourcing and preparing food, as signifiers of their ‘settling’ process.

Most of these women, having been recruited to Britain as workers, remained in

² Maddalena Tirabassi, ‘Le emigrate italiane: dalla ricerca locale a quella globale’ in Sanfilippo, *Emigrazione*

waged employment for most of their lives. This was not uncommon for working-class women in the local environments in which the migrants lived; it was in fact the norm. Their decision to work outside the home, cannot, in this sense, be misconstrued as a defiance of accepted gendered norms. And yet, as seen in Chapter 4, whether they were conscious of it or not, by removing themselves from the normative influence of their family of origin, these women did in fact make choices about their lives that were often, if not acts of conscious defiance, a break from tradition in some respects.

By moving to Britain, it would appear that indeed these women found themselves experiencing a greater degree of independence from what they were used to at home. Some seem inclined to view this independence as a negative thing, describing it in terms of isolation, dislocation and loneliness, as in the case of the extracts quoted in Chapter 3 on the subject of life in the workers' hostels. Others, such as Lisa or Annalisa, look back with fondness at those early days and their accounts convey a sense of excitement and wonder about their new life.

The respondents' accounts of how they met the men they would eventually marry, a decision that they mostly made on their own, sometimes in spite of their families' concern or even open hostility, is another startling facet. The way each respondent describes her decision to marry and her family's reaction to the news, as seen in Chapter 4, is shaped by the circumstances and appears as somewhat unusual. Most respondents were able to introduce their husband to their family only years after the wedding; whatever doubts were expressed or actions taken to prevent the marriage from taking place (as in the account of Interviewee A from Bradford, seen in Chapter 4) were ignored or circumvented.

The transnational, multicultural new families that stemmed from these marriages are also a departure from traditional expectations of migrant women. It has been argued that the

role of women within migrant families is to act as the preserver of the traditions of the homeland and the transmission of this cultural identity to the new generations.³ Hence, according to this school of thought, the frequently observed pressure, in the context of ethnic migrant families, to ‘marry within the community’ to, preserve a bit of homeland away from home. The families of the Italian textile workers, as described, rarely conformed to this expectation, another factor that makes this case-study particularly intriguing for those interested in migration. After all, as Louise Ackers has observed “Literature on international migration rarely, if ever, considers the degree and implications of mixed-nationality partnerships; the presumption is that migrants ‘marry their own kind’ and move with them to the host-state”.⁴

That is not to say that those respondents who married other foreign nationals did not preserve and transmit their cultural identity. As examined in Chapter 4, most of them did, but they also engaged with the ethnic community of their spouses when it came to socialising, travelling, religious life, learning the language, even cooking. In this connection, it would be interesting to further study the effects of these intercultural negotiations across generations by interviewing the sons and daughters of Manchester’s migrant textile workers as both witness to their parents’ experiences of cultural adaptation and as subjects of mixed cultururation themselves.

The fact that these women were economic migrants from the outset is, ultimately, what created the preconditions for these unusual developments. By entering Britain as workers servicing the British textile industry, far removed from the influence of family and community, these women went about creating a life for themselves for which there was no template, no exiting set of identifiable social norms.

³ Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Campling, *Woman - Nation - State*.

Women within the post-war Italian exodus

In the first two chapters, the recruitment of textile operatives for Britain has been seen in the context of the ‘migratory-machine’ put in place by the Italian authorities in order to facilitate the migration of Italian unemployed overseas. It would appear that, by and large, the recruitments of women confirm entirely the evaluations of the most recent scholarship about the processes and limitations of this period of bilateral agreement. Michele Colucci, whose study of this period is by far the most detailed and authoritative, has frequently highlighted the ways in which governmental intermediation has not necessarily empowered the prospective migrants. To the contrary, with its heavy regulation of every step of the process, those looking to work abroad were often discouraged from the enterprise by bureaucracy, lack of guidance, the failure of the Italian authorities to efficiently protect their interests.

Andreina De Clementi too, concurs in remarking how little thought was given to vetting foreign employment demand, such as in the case of the women employed as domestics by British private recruitment agencies and how insufficient monitoring on behalf of the authorities allowed traditional forms of migrants’ exploitation to reassert themselves. It was interesting, therefore, to verify if the documentation pertaining to the recruitment of women confirmed or not these opinions, and indeed it did. The inferior bargaining power of Italian authorities as placers of man/woman power when dealing with the ‘receiving’ governments, revealed itself at every stage of the recruitments. The extreme rigidity in the conditions of employment of textile workers, which barred entry to married women and dependents, is probably largely responsible for the fact that the expected quota of recruits, 10.000 women, according to the initial promises of Minister Fanfani, were never fulfilled.

⁴ Ackers, *Shifting Spaces: Women, Citizenship and Migration within the European Union*. p. 9.

The interviews quoted in Chapter 2 and 3, where the respondents remember their journey to England and their first impressions as newcomers, evocatively convey how individuals experienced being ‘processed’ through all the phases of the recruitment. Those respondents who, like Alba, came in the early days of the OIS, travelling in large contingents from the Italian Emigration Centres to the ‘recruits’ boot-camp’ are indeed the ones who felt most disempowered. The contacts with authorities, be they the foreign delegates, border authorities or police officials, are described as confusing, intrusive and intimidating. The dichotomy between the official discourse that surrounded the schemes, the preoccupations and objectives of the authorities involved and the subjective experiences of the recruits involved, the incomprehension, the depersonalising treatment they were subjected to, is incredibly stark.

Welcome to England?

As discussed in Chapter 2, much of the literature investigating the history of migrant communities after 1945 is focussed very intently on race and colour, and the immigrants coming from South Asia and the West Indies to the detriment of other ‘white’ migrant groups. Our contemporary preoccupation with colour can lead us to posit the colour/racism nexus as inextricable. Though it may well be true that, as Panikos Panayi said, racism “particularly affected Asians and West Indians” in the post-war years, racism is not connected with colour in an absolute sense nor has it been the decisive factor in all of British migration history.⁵ What is more, ‘whiteness’, as Linda McDowell points out “is a heterogeneous category, as marked by differences and fractured by power differentials as

⁵ Panayi, *The Impact of Immigration : A Documentary History of the Effects and Experiences of Immigrants in*

any other social division”.⁶

Italian migrants experienced the implications of finding themselves occupying a sort of middle-ground in this landscape of racial stereotyping and suspicion. Prejudice towards them, as seen in both Chapter 2 and 3, is documented in the press and to some extent it informed the mind-set of the officials running the Official Italian scheme, and was sometimes shared by those company owners that were supposed to employ the prospective migrants.

In this examination of the various stages of the recruitment of textile workers, national stereotyping regularly raised its ugly head. It would be difficult to explain, otherwise, what would have convinced British officials that Italian women were deliberately turning up to the Emigration Centres with little or no extra clothing in order to take advantage of the recruiter’s stocks. Again, it is symptomatic how dismissive officials were of instances of complaint or upset expressed by Italian women in the ‘camps’. These women’s first experience of a new foreign county was, after all, a two-week stint of confinement in overcrowded disused military barracks and yet, the officials in charge described these episodes as ‘storms in tea-cups’, since the women, again, being Italian, were ‘easily excitable’.

It is a whole different matter, however, understanding to what degree Italian migrants experienced racism in the communities they settled in. Certainly, as it appears from the literature and the newspaper articles reviewed in Chapter 2, communities like Bedford reacted strongly to the arrival of scores of Italian men and, in times, their families. The context of the mill towns has appeared, on the other hand, to be more nuanced. Whether this is because of the inherently less threatening nature of ‘white’ women migrants, as suggested by scholars such as Kathleen Paul, is not altogether clear.

Britain since 1945. p. 18.

The oral testimonies consulted in this research, such as the interviews with Italian women but also the testimonies of Bradford indigenous textile workers published in *Textile Voices* certainly show a level of resentment and suspicion towards migrants. This is a fairly predictable occurrence in whatever context in which employment of foreign workers can undermine the entitlements and wages of the workforce as a whole. The testimonies included in Smith and Howarth's study contain many of such expressions of anxiety over how EWV workers threatened their job security by being willing to work harder and for less. These accounts, however, do not come across as racist or intolerant in a straightforward way. It should be noted, in this respect, that all these accounts have been collected decades after the events discussed, the interviewees are speaking from a position where a multi-ethnic society has become the norm and a racially-charged language is not viewed as acceptable.

As for instances of 'perceived' racism or hostility towards them, on the other hand, the interviewees' accounts show very subjective and nuanced responses. The respondents quoted in Chapter 3 do remember how bonding in the workplace was difficult, of feeling ignored and even treated badly by their co-workers at times. Save for instances of flagrantly disrespectful or abusive behaviour, much of what the respondents have complained about is the perceived 'unfriendliness' of the locals, a perception probably heightened by how much it contrasted from what they were used to at home. To a degree, Lucio Sponza is probably right in thinking that some of the difficulties that the respondents reported in breaking into their new environment can be ascribed to "the unintrusive nature of British institutions and civil society, which can easily be interpreted as indifference or even hostility; the language barrier which made sustained interchange very difficult"⁷

⁶ McDowell, *Hard Labour : The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers*.p.193.

Is there such thing as an Italian Community?

The most relevant historical studies on the Italians of Britain have all been discussed at various points in the course of this research. Many are examinations of Italian communities over a long period of time, such as those by Umberto Marin, Terri Colpi, or Anne Marie Fortier. Others have investigated events occurring within a shorter timeframe which have had a particular impact on these communities, such as Claudia Baldoli's study of the effects of Italian fascist propaganda on the Italians of Britain or Lucio Sponza's focus on the Second World War years. Finally, there is a repertoire of memoir literature produced by Italian expatriates, which combines their personal memories with some degree of local history about aggregate life, culture and economy of each *Little Italy*.

All these works are different and have different merits, however, it should be pointed out that, by and large, they represent migrant communities, and their composing elements, migrant families, as a "unified interest group", thereby ignoring how gender, class and age concur in determining people's experiences and needs.⁸ When viewed within the framework of this approach, textile workers revealed themselves to be something of a wild card. Although much of their social life centred around cultivating their ties to Italy, socialising with fellow Italians etc., the 'community' they have established is in many ways different from the ones considered by mainstream migration theory.

There is not, to begin with, the element of geographical concentration, the clustering around a particular town or neighbourhood as exemplified by the long established Italian community of Ancoats in Manchester. The post-war textile workers, on the other hand, are

⁷ Lucio Sponza, *Italian propaganda abroad, the case of the surrogate 'Voice of Italians' in Post-War Britain*, in Cheles and Sponza, *The Art of Persuasion : Political Communication in Italy from 1945 to the 1900s*, p.71.

⁸ The definition quoted above is taken from: Heidi I. Hartmann, "The Family as the Locus of Gender, Class,

scattered over a wide area and travel long distances in order to visit each other or attend social events. The issue of mixed marriages too, complicates the picture, as each family became the point of intersection of different identities and patterns of affiliation.

Though they often come together for certain events, such as the traditional Catholic procession of the Madonna del Rosario in June, the second or third generation Italian of Ancoats and the post-war recruits do not usually mix, they cannot be misconstrued as a 'community' just because of their ties to Italy. Indeed, factors such as language, culture, status and lifestyles divide them more than a shared Italian identity could possibly unite them. Both groups inhabit, in a sense, an Italian community of the mind, though possibly not the same one.

As discussed in Chapter 4, a great part of what Catholic missionaries regarded as their role was the establishment of such a 'communitarian' bond amongst immigrants. They conceptualised the exiled family as the paradigm of the migrant experience, and wished communities to be culturally autonomous, with a strong religious identity. What the missionaries saw of how Italian women such as the respondents lived, alarmed them and spurred them into action. These community-building efforts were timely and helpful as, indeed, all the respondents seem to ascribe a great importance to their contacts with Italian religious ministers over the years. As seen from the extracts of Bradford's Interviewee A's testimony in Chapter 4, Italian priests were not cherished just as community-builders, in those early years of emotional segregation caused by the language barrier, contacts with a person of religious authority that spoke the same language was immensely valued.

The legacy of these missionaries, of their agenda and the role of 'surrogate-fathers' they performed, is however, problematic and hard to assess. On the one hand, there is cause to conclude that, possibly, Catholic missionaries did not succeed in shaping these

and Political Struggle: The Example of Housework," *Signs* 6, no. 3 (1981).

communities in the ways they intended. The respondents who went ahead and married outside the Catholic faith despite the church's stigmatising of the practice, have shown a remarkably matter-of-fact attitude as far as both their spiritual and family life was concerned. It would appear that many simply took what the Italian clergy had to offer without being overly troubled by their disapproval, a fact that would remain mostly concealed if one examined the issue exclusively within the limited framework of the Church's ideological objectives and their top-to-bottom views of migrant communities.

As examined in Chapter 4, the missionaries' depiction of the lives of Italian textile workers as miserable and exposed to danger seems to stem from an underlying preoccupation with the issue of inter-marriage. And yet, it would be important to extend this enquiry to include individuals for whom, possibly, their migration to the British mill towns was not a success. It has been mentioned that many Italian textile workers repatriated; further research into this phenomenon and the reasons behind it would be of immense interest, not just as an integration to this particular research but also as a contribution to the still much neglected subject, within Italian migration history, of migrants' return.

Another matter to consider is whether the influence of Catholic pastoral care has had negative repercussions in terms of hindering integration or pressuring women into a subaltern role in the family and society. Lucio Sponza has commented that 'in the light of the subsequent overall history of the Italians in Britain and the pervasive role of the Catholic Church and its affiliated organisations, is that the permanent condition of detachment from British society is paired with a growing alienation from Italian society as well.' And that "the mass of emigrants who arrived in Britain between the late 1940s and throughout the 1960s have remained almost as in a time capsule". The findings of the present research do not chime entirely with this opinion. The respondents and their families might well be viewed as embodying fairly traditional notions of gender-roles and family life, but this is a

factor observed by McDowell in her study of Latvians as well, where Catholicism played no part. More generally, these families do not appear as very different from their autochthonous peers within the local communities they live in, once you factor in their age, their working-class status, and the socio-economic reality of the areas such as Oldham or Preston. Their children meet the expected levels of upward mobility within the overall population of second-generation British citizens and Italy is not as distant as it once was, in this new era of budget flights and satellite TV. People's lives, it would appear, are varied and complex in ways that academically informed inquiries sometimes overlook.

The lives of Italian textile workers exemplify such complexity, touched as they were by war, migration, by the decline of one of Britain's most important industries, the turbulent changes of modern society. Witness to the great transformations occurred in British and Italian societies alike, the respondents' retelling of their personal journeys have revealed themselves to be the most stimulating, fascinating, challenging 'document' this author has ever had the privilege to study.

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