Comparative notes.
Some sociological roots of transnational practices in Italy

by
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As many writers have noted (among many others, Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999, Vertovec 1999, Faist 1999, Itzigsohn et al. 1999, Kistivo 2001), the term transnationalism has been used to describe very different situations. On the one hand, we have, for example, classic and contemporary examples of "diasporas" which may be genuine transnational "communities" – where people identify themselves clearly as members of a social unit dispersed over the world in various countries, and where shifting to another node of the community in another part of the world may be a possibility people are clearly aware of. Sense of belonging to this transnational community may be sustained by all the usual mechanisms creating an imagined community (language, religious specificity, myths regarding common origins, etc.), but also by frequent material exchanges, meetings, mutual aid, occupational careers, inter-marriage. On the other hand, discussions of transnationalism may also cite phenomena which are present in nearly all migrations (for that matter, even migrations within a single state). For example, migrants go back 'home' for holidays (sometimes long holidays), maintain numerous ties with kin in other countries, send remittances (which may be crucial for the home area's economy), read newspapers or watch television programmes of their 'country of origin', invent new cultural forms combining elements from two or more countries (nearly all the interviewees of our research in Italy combined elements of Moroccan/Romanian with elements of Italian food), continue to use their first language, and so on. Some scholars (cf. among many others, Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999) tend to exclude these weaker forms; others (e.g. Itzigsohn et al., along with numerous others) continue to cite them at least in combination with other practices.

In any case, it does seem necessary to distinguish between the various forms in order to avoid confusion between phenomena which have very different implications. Comparison between them also seems useful in order to understand why in some places and times certain kinds of ties are maintained across frontiers, whereas in others they are not. In these brief comparative notes on manifestations of transnationalism among migrants in Italy, I will therefore also ask why more developed transnational phenomena are often *absent*.

As Ambra Formenti's notes show clearly, the interviews carried out with Romanians in Turin and Ivrea revealed large numbers of exchanges of the kind which might be included under a broad or loose definition of transnational practices, but absence of the more articulated forms. Take, for example, political transnationalism. No interviewee declared interest in affecting politics in Romania via migrants' action. There was generalized cynicism of Romanian interviewees towards politicians and politics in general, but this stimulated no attempt to change the existing elites, or to intervene actively, either as Romanian citizens or as Romanians living abroad. Discussion about Romanian affairs did not form a significant topic of conversation among migrants in Italy, let alone a focus of action. The numbers of migrants exercising their right to vote at the embassy in Milan are very low (at the last national elections in 2004, just 4000 persons voted, out of an estimated total of 150 000 having the

right to vote[1]), and there appear to be few attempts by migrants to make their interests heard in Bucharest.

Political action of this kind seems inconceivable also because national associations are not strong. Many Romanians interviewed repeated a common self-image or self-stereotype: "We're too individualistic"[2]. Along with Rome, the Turin area is one of the main destination points for Romanian migrants in Italy. Official figures for regular migrants give over 23 000 for the city of Turin alone (2005), and if the surrounding region is included, the figure is over 53 000 (Romanians constitute the most numerous nationality in the foreign population in the city and surrounding region). From a purely numerical point of view, then, the area contains the second most important Romanian "community" in Italy (and, indeed, one of the largest outside Romania). In addition, since much of the migration in and around Turin has come from a relatively small number of often semi-rural towns and villages, many people have friends and acquaintances in Turin and its hinterland as well as relatives. One might have thought that this clustering would have made the realization of local projects more feasible (as is, indeed, the case for the Pentecostal Romanians described briefly later). Given all these facts (and given a certain amount of encouragement from Italian local authorities who often welcome associations as channels for dialogue with what are seen as "communities"), the level of associational activity is decidedly modest. There is just one really active association in Turin: the other two or three struggle to survive and have great difficulty obtaining members or organizing events. Even the main association seems important primarily for the practical information and aid it provides to recent migrants. At Ivrea there is an active association, recently established and involved, for example, in organizing the visit of a Romanian ecclesiastic (this association is heavily entwined with activities of the Orthodox church) and a twinning project. However, as in Turin, the existence of the association seems to rest disproportionately on the shoulders of one especially active woman who is the founder and president[3].

The same sort of pattern seems to prevail in other areas of life. With the important exception, once again, of neo-Protestant Romanians, there do not seem to be genuine examples of collective remittances. When widespread flooding occurred in Romania, the main Romanian association in Turin did organize a scheme asking people to send a donation of one euro by sending an SMS on their mobile phone. However, this is obviously a long way from the more ambitious schemes of collective remittances, aid and intervention in the "home town" described in the literature.

The Orthodox Church is a focus for national identity and at church services migrants meet co-nationals they would not otherwise meet. However, although these meetings around the

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[1] Estimates of Romanian newspapers and *Repere romanesti*, an on-line service of Romanian associations abroad.

[2] "I romeni sono invidiosi, non ogliono dare il lavoro agli altri …. Per me, l'unica sicurezza rimane la famiglia". "Tra compaesani si perde questa amicizia… Venendo tutti qua ci siamo distanziati. La mia vicina …. Di Marginea, non la vedevo da un anno …ad agosto l'ho invitata, ma lei ha risposto 'Non so'". Comments of this type, along with stories of betrayals, debts never paid back, etc. are frequent.

[3] Liza Schuster (2005) suggests that low levels of associational activity in Italy might be connected with high rates of movement within Italy (migrants moving around from one part of Italy to another before settling in one town). However, this hypothesis requires comparative evidence both inside and outside Italy: in reality, ethnographic accounts provide plenty of examples of widespread mobility within a country in the early stages of individual migration trajectories in many cases of past migrations, even where associations are important. In the case of Romanian migrants in the Turin area, although some interviewees have previously lived elsewhere in Italy, many moved directly to the area.

Church undoubtedly contribute to the intensification of links between migrants from the same places, and to the increase of flows of information regarding "home", this socializing and "keeping up" does not have obvious transnational consequences.

With regard to economic transnationalism, although there are individual cases[4] of people who exploit a niche (see Pietro Cingolani's report), activity is on a very small scale considering the numbers of people present in a single metropolitan area. To give one example, it is interesting that there appears to be just one self-employed migrant importing Romanian food products in the entire region.

As will be seen later, there are certain transnational practices which are significant. Nonetheless, it seems interesting to focus first on the relatively lack of many forms of political and economic transnationalism documented in the literature for other groups, as well as a lack of strong identification with other Romanian migrants as such (nothwithstanding the role of the Orthodox Church, most social life seems to be with kin rather than in associational contexts or meeting places where people identify themselves *qua* Romanians. Indeed, a number of migrants express caution about associating with co-nationals, fearing they may be involved in transactions they do not want (asked for a loan, asked to put someone up in their flat, etc.).

The situation is still more interesting because there is also an important exception among Romanian migrants in Italy: transnational ties appear considerably stronger among Romanians who belong to the Pentecostal Church[5]. Pentecostals were pioneers of international migration in Romania in the years after the fall of communism, since they were able to draw on the resources offered by American and other brethren. International support exists in a way it does not for members of other religions, and more of a genuine sense of diasporic identity appears to exist: young people seem to have a sense of belonging to networks established in "communities" in several countries of the world. It also appears to be accepted that brethren have an obligation to help each other if possible. As one interviewee said: "You'll never see a Pentecostal hanging around the square by Porta Nuova (where migrants looking for work wait for offers of casual jobs in the building trade, etc.). In Italy as in Spain, Romanian Pentecostals do in fact often own small building firms, and appear to employ mainly co-religionists, thus constituting an essentially closed employment network. Willingness to cooperate between employers and employees may also have been a factor helping these firms prosper. The social life and organization of leisure time also seems heavily centred around "community" activities connected with the Church and brother Pentecostals.

Given this heavily communal organization of life in Italy, it is perhaps not surprising that, in contrast to the situation for most Romanians, collective remittances do exist. In Marginea, for example (the small town where Pietro Cingolani did his fieldwork), a large Pentecostal church has been renovated and decorated via remittances. But projects of benefit to Marginea as a

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[4] As Portes et al. 1999 have argued, too much of the discussion of transnationalism is based on case studies, which cannot provide evidence about how prevalent transnational practices are for immigrants as a whole – thus making it difficult to know to what extent the traditional "sociology of immigration and integration" perspective needs adjusting.

[5] Despite our efforts to make contacts with members of the Pentecostal Church, we were able to obtain only a few interviews. This is largely a result of constructing our interviewees in a snowball fashion, starting from individuals who although quite different from each other on other dimensions, included no Pentecostals. In his fieldwork at Marginea, Pietro Cingolani also tended to be identified with non-Pentecostals since he lodged with an Orthodox family. This made it difficult to obtain interviews.

whole have also been financed in the same way: thus new facilities have been donated to the local primary school. In other words, there appear to be attempts to intervene in local town life and show benevolent influence of Pentecostalism – initiatives which do not occur among Orthodox migrants from Marginea.

In the interests of understanding the relative lack of many practices among most Romanian migrants, and their presence among Pentecostals, it seems worth referring to a couple of other examples (however different and specific these may be in many respects). Another case of migrants in Italy well known for their marked transnational orientation is that of Senegalese migrants belonging to a Murid confraternity of Sufi Islam (cf. also the research undertaken by the French team in the current ESF research network). For several decades, Murid migrants from certain areas of Senegal have undertaken a form of circulatory migration involving long and very long stays abroad (in West Africa, in France and, since the 1980s, in Italy), earning money through street trading or by working in factories (for descriptions of migrants in Italy, see Carter 1991, Schmidt de Friedburg 1994, Castagnone et al. 2005, Riccio 2001). Many migrants of these Murid fraternities organize themselves in a strikingly communal way, living together in all-male shared apartments (termed "village houses"), delegating particular tasks to particular members (so that, for example, housekeeping and cooking will be done by one particular person) and taking many decisions in concert. In many places, migrants have set up a local *dahira* – the kind of urban association established by rural migrants to cities in Senegal itself - and contribute a significant part of their income to a religious leader and to initiatives of the confraternity in Senegal. Conversation among these men often centres on news from back home. Political conflicts splitting the community affect migrants and vice versa. To some extent, gossip and disapproval circulate in the migrant *dahira* to some extent as in the village or in Louga or Dakar. Migrants are recognized by all as full participants in life back home even though they may have been away physically for years at a time. It is striking that this form of migration – so heavily oriented towards "home" – should have remained relatively constant over several decades: there seems as yet little sign of any progression through various "ages of migration" (Sayad 1999).

Not all Senegalese migrants live in "village houses" or are active members of the local *dahira* (the long extracts from interviews in Castagnone et al. include several quite individual trajectories). However, this kind of incapsulated life in Italy certainly provides a firm basis for many migrants to remain heavily linked to home. It is crucial also that most men (the overwhelming majority of those interviewed by Carter and by Castagnone et al. were men) have wives and children in Senegal. There are few attempts to bring wives or children over: it appears to be a stably transnational family (often remaining apart for ten or fifteen years or more). Families are united only in Senegal during a trip home.

In thinking about the various groups of migrants I have referred to so far, and their varying propensity for transnationalism of the more developed form, I believe it is worth recalling Philip Mayer's classic comparison between "Red" and "School" Xhosa migrants in the South African city of East London in the 1950s (Mayer 1962, 1961)[6]. Mayer argued that if we want to understand how "Red" migrants in the urban context maintained such a close attachment to

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[6] "Red" migrants were "traditionalist in their customs and often in their dress and daily habits and attitudes, whereas "School" migrants were more "Westernized" or "urban". Red and School were different to some extent already in their villages of origin (School migrants had indeed more often been to mission-run schools in the countryside). But in the present context, it is Mayer's focus on the effects of social organization in the city which is interesting. The Xhosa migrants to East London did not cross national boundaries (although there were legal restrictions on their movements). But I believe the analogy stands nonetheless.

their village of origin, and such involvement in its affairs and conflicts, we need to understand above all the structure of their social lives in East London. Nearly all migrants – whether "Red" or "School" – maintained ties with home, went back periodically, and so on (albeit to differing degrees). So the difference was not so much one of the strength of individual attachments. The crucial difference between the two groups was that the Red lived among fellow-villagers in the city, whereas the School had more differentiated networks mixing people from different areas. In this way, the School migrants were less subject to control, and less continually stimulated by news, less involved in attempts to intervene in village affairs, exercise moral judgements on fellow-villagers, and so on. For Red migrants in East London, the sociological basis of the ability and the motivation to maintain active participation in village affairs even while living in the city lay (in considerable part) in the form of social relations maintained in the city. So were extended trips home.

I am not of course suggesting that all transnational practices are supported by the very communal forms of living of either a Murid *dahira* or forms of association between "Red" migrants in 1950s South Africa. It does, however, seem worth reflecting more in general on the specifically sociological bases of transnationalism, and in particular in the way the social life of migrants among themselves condition attitudes, identity and action. Much of the discussion of transnationalism focuses too exclusively on the individual relations migrants have across borders, and on the legal and technological factors which facilitate or restrict such ties (from border legislation to cheap air travel and the Internet). However, the social bases of social units often seem more crucial.

As Smith (2005: 236) has argued, some of the "first wave" of accounts of globalization tended to portray it "as an inexorable structural-economic transformation, operating outside of thought and human practice"; and not a few studies of transnationalism were influenced by this. So at present - as Conradson and Latham (2005) also argue - it seems important for the study of transnationalism to devote more attention to the practices which maintain communities, organizations and networks in being as viable realities. And this means studying the practices which maintain particular networks and social units as living realities: it cannot just be assumed that, say, two cousins will necessarily maintain relations with each other, or provide each other with mutual aid, thus producing a transnational tie. Even less, of course, can it be assumed that two Romanians or Moroccans will necessarily seek each other out. Indeed, nationality is often more a classification significant for outside observers (a classification on which data is readily available) than one which forms a basis for action of actors' themselves (our interviews contain numerous reminders that migrants do not always identify with their fellow nationals, and sometimes may even avoid them). A social unit like "the Armenian diaspora" for example, needs to be kept in being by continual exchanges, reunions, celebrations, passage of information. For many Armenians, this sociological basis often seems to be realized: in other cases, much less so.

Transnational communities are no different from other kinds of communities in this sense. However, many of the everyday practices used to maintain social units in being – eating together, say, or helping out with domestic work, or taking part in a village procession – may need to be substituted by others when geographical distance intervenes. Senegalese migrants maintain their families not only be remittances but also by long trips back every year or so (perhaps just a month, but often more – employed workers taking advantage of periods of unemployment, those self-employed in petty trading simply taking time off).

Certainly, it would be naïve to imagine that the capacity to maintain relationships at a distance varies primarily with technical factors like the access to, say, telephones. It may be affected by the *use* of telephones, but the use of telephones is a more sociological affair than the mere existence of the telephone network. Empirical research on the effects of geographical moves on telephone contacts show that the existence of the telephone does not solve the problem of distance. After a move, most contacts with friends, for example (even friends who are described as close emotionally, and with whom telephone calls were frequent before the move) drop away after a very short time (Mercier, de Gournay and Smoreda 1999). The technical possibility of telephone contact remains almost unchanged after the move but sociological conditions of telephone conversations include having something to say. In general, telephone contacts between individuals are closely correlated with face-to-face contacts (Claisse and Rowe 1993; Smoreda and Licoppe 1998; Smoreda and Thomas 2001), for many phone calls are about matters like appointments, arrangements for some meeting, sharing opinions about some past face-to-face event, talking about something someone else with whom we are in face-to-face contact has done or should do. It seems likely that friendships do not survive geographical separation well because the social context of activities and of shared events and persons who form the basis of the practices making up the relationship tend to fall away[7]. This is less the case for kin because many of the obligations and many of the indirect contacts and exchanges with other relatives remain in place anyway[8]. For this reason, telephone contacts between kin change (as Mercier et al. found, calls become less frequent but also longer) but they are much less likely to disappear than are calls to friends. In the case of the kin network, numerous exchanges between individuals *other* than the two directly involved form the backdrop maintaining the tie.

In any case it should be clear that practices of *some* type are necessary for maintaining ties. Groups, communities, kin relationships do not persist by themselves (whether in propinquity or at a distance): they always require what Wellman (1985) aptly calls "net work". Most transnational practices (even ones as elementary as making a phone call) require the work of many people in the background (cf. Becker 1982[9]), and so of networks; yet these very networks require maintenance via practices (even a family network needs to be renewed by exchanges, ceremonial and festive moments, talking, eating together[10], etc.).

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[7] Although friendship is often portrayed as a highly individual relationship, in reality it seems to depend heavily on other persons in the background (Eve 2002). These include persons with whom activities are carried out, persons about whom one talks, persons with whom one is in conflict, and many others. The importance of such third persons comes out clearly at moments when an individual's social configuration changes with, say, death of a spouse or divorce, but also with birth of a first child (cf. Bidart 1997).

[8] As Margaret Grieco (1987) has pointed out, indirect ties are fundamental in explaining why kin networks are often so effective and reliable in conveying aid. A often helps B not because of any great love but because not helping is liable to invoke problems with C and intervention from D.

[9] Becker's work on "art worlds" shows that the production of an art work is by no means the work of one individual alone, painting, composing, etc. in isolation. People like publishers, critics, gallery-owners, other artists, performers and many others have a *fundamental* role in the actual creation of the work in question. Becker clearly intends his work to have general sociological implications and takes art partly as an illustration of the fruitfulness of describing the entourage of persons who make a particular form of action possible. I cite it here to stress that transactional practices, too, may sometimes be represented in too individualistic a way, stressing the technical conditions but not the sociological ones.

[10] In her (1992) book on *Feeding the family*, Margaret De Vault stresses that through the various actions necessary for feeding the family, "women quite literally *produce* family life from day to day, through their joint activities with others" (p. 13). It is easy to drop into the assumption that the family unit exists naturally, but of course this is not so.

With regard to the study of transnational practices, this implies that more attention should be given to both the people "in the background" who are necessary to sustain a particular practice, and to the practices in other fields which may be necessary to maintain the networks. (Just as a series of other exchanges – direct or indirect – seem necessary as a backdrop to telephone conversations.)

As I have stressed, the problem is not just that of maintaining contacts between single individuals but also of maintaining the indirect contacts which form the context essential for maintaining living contacts with individuals. It is fairly clear how this occurs in cases like Mayer's Red migrants or also among those who live in a Murid *dahira*: living together in a shared flat, coordinating work together, worshipping together, talking of fellow-villagers, forming alliances, drinking together in East London, wearing certain kinds of clothes, dancing certain dances – all these are practices which maintain networks and maintain people involved with the village. But all relationships require constant practices in order to maintain a relationship alive. It is often not so easy to maintain even kin networks intact: this is testified in a way by the anxious attention many migrants give to choosing gifts to take back to relatives (for descriptions regarding Moroccan women in Italy, see Salih 2003), or by their willingness to undertake favours for relatives they may not especially like in order to maintain other kin relationships. It is also worth remembering that not all migrants may have the resources to maintain such ties: trips home may be essential for keeping kin networks active[11]. But trips home are also expensive since gifts are required for a large number of people, because it may be necessary to take several weeks off work, etc. Many Moroccan migrants in Italy cannot afford a trip home every year. In addition, it is worth remembering that visits home (and the connected "net work") have been nearly impossible while a migrant is undocumented or waiting for regularization; it is worth remembering, therefore, that the vast majority of migrants in Italy have spent a period (often several years) without documents.

As the various examples of the transnational practices (or lack of them) of different migrants in Italy seem to indicate, such sociological support giving meaning to a particular kind of tie with "home", to particular projects and careers, offering solidarity and mobility opportunities to particular people is not invariably available. For the majority of Romanian migrants, it seems to be kin ties (plus perhaps godparents) which are fundamental, and this provides an adequate basis for certain practices. For example, the various practices around construction of a house (an investment which is particularly common among our Romanian interviewees) may maintain certain kinds of family ties alive. Building or modernizing a house is an activity which encourages migrants to return home for family holidays at least, maintains a presence in the village, may be used by parents, involves a series of activities and exchanges which involve parents (especially fathers: it is often fathers who oversee the work, buy materials, and perhaps do some of the work themselves). In turn, this family network encourages and makes possible further types of transnational exchanges within the family.

On the other hand, other forms of transnational practices, which presuppose wider "community" type ties are rather lacking for most Romanian migrants in Italy (with the exception of Pentecostals). I have mentioned the lack of any real identification with a diaspora, the weak sense of common identity with co-nationals, the lack of enthusiasm for associations and the lack of active participation. This pattern can be understood (no less than

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[11] It may be relevant to mention here that among the Senegalese migrants interviewed by Castagnone et al. (2005), a small minority have more regular jobs (most are either self-employed or have the kind of jobs which are often interrupted by the end of a contract). It may be no accident that these men seem somewhat more "integrated" in Italian society (having more Italian friends, seeing other Senegalese much less socially). It is, of course, difficult to know the direction of the causality, if any.

for Mayer's Xhosa migrants or for the telephone traffic of French telephone users after a move of house) if we analyze the form of social life led by most Romanians in Turin. It is clear in most cases that this is heavily centred on the immediate family.

When transnational practices depend almost exclusively on kin ties, the rhythms of such practices obviously evolve with family life events. For example, it seems that among Romanian migrants, remittances tend to be substantial when parents are living in Italy and separated from children in Romania, but tend to fall abruptly to merely occasional gifts if the children moved to Italy (even money sent to parents seemed to follow this pattern: only when looking after grandchildren did grandparents receive remittances on a regular and substantial basis) (CESPI-FIERI 2007). As will be seen below, patterns of circular mobility also seem to vary according to a logic of the evolution of family ties in the life course.

Some similarities are in evidence when we look at the transnational practices of Moroccan migrants in Italy. Once again, we can see the combination of weak associational ties, lack of collective (as against individual) remittances[12], general pessimism regarding the possibility of political change (as the report on Moroccans illustrates, for some more educated Moroccans, the situation has recently changed with the accession of the new king; but it seems unchanged for the majority of migrants). For many Moroccans, as for many Romanians, religious centres are important bases for social life, as well as religious practice, important nodes of identity, places where one meets co-religionists and co-nationals one might not otherwise meet so often. In this sense, they certainly increase the density of contacts with co-nationals, contributing to something nearer to a "community", and reinforcement of identity, and thus indirectly contribute to the maintenance of attachment to 'home'. Although Ruba Salih's (2003) book on Moroccan women bears the word transnationalism in the title, the everyday practices she describes are overwhelmingly either practices maintaining kin ties across boundaries, or practices (e.g. Moroccan cuisine, decoration of the home using Moroccan elements in combination with others) which are part of the home-making of a Moroccan immigrant in Italy as much as a transmigrant fundamentally different from immigrants of the past.

For economic, as for political transnationalism, levels are also modest among Moroccans and Romanians. There are certainly individual instances of small businesses with links across frontiers, as described by both Mattia Vitiello's report and Pietro Cingolani's. Such individual businesses however seem relatively few in number when compared to the size of the two national groups in Italy (, along with Albanians, Romanians and Moroccans are the most numerous foreign nationalities in Italy) and as a proportion of total numbers of small businesses. Small business activity and self-employment are common among both Romanians and Moroccans in Italy, but the proportion whose business depends on transnational ties is very much smaller than, say, Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt's central American entrepreneurs in the USA. In their sample, 58% of all those in self-employment were engaged in transnational activities, and the percentage would have been even higher if Colombians had

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[12] As with Romanians, the exceptions to this are minor - small amounts of money being raised for a national disaster such as an earthquake. This kind of activity significantly implies no lasting link between a specific group of migrants coming from one particular village or region and a specific group of migrants from that area. In this sense it seems very different from the kind of initiative reported by Thomas Lacroix (2003, and in his report for the French team of this research): e.g. providing electricity (or a new school or pumped water) to one's own village.

Perhaps the most important type of aid given by Moroccan migrants in Italy is paying to have the body of a dead person flown back to their family in Morocco (see Mattia Vitiello's report).

been excluded, leaving only Salvadorans and Dominicans: Portes et al. 1999: Table 1)[13]. The persons interviewed by Portes and his colleagues seem to have worked mainly in businesses serving the local "community" of co-ethnics in particular areas of New York, Los Angeles, etc. and businesses which are bi-national or multi-national by definition: couriers, travel agents, importers, etc. In contrast, the small businesses of Moroccans and Romanians in Italy tend to serve a mainly Italian clientele, and are essentially local in nature; the small firms of Romanians are mostly in the building trade, whereas the most fruitful outlets for Moroccan business and self-employment are in distribution and catering: shops (especially food, but also in many other areas), restaurants, pizzerias, kebab houses, etc. (Camera di Commercio, Industria, Artigianato e Agricoltura di Torino 2005).

It is true that alongside these forms of self-employment and business enterprises, depending primarily on ties in Italy, there is also widespread petty trading which often does involve transnational ties. This does not emerge in the interviews conducted for the present research, because the interviews in Rome focused on more "middle-class" migrants; however, the pattern is widespread. For example many Moroccans, when they return home, drive back (taking the car on a boat) rather than flying, and use the occasion not only to take numerous presents but also various items which are cheaper in Italy than in Morocco (perhaps including the car itself), and which can thus be sold to acquaintances (see Saleh 2003 and Semi 2004 for examples). For most people, however, this is an occasional supplement to their income, not an economic strategy. It is true that a fair number of young men do undertake such trips more regularly, transporting cars, sometimes perhaps combining stolen goods with those bought second-hand. They are, therefore transnational entrepreneurs. However, as among young men in the Marseille area (Peraldi 2001, 2002), this kind of activity usually seems to be presented by migrants as a fall-back activity undertaken because of lack of ability to find a satisfactory job in Italy. Only rarely does it seem to be conceived of as a career and a proper business to be developed. In general, therefore, it seems more plausible to consider the majority of these entrepreneurs as undertaking an activity which is characteristic of a certain stage in the life-cycle.

It is possible, of course, that transnational activities may become more widespread as migrants become more rooted and acquire the social and economic capital necessary to exploit transnational niches (Portes' et al's "transnational entrepreneurs" were resident in the USA for slightly longer on average than either their "domestic entrepreneurs" or the employees of the same nationalities they interviewed). Romanians have been present in large numbers in Italy only since the mid-1990s, and although Moroccans are one of the oldest immigrant groups in Italy (mass migration was established already in the early 1980s), and notwithstanding the general progress made (cf. Mattia Vitiello's intermediate and final report on Moroccans in Italy), the financial situation of many quite long-standing migrants is still far from secure (integration in the Italian labour market is notoriously slow, even for natives). Time certainly is fundamental. However, it would obviously be as rash to imagine that transnational activities (or phenomena like associationism which are probably linked to some forms of transnationalism) will necessarily develop with time, just as it would be rash to assume that "assimilation" or falls in transnational ties will occur. Indeed, as has been asserted, the interesting question seems to be to ask precisely why there are differences between various groups and individuals.

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[13] A "transnational entrepreneur" was defined by Portes et al. as someone self-employed with or without employees who went back at least twice a year for business, and who declared that links with the home country and/or other countries were crucial for the success of the business.

In any case, it should not be assumed that the only entrepreneurial niches migrants can find will be those associated with frontiers. It is true that frontiers - and the different prices levels they often imply - provide entrepreneurial opportunities (as described by Ibn Khaldun back in the fourteenth century, and as exploited by smugglers throughout the centuries). And as has been described, there are certainly migrants in Italy - like the young Moroccan men I have mentioned - who exploit these differences created by boundaries between different regimes of economic regulation. But it is also true that frontiers also provide obstacles and extra costs. It is not surprising, therefore, that the importer of Romanian foods interviewed by Ambra Formenti decided it was cheaper to have salami made to a Romanian recipe in Austria, thus avoiding the need to face extra controls, difficulties in meeting EU food regulations, negotiations with customs, food inspectors, etc.[14] Significant also, that although there are many individual transporters working the route between Italy and Romania (obviously falling into the category of transnational entrepreneurs), much of the total business has been captured by medium-sized Romanian firms, who find it easier to spread the costs of handling difficulties with customs and police. Likewise, it is worth noting that the Moroccan trader interviewed by Mattia Vitiello had chosen to obtain his Moroccan goods from wholesalers in Marseille and Barcelona rather than dealing directly with Morocco. Once again, economies of scale often make it more profitable to concentrate the problems of (legal) importing from outside the EU, and managing the various regulations, in the hands of a medium-sized company, rather than handling it all oneself. In this sense, it may be misleading to concentrate on case-studies of successful transnational businesses: there may be major limits to the *numbers* of migrants able to sustain activities of this kind.

Economic logic, but also social logic often makes it more important for a small business or a self-employed person to cultivate local ties intensely than to bridge supply and demand in two different countries. In this context, it is significant that a number of Romanian migrants interviewed by the current research and previous research note that the greatest entrepreneurial opportunities in Romania since the fall of communism have been captured by people who have stayed and used their local ties and knowledge (Cingolani and Piperno 2005). Being present at the right moment, cultivating the right political ties, patiently negotiating the right conditions, all these things are often more important than bridging a frontier.

Some businesses, such as the courier services very prominent in Portes et al's study, and present also among Romanians in Italy, perhaps require relatively elementary social links (and corresponding net work to maintain them): perhaps little more than an adequate number of acquaintances concentrated in a particular migrant area and home area to form an initial customer base, plus a minimum of trust (drivers are entrusted with packets and remittances). Other kinds of business (manufacturing at a distance but often even importing) require more complex organization and embeddedness.

It is perhaps significant in this context that the incentives for investment in Morocco provided by the government (eager to attract the resources of migrants and channel them into investment projects) often seem to be met with scepticism by migrants in Italy. Notwithstanding the favourable conditions offered to migrant investors, those with money to spare often prefer to invest in business in Italy. The difficulty of really knowing how trustworthy partners are and overseeing activities evidently seems discouraging. Many Moroccans, like many Romanians, have projects for starting up some sort of small business –

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[14] The interview was conducted before the entry of Romania into the EU in January 2007.

a shop, car repair business, small restaurant, etc. However, these plans (which often remain just plans) are not so much the kind of dynamic investment development agencies dream of, but rather part of a strategy of return. In this kind of context, a shop or restaurant (perhaps open just a few months of the year) fit in to a strategy which provides a minimum of income, perhaps combined with other sources (perhaps even including migration). This kind of strategy is, of course, more feasible where the general economic climate is somewhat more favourable (as in the case of Romania in the years leading up to EU membership).

Among persons interviewed in Italy for the present research, perhaps the most successful case in which small businesses (but also individuals) have used links with home regards the flexible use of labour. As Pietro Cingolani's report on the transnational practices of Romanians in Italy describes, circulatory migration is common – at least in some towns (like Marginea, the site of our fieldwork) where migration is a very common strategy. Even people who have no intention of leaving Marginea, and who have stable jobs, may work for a month or two (e.g. during the summer holidays of teachers) in Italy. Others who do not have a fixed job of this kind but who combine several small sources of income are happy to include migratory work in this overall strategy – apparently without any intention of "emigrating".

A significant part of the seasonal workforce in some sectors of agriculture (fruit-picking, wine-harvesting, taking cattle or sheep to their summer pastures) in some local areas of Italy is now composed of Romanians undertaking a "working holiday". In agriculture, the employers are almost always Italian. But temporary migrants also form a significant part of the workforce in services such as the care of the elderly and in the building trade. In these cases, it is migrants themselves who tend to initiate this form of migration. A Romanian with his own micro-enterprise in the building trade may telephone from Italy to an acquaintance back home, saying he has need of an extra hand. In other words, one advantage of such small firms is their ability to draw on a transnational supplementary workforce in a very flexible way. This kind of access to workers who are trusted, or with whom the employer may have worked previously (so known to be skilled and reliable) has obvious attractions for a small business. But it also may have social advantages (employers may be pleased to do a favour to a friend or relative). And it helps employers themselves to renew their contacts with people who are well rooted in a town back "home" (for whom occasional work provides the supplement of income necessary for remaining in the village).

The system has certainly been facilitated by changes in border regulations. In 2002, as part of preparations for Romania's entry into the EU, Italy abolished the requirement for a visa. Romanian citizens could therefore enter legally for tourist reasons for up to three months with a minimum of bureaucracy. In theory of course, they could not work, but the costs of entry were reduced considerably (with some exceptions[15]), and in practice it made it more feasible to undertake short working trips.

An important result of Cingolani's fieldwork interviews concerns simply the number of people who had undertaken such short trips (ranging from a month or so to three or six months or more). This kind of migratory movement is difficult to detect. Being undocumented, it is obviously not registered in most official statistics on immigration. But even research based on interviews tends to exclude them because of difficulties in making

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[15] The situation is not entirely straightforward, because measures intended to demonstrate that Romania was prepared to regulate entry in preparation for EU entry meant that there were occasional tightenings of regulation – for example, taking away passports of migrants who had overstayed on a tourist permit when they came back into Romania.

contact. Thus the interviews undertaken in Italy by the current research and by previous research projects contain almost no interviews with persons engaged in this kind of circulatory migration, and very few even indirect references to these kinds of movements among others. Yet Cingolani's interviews in Marginea suggest that *most* people had undertaken this kind of movement, and very many were still engaged in it. In other words, there is an important methodological point at issue: interviews may be necessary in sending countries, or at least special techniques and great attention during interviews in receiving countries.

As already mentioned, this form of circulatory migration seems to have clear links with the regulations governing the cost of crossing the frontier. Other studies of changes in European regulation also suggest changes in legislation may have had similar effects. Serge Weber (200??), for example, noted an increase in back-and-forth movements from Poland to Italy after Poland's entry into the EU. At an earlier stage of European integration, it has been suggested (Reyneri 1979; Pugliese 2002) that introducing free circulation of labour in the EEC encouraged Italian migrants to adopt strategies going back and forth rather than settling stably in Germany. It will be interesting to see if the further relaxation of controls on the movement of Romanians with entry into the EU has effects in further encouraging movements of this kind. The issue is interesting from several points of view: it has been suggested by Müller?? that this kind of strategy pursued by Italians is one possible reason for relatively poor results of the children of Italians in German schools, as compared to several other second-generation groups.

In any case, it is interesting to think that a decrease in the costs or difficulty of crossing borders may have as a major result not only, or not so much, an increase in total migration flows (the effect feared by many in Germany in the 1960s and often feared in subsequent border liberalizations), but rather an increase in transnational/circulatory migration which has the function of preserving the viability of life back home. Once again, it is worth noting that legislative changes are only one element in the calculation. For clearly, individual migrants differ in the extent to which this form of migration – which, as I say, appears to fit descriptions of forms of migration oriented to the preservation of viable life in the village[16] - seems attractive. Cingolani notes that in Marginea this strategy of using short trips is one adopted mostly by people who have firm family ties and are in their forties and fifties, much less by younger people[17]. As I have noted, in semi-rural towns like Marginea, minor jobs, work on one's plot of land, selling a little agricultural produce or other petty trading, a little building work, may all serve as a basis for "getting by". Extra income gained by a month or two's work provides a useful supplement in income – enabling one to pay a daughter's university fees, buy equipment for the house (white goods, a new television, etc.), rebuild part of the house, etc. So a wife/mother may willingly substitute a friend or relative in Italy while the latter takes a month's holiday from caring for an elderly person. Likewise, a husband/father may be glad to spend a couple of months on a building site in Turin while a particular contract lasts. The rationality of this kind of strategy depends on the objective not so much of maximising income but of maximising standard of living (plausibly higher in

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[16] Among such descriptions, Sayad's description of migration in a "first age" comes to mind (Sayad 1999). But forms of migration which reconcile life in one place with work outside are common also among internal weekly "migrants", who choose to work in a city. This is not always just an individual strategy, but may also be a way of preserving village life. For a Breton village maintained by young people in this way, see Eve, forthcoming.
[17] Of course short trips are not always an intended strategy. Some people – including some young people - may return from Italy after just a few months simply because they do not manage to find work. The downturn in demand for labour in the building trade in the Turin area in 2006 badly affected Romanian male migrants.

Romania for many migrants than in Italy)[18]. Some people with stable conjugal relationships[19] or family commitments seem to want to maintain a way of life in places like Marginea, feeling their own life is better and less stressful than it would be if they moved permanently to Italy, and that even if their children live abroad (perhaps in two or three different locations), it is important to maintain a welcoming base for migrant children returning for holidays, etc. The extent and duration of this pattern of circulatory mobility in Romania (and elsewhere) may thus depend on the attractiveness of these social factors as much as on changes in border regulations. It would be interesting, for example, to know whether the pattern Cingolani discovered in Marginea is characteristic mainly of certain types of semi-rural towns, or whether it is common also in cities. As it would be interesting to know whether the pattern may also affect younger people in some towns, or whether it remains characteristic of middle-aged couples with stable conjugal relationships. In other words, it would be interesting to know more about the social preconditions which give meaning to this kind of pattern.

Another set of questions raised by Cingolani's findings in Marginea regards the kind of organization of work in Italy which makes this kind of migration possible. Agriculture has of course always had marked seasonal needs, and the building trade is well known for sharp fluctuations in demand, as well as for fragmentation into innumerable small and micro-firms (fragmentation meaning that demand for labour is even more fluctuating for the single firm). Care work is a service which one might have thought of as needing a constant presence and so excluding this kind of pattern; yet it seems that the pattern is common among care workers. In reality, the need of a permanent carer to take a break – either for a holiday or to cope with some crisis in her own family - create needs for temporary substitutes. And some jobs are quite short term in duration (e.g. helping an elderly person recover from the effects of a fall). Presumably most factories and shops would be reluctant to accept this kind of shifting workforce, but in a situation where many workers come through agencies and "cooperatives", it may be that temporary workers would be accepted. In any case, the pattern seems worth investigating more fully.

It is interesting also that there seems to be a certain amount of tacit institutional acceptance of, and adaptation to, the pattern in Romania. It might be thought that schools, hospitals, local councils, etc. might object to their employees working in Italy in their holidays or in periods where they have taken leave, especially as the issue of brain drain and of staff shortages is often a subject of controversy (see the articles in both the local and national press collected by Emilia Drogoreanu for examples). However, the levels of effective toleration and adaptation to what is perhaps seen as an inevitable strategy in general seem quite high. Perhaps schools, hospitals and other organizations fear that attempts to sanction employees could be counter-productive and lead to personnel leaving permanently. Allowing employees to stay away for short periods may be seen as an acceptable compromise in a local ambience where migration is widely recognized as a strategy open to most people.

Most of the practices discovered by our research are examples of "bottom up" transnationalism. In these cases, as I have stressed, the transnationalism relies on the relevant "communities" and networks in question being sustained by everyday practices of migrants

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[18] On the perils of identifying standard of living with income, the most penetrating statement (highly relevant for understanding the logic of migrants' decisions) remains Sen 1987.

[19] Interviewees with Romanian migrants quite often bring out the multiple connections between migration decisions and events in family history like separation, divorce, and deaths and illnesses of close family members. This is a fundamental factor structuring the capacity to maintain a particular social field, and therefore also a transnational social field.

themselves. However, there are obviously also more "top down" forms, where it is an organization which provides the framework coordinating and making possible social action in two or more countries. International organizations in Italy naturally employ Romanians and Moroccans along with other nationalities, and thus provide the organizational support for careers in more than one country – career structures where, as for Watson's (1964) "spiralists", geographical mobility may be a prime means of occupational mobility[20]. Industrial firms producing and selling in more than one country naturally provide similar career structures, leading employees to shift from one country. If we had undertaken research in the North East of Italy, no doubt we would have found Romanian technicians working for Italian firms (in textiles and other industries) coordinating work in the two countries, transferring skills, etc. (Stocchiero 2002).

Among the educated Moroccan migrants who made up Mattia Vitiello's interviewees in Rome, there were several people whose links with Morocco depended in part on this sort of organizational framework more than on configurations created by migrants themselves. In this context, it is worth noting that, in general, the occupational opportunities for skilled migrants in Italy are notoriously slight. A considerable number of posts are reserved either for Italian citizens or for people who have an Italian diploma (procedures for obtaining recognition of foreign diplomas often exist but are long and laborious). Above all, a lengthy period of waiting is often necessary even for Italians; such long waits may not be feasible for migrants. Among the few posts available to foreigners are those where knowledge of a language, contacts with a particular immigrant "community", or knowledge of local conditions in a country of emigration are considered crucial. For this reason many educated migrants in Italy have sought jobs in this sort of niche. Many have become *mediatori culturali*, translating and mediating between public agencies (social work agencies, courts, local councils, etc.) and migrants; others have found jobs in development agencies. The connections which several of Mattia Vitiello's interviewees have with Morocco are due to occupying this kind of occupational position. Specialization in providing information about Morocco and Moroccans has led these women and men to increase their ties with their country of origin. Notwithstanding personal trajectories which in many ways led away from maintaining close links with Morocco (e.g. a break with the family of origin over marrying an Italian man, failure to find co-nationals of similar status in Italy, forming friendship groups formed mainly of Italians), these people were led for work reasons to multiply their ties with Moroccans in Italy and with Morocco. In other words, both contacts with "the Moroccan community" in Italy, and ties with Morocco and Moroccan institutions can be seen, in a way, as a product of integration trajectory in Italy, given the few niches effectively open in the Italian labour market.

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[20] In an analysis of contrasting fractions of the British middle classes, Watson contrasted "spiralists" - for whom insertion in a national career structure was the key to success - with "burgesses", for whom rootedness in a local context was the crucial factor. Occupations which involved developing a local clientele and solving problems which necessitated mobilizing local relationships – from solicitors to local industrialists or shop-owners – tended to make people into burgesses, who devoted much time and trouble to cultivating local ties. For spiralists, in contrast, upward occupational mobility often involved moving to another geographical area, because what was important was the career structure provided by organizations. Some work on transnationalism has stressed rootedness in two or more local contexts, but achieving this is far from easy. Most careers still seem to depend either on organizational resources (which may of course be international as well as national) or on deep rootedness in one locality.

For several of Vitiello's interviewees, working on development projects, or investigating the implications of the new family law[21] led to visits to Morocco, work with various Moroccan governmental bodies and local groups, and with institutions for "Moroccans abroad" like the Hasan II Foundation. These contacts, in turn, stimulated interest among some of these interviewees regarding politics in their home country. Two women interviewed were interested in increasing awareness of the new, less "traditionalist" family law, and even in influencing discussion of connected issues in Morocco itself. For one of these women, this renewed interest is the product of her work for an association promoting the rights of women, for the other, work in an association promoting local development.

The cautiously optimistic climate which has prevailed in Morocco in many ambiances interested in reform since the accession of the new king shows how some forms of political transnationalism may oscillate heavily with the opportunities offered by national authorities – whether this is the interest of migrants own country of origin, or the that of a country of residence like the U.S., showing intense interest in intervention, say, in the Caribbean[22].

Some journalistic, but also some academic, discussion of behaviour which spans more than one nation-state is unduly breathless. Such wonder seems a sort of backhanded testimony to the hold of the national framework in our mindset[23]: when people's lives cross boundaries this is cause for wonder, and is assumed to be something new. In this dominant perspective, what is assumed to be "growing transnationalism" is effectively represented as an almost inevitable trend in post-modern times. In contrast, it seems worth doing comparative analysis, comparing cases where particular transnational practices occur and others where they do not. As several recent commentaries on the concept of transnationalism have stressed, it seems necessary to devote more attention to the specific practices which sustain transnational ties. Among these, it is essential to consider not just the direct practices such as telephone calls, but also the organization of life among migrants in their everyday lives in places like Turin. It is this background "net work" which is necessary to sustain social fields of any kind, whether geographically clustered or scattered. As some of our interviewees in Rome show, it may be the work of people in an organization which provides the substratum supporting a single individual's capacity to sustain transnational ties. In many other cases (the majority among our interviewees), such work is done informally in the forms of life created by migrants. Most of the transnational practices we documented among Romanians and Moroccans in Italy were supported and given meaning essentially by kin[24]. For this reason, they were affected by the rhythms of development of kin regrouping and life-cycles: deaths, divorce, separation, regrouping of the most significant members of the family in one single country – all these events could radically affect transnational practices. It seems likely that transnational ties will

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[21] With support from the new king and various ministers, a new family law was introduced in 2004, after three years of consultations and work in a commission. The new law has been widely seen as a milestone and provides a much more egalitarian framework for women regarding matters such as responsibility for the family, custody and divorce, as well as rights for children.

[22] As has been pointed out, a good deal of the work on transnational ties has focused on migrants to the USA coming from small states in the Caribbean and Central America. This raises the question as to whether some types of political transnationalism, for example, may not be specific to small countries which often do appear to be "America's back yard".
It may also be worth wondering whether the economic dynamics of small states are not specific.

[23] It seems worth recalling here Norbert Elias' critique of the tendency to assume a framework of life within stable nation-states, while at the same time (e.g. Elias 1978) ignoring this as an implicit presupposition.

[24] In Romania, fictive kin (godparents) also seem important for some migrants: see Cingolani's report for the current research.

remain important in the broader sense alluded to at the beginning of these notes: people will continue to maintain many affective ties with Romania/Morocco, will create hybrid identities, and so on, in the same way as most migrants have done in previous centuries. In many cases, links will last for many years, also to third countries: many Moroccans in Italy have close ties with relatives in France, and these ties may serve also for exchanges in the second generation.

On the other hand, bases wider than kin seem to play a major role only for limited numbers of Moroccans and Romanians in Italy. This restricts many forms of transnational practices, which appear linked to development of strong consciousness of being a unified diaspora, and of creation of numerous career opportunities for young people abroad. Neither Romanians nor Moroccans have really created enclaves in Italy nor the type of enclave economic activity oriented primarily towards "the community" and "back home". Political transnationalism is also weak, except for minorities. Although we cannot exclude that some transnational practices recorded elsewhere may develop strongly in the future, it would be forcing the evidence to imagine that all migrations are similar, and that transnational consciousness develops necessarily. In fact many transnational ties require the cooperation (directly and indirectly) of quite large numbers of people. It is by no means automatic that such networks will be created and kept in being, for they require constant maintenance. Many migrants have constructed lives which concentrate on everyday practices which maintain quite limited networks.

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