Under the Brunt of the Crisis: Life Trajectories of Migrant Care Workers in Italy

1. Foreword

In Italy we had one of the longest economic crises in the EU, which lasted until 2015, while other European countries were already beginning to recover. During the crisis the number of people in absolute poverty grew from 2,6 million[1] in 2011 to 4,4 in 2013 and 4,1 in 2014. Considering that the Italian welfare system has no anti-poverty safety-net measures, the first aid services of Caritas and Third sector initiatives distributing food or clothing, which are usually the main resource of poor migrants (as well as providing vital support in finding jobs), have, as the reader may imagine, increasingly had to support Italian nationals in poverty. As in various other European countries, this clash of interests has been taken as a pretext by the populist anti-EU parties fomenting discontent and resentment against immigrants. The humanitarian refugee crisis of 2011/14, due to the exposure of Italy's coastline to arrivals by sea, meanwhile became constant reference in the media and in the political debate, aggravating contrasts and cleavages and spreading a sense of insecurity and exposure to new risks.

It is worth noting that, precisely in these years of economic crisis, the labour market niche of domestic and care jobs, which had long been the reserve of migrant workers, saw an increasing presence of national workers: in 2005, before the crisis, the Italian domestic workers recorded were 136,000. During the crisis, in 2014, they almost doubled (206,000) whereas migrant (regular) workers in this sector peaked in 2012 (816,000), but, as the crisis continued, they numbered only 693,000 in 2014 (INPS, 2016).

This substitution effect makes of Italy an extremely clear case of a model of "subordinate" integration of migrants in the labour market, which is common to Southern Europe (with some differences in Portugal) and which differs profoundly from the backlash against multiculturalism and the forms of stricter regulation of entry often preceded by pre-admission tests in continental and Northern countries (Kofman et al., 2015). It seems particularly useful to isolate the ways the conditions changed for migrants under the most violent effects of the crisis in a semi-legal economy in which their presence is in any case an essential resource due to the country's major care deficit (Bettio et al., 2006).

2. Theoretical approach

The paper builds on a survey conducted over three years (2011/2013) in Tuscany Region with (male and female) migrant care workers collecting long biographical interviews, but it also benefits from an extraordinary confluence of lines of research to be seen in the literature, which make up the theoretical background we refer to here.

First of all, we start by criticizing the male breadwinner model of migration, which described migration processes as the initiative of a male first migrant, unattended by family dependents, who, only after achieving solid integration in the Fordist economy of the receiving country (a job and a house) through family reunification involved women, whose working activity in any case was deemed only secondary. However, highly feminized migration flows became increasingly frequent, also coming under the focus of research. Feminist studies in the '80s and '90s, following the seminal papers by Moroksavic (1983, 1984), led to a better understanding of the so-called "new" highly feminized migration flows (Pedraza, 1991; Tienda and Booth, 1991; Koser and Lutz, 1998) in which women migrated alone in search of work – described as a grass-roots reaction against globalization (Sassen, 2000) and disruption of the former economic equilibrium of their countries in the transition to post-Fordism. As early as the '90s in Italy the first surveys investigating the feminized flows of domestic or care workers often connected their migration projects and their clear

agency attitude to a disruption of their families or a marginal family condition (lone parent, widow, unmarried girl) (Campani, 1990; Favaro and Tognetti, 1991; Vicarelli, 1994); this could be seen as a specific exception to the still valid model of the male breadwinner. Only in more recent years did debate begin to focus on a more general transformation induced by globalization "de l'ouvrier immigré au travailleur sans papiers" (Morice and Potot, 2010) underlying the connection between informal markets and the new service economy in which women were an important part of the "fourmies de la mondialisation" (Tarrius, 2002) belonging to the more general transformation towards "Transnationalism from below*"* (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998).

At the same time a better understanding developed of the migration model of Southern European countries, often thanks to the contribution of feminist researchers: a model common to countries which only recently ceased to be the open border of Europe to be crossed migrating to other, richer countries and became, after the closure of fortress Europe, a receptor of new migration flows, often of circular ones (Anthias and Lazaridis, 2000; Kofman et al., 2000; Morokvasic et al., 2003) targeted to specific work requirements in the grey economy. Among these "niches of subordinate integration" (Calavita, 2005), agriculture for men and services for women (Baldwin-Edwards, 2002; Carchedi et al., 2003), the long-term care of elderly persons was certainly the job that benefited most in the repeated amnesties which characterized the legalization process of migrants in these countries. But also in other countries separate regulation of care work often granted greater access rights or ex-post, de-facto regularization measures or semi-legal statuses, as a proof of its growing importance in social practices and in the governance of migration.

From all this is emerging a new image of women (first migrants): women in fact have always migrated in almost the same proportion as men but were simply not seen in the old model, whereas the turn to transnationalism in migration studies in fact recasts the implications of migration for both genders: the migratory process is in both cases an experience that entails a redefinition and a shift in their family interconnections and often involves complex family strategies. Nevertheless, at least in the case of women *first migrants*, the whole business has more weighty and possibly even more dramatic implications for other members of the family. In this connection the "transnational family" or "transnational motherhood" approach (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Herrera-Lima, 2001) seems to us particularly useful. However, this approach was superseded by a slightly different interpretation at the turn of the century, namely the "global chains of care" model (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002), which was built on the long distance migratory flows of women from the Philippines, Indonesia, Puerto Rico and South America, at the level of theory putting all too final an end to the model based on the idea of the "theft" of care resources perpetrated by the advanced countries on the developing ones. Even if, from a general point of view, the diagnosis is also sound for Europe, in this approach the image of migrant women is a bit too passive as victims of globalization, understating their agency capacity and ability to cope with difficult tasks and circumstances. And yet this approach has steadily and uncritically been adopted in Italy in many research reports on care workers. Our impression is that we can now take a new look at the model in the light of recent experience in the countries of Southern Europe where, after the fall of the Berlin wall, a new migration flow from East to South developed. These women were in general not so young and had grown-up children, unlike the women lacking educational qualifications from the Third World studied by the global chains approach. And again, migrant care workers in Southern countries seem to constitute a case of clear artificial re-racialization, particularly apt for study taking an intersectional approach between gender, ethnicity and class (Hill Collins, 1991; Campani, 2003). Another difference to be underlined in these recent migration flows is the disproportionate amount of elderly care as compared to childcare and domestic work. Again, we have to thank the contribution of a series of leading feminist scholars (Anderson, 2000; Lutz 2008; Morel, 2015) who documented well the historical recovery of domestic work in these countries, and at the same time the blurring of boundaries between domestic and care tasks, also among care workers, domestic aids and au pair girls. All in all, the Southern countries offer a case study in which the intersections

between the regulation of legalization of entry and residence, the immigrant-in-the-family model as a new care regime and the semi-legal labour market rules are only more clearly interconnected, but in many respects their combination might be applicable to other countries.
Moreover, Italy offers a case study in which, in our opinion, it is easier to measure the agency freedom of migrants in the original sense attributed by Sen (1985), that is the individual's real freedom to choose, which goes beyond inequalities in resources, embracing his/her capabilities to achieve positive goals, even if bound by social and environmental factors (Hobson, 1990). Often immigrant care workers of the East/South flow develop firmly transnational identities (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Basch et al., 2004), forever shifting on the borders of different ways of life, maximizing their utility in terms of welfare, political freedom and economic opportunities, wherever they may be, for the having.

3. Methodology of the survey

Given these theoretical issues, we naturally favoured a qualitative methodological approach[2] for our research, collecting 49 biographical narratives delivered as spontaneously as possible, besides the difficulties they may have with the language. Taking a critical perspective on the global chains of care approach, the sample was formed so as to compare the experience of long-distance immigrants (Peruvians) and immigrants from shorter distances – from the ex-Soviet countries of the East (Moldavia, Ukraine) or even immigrants from ex-Accession countries who have since become European citizens (Romanians). Moreover, assembling the sample, apart from differentiation in the legalization procedures, we also sought a balance between "pure" care workers and (male and female) workers combining care work with other tasks, domestic or otherwise.

4. The transformation of the care market resulting from the crisis

The interviews were carried out at the very time when the effects of the lasting crisis began to make themselves felt in the care work sector, too. The available data reveal that after three years of crisis households had reduced economic resources, trying to manage at least in part by themselves and getting the care workers to perform more domestic services (Ismu-Censis, 2013), as many of our interviewees[3] pointed out.

> You can't find work anywhere. You could before, but then the people couldn't afford to have someone in the house, perhaps they manage by themselves now because they just can't pay someone else anymore. Less Italians are looking for help, I think. There are two things. The economic situation, the families look after their old folks themselves, and more competencia [*competition*], more people are looking for work. (11_F_Peru_58_1997)

> Now lots of families try to do it by themselves and all, because it's really a crisis that … Now I hear a lot of women looking for a proper job, care work and all and they don't find it. So many of them just go away. […] It's hard now because so many call, they want it and don't find it, they've been in Italy many years, they know the language, not just the ones that have just arrived. (1_F_ Ukraine_41_2006)

Until a few years ago, the Long Term Care sector of the Mediterranean care system was the "entry" sector migrants could rely on, especially the irregular ones. On the one hand, there was the heavy demand of the households, and on the other hand the loopholes normally tolerated in legalization policies and unofficial labour market practices. The families were happy to pay relatively low undeclared wages to the latecomers (often on the basis of national or local care payment provisions

added to the elderly family members' pensions). They would then take advantage of the possibilities of patronage (Sciurba, 2015) and help in the subsequent process to obtain a residence permit, regular hiring or family reunification as a lever in verifying the quality of the care supplied by persons hastily taken on through a network of indirect acquaintances, fundamentally based on word-of-mouth. At the same time, the widespread practice of 'round the clock' live-in care (favoured by the fact that the old peoples' accommodations are generally owned rather than rented) offered initial response to the needs of the late comers (work and accommodation as well as pay, albeit below the market rates but appreciably higher than the pay in the sending country, there being no subsistence costs). The crisis saw a great change in the market: unqualified supply increased greatly and the remuneration was reduced for all (whether expert or not), while live-in care work as first job on arrival, although available, became a privilege long sought after. There was no longer any straightforward progression so that, as had been the case before, despite the years spent in Italy the share of live-in family assistants continued steadily to decrease.
The reduction in pay is attested by this interviewee, who also put her finger on the transformation from care market located in the big cities to a nationwide phenomenon:

> I've seen even in south Italy, where there isn't much development, in Salerno, even in Campania, lots of Russian women, Moldavians, so very many, and I said would you believe it! I thought this went on in the cities, but in the countryside too! […] I thought in the city, because the children go to work and the parents need it. But in the country! What's sure is that they come in the pay drops, it drops a lot, I used to earn 800 euro and now I earn 600. (2_F_Peru_58_1998)

The competition between flows of "European" citizens from the East or migrants from ex-Soviet countries who accept lower pay is seen as the main cause of the change in opportunities – a sort of unfair competition with lowering of professional standards, which creates divisions between the nationalities involved, but also between the more expert migrants who have been in Italy for some time and the late comers:

> For example, I earn 937 with a pay packet, but I know that in the area where I work there are Romanians who earn 700 euro. […] I don't know, I think it's cash-in-hand. And so… Yes… the Italians look out for them, the Romanians, because they earn less and it wasn't like that before, you earned 850 they paid you cash-in-hand. (25_M_Peru_43_2006)

> Mind you, I was always used to working and earning. I wouldn't be with an old person for 700 euro. I swear. […] And then, day and night. And in doing everything, they load the family on you, too, do this, do the ironing, do this, do that. (3_F_Romania_52_1999)

> When the European Community charter came more people came there was more competencia [*competition*] …. for work. Last year, as I didn't find work I went back to my country. I went to my country two months, and when I arrived I didn't find. There's so much competencia, at the help centre they had 20-30-40-50 people…Us [*Peruvians*] mostly, but so many Romanians, too, Albanians. (11_F_Peru_58_1997)

> They say the Albanians, Ukrainians and Pole earn less but [*the employers*] aren't happy. They no good with the old people, the granny, but I no know, they say, I no know. (7_F_Peru_67_1999)

And, as crisis reaches out, the competition of Italian care workers (who had previously given up this sort of work) is making itself felt, and feared.

> And caregivers, they need caregivers. But Romanian, Philippine, Peruvian, doesn't matter. I mean, there are more and more Italian people that'll do this work. (20_M_Romania_58_2007)

5. The double-edged effects of the crisis on the care workers' histories

Analysis of the biographical and work histories of our interviewees reveals extremely diversified responses to the conditions produced by the crisis. In these histories we find ample evidence of the essential ambivalence of the crisis which, as pointed out by Morin in in his celebrated contribution (1976: 161), "sees the combined emergence of forces for disintegration and regeneration, with the germination of 'healthy' processes (research, strategy, invention) and 'pathological' tendencies (myth, magic, rites)". Thus the critical conjuncture clearly constitutes a turning point giving rise to degenerative or, on the other hand, emancipatory effects on the histories of the care workers. The strategies adopted to cope with the new, changed state of the labour market are manifold.
In many cases, with the outbreak of the crisis our interviewees – especially the late comers – seem to remain literally trapped in a circuit of short-term jobs. It may be a matter of temporarily substituting other caregivers who go back to their countries for their holidays, or care work with old people in critical conditions, more often than not ending all too soon with the death of the person cared for. On top of the stress of precarious employment there is, at the emotional level, the heavy psychological burden resulting from repeatedly having to deal with the decline and death of the care recipient. The result is a serious risk of falling into states of utter depression – effectively summed up with the expression "mal d'Italia" (Italy sickness) which, an interviewee told us, is common among the caregivers (18_F_roman_39_2002) –, to the extent that return to their countries of origin may take on a certain urgency.

> *Int.: How long was it, with this old fellow?*
> Until the end. I haven't been with anyone, I haven't had the luck of being so long with a person. The longest I've been was with him, two years and seven months. Very little with the others, a year. This year's a disaster, that's why I'm going away. (36_F_Moldova_62_2003)

> I'd already had that experience…they called me for a week, a boy, to substitute. A steady job and I went to do it…and the result was that I finished and the day after he died. He must've died because he was one of those they'd already given a short time to live […] And from one day to the next he got quite worse and hadn't … hadn't much longer. (21_M_peru_51_1993)

In some cases response to the dwindling opportunities for employment resulting from the crisis – at least with the 'classical' live-in arrangement – is increased readiness to accept working conditions that from the very outset are seen to be particularly heavy with little security. Such was the experience of a Romanian woman who had gone through a long period of temporary jobs and substitutions, and decided to accept work as caregiver assisting an elderly woman suffering from Alzheimer's. The convenience of the live-in "steady job" led this woman to ignore the warnings of her more experienced compatriots who immediately saw all the problems arising over the condition of the elderly woman.

> I was trying to find a job, once again having no work. […] "Would you like a substitution in M.?" Yes, I accepted. It's normal, I can't get by without work. Then the substitution finished. "What'll I do now? Where can I go?". A Romanian woman [*had*] gone away

> because…Because she was tired, tired. So I say [*she sighs*] no matter what the job's like, I want it because I need to work! They all told me "No! You regret it!" It was a woman aged 100 with Alzheimer's, with aggressive dementia. After 20 days of hospital I thought "Mamma mia! How can I manage with this woman at home?" When I was good, she told I was an angel sent in heaven to care for the sick, otherways she said "filthy, bloody, whore!" (19_F_Romania_45_2010)

However, analysis of the biographical and work histories also reveals proactive strategies in response to the changed conditions of the care work market, adopted mainly by the more expert caregivers who had been living in Italy for a relatively long time. So it was that a woman of Ukrainian origin who arrived in Italy in 2001 explained that, with the new competitiveness now characterising the sector, word-of-mouth contacts among the employer families no longer suffices to guarantee the professional qualities and reliability of the caregivers. Consequently, the need arises for them to invest in formal certification of their work experience and professionalization of their competences.

> I have references, I asked for them…Before when I worked, I didn't…you know, in those times they didn't ask for references, people looked for caregivers so, as the families give telephone numbers, they looked for caregivers that other families knew, you might know a friend who has a caregiver … so you only had to make a phone call "Yes, I know someone". Now they ask for references. When I realised they asked for references, too, I asked for references and I did a course for caregivers. (45_F_Ukraine_60_2001)

Similarly, among the caregivers who have been in Italy for some time and had a range of experience in the sector there is a greater awareness of the requirement for professional standards now characterising care work. Thus investing in courses for qualifications becomes a deliberate strategy for the caregivers to enhance their professional profiles.

> At that time, I mean 2004, 2005, 2006, it was less complicated than today because today it turns out that you have to do the OSA course or the OSS course[4], that sort of thing, or a minimum of theory, also in nursing, otherwise you're a nobody, even if you've had experience "I've worked in this job, and this one too" you're a nobody. […] All the people I know, speaking of those who come from South America, they always come with this idea they've got in their heads with finding a steady job because they say as long as they get paid, and get the full wage, and don't spend anything, but now they won't be able to do that anymore because, as I said, now they're asking for these types of courses it if someone comes and says more or less "thanks" and "ciao"… If you don't learn the language at once then you've already become a bit … It's not like it used to be, "come, work, but do you know the language?" "No" and at the end with gestures, they made themselves understood with gestures. (40_M_Peru_37_2003)

> This school gives me some confidence, dealing with a family, even with an elderly woman, even a self-sufficient woman. When they know that you've done school for assistance, then they behave differently towards you … they have confidence, too! […] What I want when I finish this ADB school, I've heard they also do OSS for health and hospital. I'll see what I can do. (20_M_Romania_58_2007)

6. The revealing effects of the crisis: surprising agency capacity

Analysis of the interviewees' life and work histories lead us also, somewhat surprisingly, to the discovery of various cases where the critical state of the economy and its repercussions on the care work market distinctly reveal the agency capacity of a number of caregivers.
There is, in fact, the group of interviewees who found in the flexibilization of the care work market an opportunity to organise a set of micro-employments which, while conserving and in some cases even enhancing their remuneration, at the same time allow for a good quality of personal and family life.
This group of interviewees, consisting mainly of women, appears decidedly heterogeneous in terms of time spent in Italy, age, cultural resources, countries of origin and family conditions. On the other hand, what the caregivers who succeed in coping with the complex situation produced by the crisis seem to have in common is, rather, the ability to create and manage relational networks, both with their foreign compatriots and with Italians. Together with this, as a second characteristic, we find what we might define as a sort of 'professional pride', resting upon skills, dedication and, above all, attention to the emotional aspects involved in care work[5].
One exemplary case is that of a young Romanian woman who arrived in Italy in 2010. Her decision to migrate was largely conditioned by the need to find some effective cure for her son, who was suffering from a serious illness. Although she started on her plan to migrate at the very time when the present crisis was breaking out, she managed to bring her son with her and then to be reunited with her husband, eventually succeeding in reconciling her own demanding family care tasks with management of three different work activities, which together provide her with security in various ways. Frequently emerging from her account of her experience is the ability to interpret the emotional needs of the care recipients, which has much to do with her own experience of looking after her sick son. It is thanks to this "knowing when to be there for others", over and above the basic needs of assistance, that relations with the employers seem to take on a different tone, coming rather closer to a sort of reciprocity.

> Up to now for a year and eight months, almost, until three months ago I worked by night, too. Yes, because he [*the care recipient*] was afraid after the death of his wife, he slept with the light on, he said he heard noises, but I don't know because there he was a bit … on edge, yes. He was afraid during the night. And then, when … gradually, together, like…[*he gained*] more confidence, eventually he said to me "M. I want to give you a bit of free time to be with your family". Because he's a good man, he understands my situation, he's seen the little boy, he knows I need to be with him during the night. And he said "When I see I'm beginning to feel bad come to me in the night, too, the pay's the same." So now I only do from morning to lunchtime.
> *Int.: But when you were with him did you have some hours off for yourself to go and see your little boy?*
> I started at 9 o'clock and left at about 1 o'clock. That was my timetable, I had the whole afternoon for my family. I also have some more hours. I have another family now, at Montale. And a third one [*job*], too! Yes, because to tell the truth I like to be doing something all the time […] I've been going to a family at Montale for nearly 2 years, I go one day a week. I looked after the lady for a whole month because she had hurt her knee, she couldn't walk. And then, after a whole month, she said to me "I'm sorry to let you go". And then the third [*job*] I found at an office in Piazza M., I go there once a week, it's a steady job. It's to do the cleaning in an office for postmen. (41_F_Romania_35_2010)

The ability to cope with the crisis can also be seen in the case of two Romanian women who arrived in Italy in the early 2000's. They are two excellent examples of caregivers with a high degree of

agency capacity, able to coordinate care by the hour for two (or more) old people and fill in the gaps with cleaning by the hour, putting together very reasonable incomes.

> I slept at home in the night. I got up at 6, 6.30 and went to … I saw if he'd got up and got the breakfast ready and everything else, because the woman who did nights would be going away. If he'd had breakfast and all that, then off I would go telling him [*the care recipient*]: "Daddy, drink a bit more and I'll be back in two hours". I left breakfast on the table for him and all that. Like that. And he got up and ate it all and at 9 o'clock I went to the other. From 9 o'clock to 1 o'clock. Yes, I fed him, and then came back to daddy. Because in the morning by 9 o'clock I'd already prepared something. So I left the sauce ready and other little titbits. And that's it, at half past midday, after I came home and fed him. Afterwards I tidied up and cleaned the house, and then took him out and all that. At half past five or 6 o'clock I left him at home. […] I've never been without [*work*]. I don't mean to be mean, speaking for people who haven't got it. But I've always been like that, I've always worked. I've also made some sacrifices. Because I knew that night work isn't steady and I say "I can't leave all the other day people because sooner or later I may not have this". And when I had school, two years […] I would go to this mother [*care recipient*] where I go now, I went from 9 o'clock to midday. Then I went to school from midday till half past two. At 3 o'clock and went back to the mother until 4 o'clock. And then, in the summer with the good weather I also did [*cleaning*] an apartment from 4 to 6, the ones where I have the keys. (8_F_Romania_41_2003)

> In the morning I'd go to this old lady in the city centre. On the bridge there was an old lady I got her up in the morning, dressed her, fed her and they took away because she was very big … The social worker took her away on a stretcher and her son stayed at home. […] Yes, this old lady went to the day centre because her son was living at home but couldn't manage. At 9.10 I went up to the bridge and got the number 10, the tram, and arrived at Sar. From Sar. at 2 o'clock I got off and took the 2.15 here on the bridge and I went to Ser. I got off at Ser., stayed here until half past four when the old lady got back from the day centre, I changed her, prepared a little meal and put her to bed. So there really is a lot of work! (18_F_Romania_39_2002)

The picture of opportunities offered by the care market seems to reflect inversely the situation of those who, as we have seen, perceive a steady reduction in demand and downward competition in terms of remuneration and professional standards. By contrast, the caregivers who seem to be least vulnerable to the effects of the crisis are the ones who show a more assertive attitude in terms of their rights in the field of work.

> To be free to get around I haven't taken on jobs with a set timetable every day. I've taken the scraps. Limited. Mostly I have families where there's a flexible timetable. They aren't there. I have the keys and I go when I like. I can manage things like that. If course I have a few fixed jobs to manage, some mornings I go to the people who have their needs. Only that day and only that timetable. But it's not like that with the others. I'm fairly flexible with them all. […] The ones who generally come here and aren't very easy about things and are afraid of being jobless, they don't speak up and everyone takes advantage of them. I've never been afraid that I won't find work. Never! I've got more than enough. I go out at 7 o'clock in the morning and get back at midnight! (3_F_Romania_52_1999)

A similar line was taken by a Peruvian woman who came to Italy in 1998 to find a better life for herself and her three children than the domestic violence they had had to endure in their country.

She accepted to be reunited with her ex-husband to protect her children from the negative effects of his presence – "I get him to come here. I prefer to get him a long way away from my children, right? So he won't do the psychological harm to them that he does when there's no distance between them". As the years go by the woman manages to be reunited with her children, one by one, coping at the same time between domestic and care work and to get divorce. Again, this is a history that reveals during the interview a good capacity to stand up to the effects of the crisis (an open-ended contract in the cleaning sector supplemented by hourly care work), together with the selective approach to the supply of jobs. In fact, we frequently come across cases of interviewees refusing jobs they consider poorly paid or incompatible with their care burden, looking after their adolescent children.

> I changed two years ago because they sold the firm to these new owners who brought in their own rules which didn't suit me, above all from the economic point of view. Because the work you do the really takes it out of you, a lot of night work. And they didn't want to pay the extra for night work so I said no. It's one thing to work by day, and another thing to work by night.
> *Int.: So now you're working half-days?*
> Yes, I do 4-5 hours. I start at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, until 10 o'clock at night more or less... in the morning I give assistance to this old lady in the care home. Then when there's the occasion, very often on Saturday as a chance to do other things, I do it. (26_F_Peru_45_1998)

7. Migration to Italy as seen by the care workers: between replication and deconstruction of conventional 'wisdom'

The split between those who bear all the brunt of the crisis and those who show ability in coping with the major changes coming about in the care work market is, of course, reflected in the way these two groups of interviewees represent the experience of migration to Italy.
Replication of certain classical topoi characterising the general perception of migratory practices recurs notably in the considerations of those who experience hardship in their work and see their present situation as all too different from their hopes when they made their plans. They seriously contemplate the possibility of going back to their countries of origin in the short-medium period. In this respect the old refrain "italiani brava gente" tends to crop up, and, with a knowing nod to majority population – and to the interviewers seen as representing them – it is seen to lie behind many problems with the new flows of refugees.

> I think that with all these foreigners, who get up to all sorts of things on the buses, in the streets, and the shops and everywhere, you are too good [*she laughs*]. Because it's different sorts of behaviour, often very wrong, by foreigners who come here. But you are very [*she laughs*] how can I put it?... because they drive me crazy too when they talk on the telephone. They barge into you with their bags and trunks. But I think a lot of them are … let's say ill-bred. But as a people you are, let's say, quite good [*she laughs*]. (12_F_Moldova_45_2008)

The great media coverage of and widespread attention to the refugee crisis is reflected in the observations of these interviewees, creating worries about competition on the labour market which are hardly very realistic, considering the marked ethnic characterization of the professional niches, particularly in the case of care work.

> I now think, for example … there are a too many of us now, no? I think so … it's bad for me, too, because what...no… there were less of us before and there was something for everyone, now they're taking it [*work*] away from us, too. Okay, poor things, they come with boats, all these things they tell so many … so many lies to them that "go there, you find work at once",

> all lies to these who come here…but, for us, too, it's got like you, it's no good, because then they give them … as they have no work they accept … and for us… we have no work anymore. The must be a limit, for us, too, it's too much […] It makes me feel bad, every time they come I feel bad about it … and now it's got… You see all these coloured people, no? (46_M_Peru_45_2002)

Some, chiming surprisingly with populist narrations, even go as far as perceiving some direct correlation between the presence of foreigners, seen to be in excessive expansion, and the economic crisis.

> Mamma mia! Yes, there's a real crisis in Italy now. Above all because there are so many of us foreigners here! (1_F_ Ukraine_41_2006)

In sharp contrast with this attitude, the interviewees who stand up to the crisis, investing in training and the quality of their work as well as their networks of connections, very often come up with contestation of the stereotypes and deconstruction of representations based on conventional 'wisdom'. And the first point they contest, sometimes even with their care recipients, is the idea that foreign immigrants take jobs away from the Italians.

> At the time I was working for a lady and she always used to say, watching television and saying "Just look at that"…, she said "Just look, these foreigners come, they arrive here and our women, our Italian women can't find jobs". She often used to say to me "You come here, so many of you, and our women have no jobs". Once I answered her back "Yes, look, a lot of us have come here and Italian women have no jobs but no Italian woman is going to come and take my place for 24 hours a day, not going to leave her family, like we do, none make this sacrifice". (45_F_Ukraine_60_2001)

> I see things are getting worse and then with the crisis some of you are already starting to go "Eh"... already I hear people saying "I've had enough of foreigners", I hear them talking… I know, because they go "Eeh! They're giving work to foreigners". I put it to a woman "Excuse me, would you go and do the work I do? You can say what you like because you wouldn't do it, we do work under the table that no one else does." There may be some that hit on bad times and can't manage, and go and do it. I met an Italian woman who told me her husband went to work as a caregiver when he got old because he said he couldn't pay the mortgage on the house, but most of them would never do it, say what they like. (37_F_Moldova_50_2003)

The difference in prospects is also evident in the growing competition in the care work market where, as many point out, it is leading to downward competition in terms of remuneration. As we have seen, those who seem to be suffering most from the effects of the crisis account for this dynamic attributing responsibility to European citizens from the East or migrants from the ex-Soviet countries, who would appear to be ready to accept lower pay. On the other hand, one of the caregivers interviewed – one of the cases pointing to a greater agency capacity among the men – lays the stress on the vulnerability of foreign women, who find themselves obliged to accept all sorts of working conditions and fall victim to the cynical reductions forced on them by some Italian employers.

> For the Italians it's a matter of speculation. Because in this period of crisis, that's hitting everyone, they [*the Italian employers*] go in for this speculation. I need a caregiver for my dad. And they talk to dozens of caregivers. And talk to you, and you, and you. "Do you want days off? I'll get you hired 20 euros [*a day*] and Thursdays you work, Sundays you work, the two hours [*off*] are not for you, okay?" I'm a caregiver without a job, I have two children at

home, a husband who drinks, gets drunk, a life like that, "Yes sir!" And he takes advantage of these things. It's not right. (20_M_Romania_58_2007)

Then there is a group of interviewees who make quite clear their ability to rise above the rumours of the moment on the subject of migration – the most widespread, stereotype social representations fuelled, as one of the women caregivers put it, by the "mass media campaigns" ready to point their finger at "the population whose turn it is to come in for hate" (28_F_Romania_50_2003). Consistently with this approach, showing solidarity that extends beyond the limits of their own communities and/or national identities, when asked for further thoughts about the subject of migration in Italy one of the caregivers classified as having high agency capacity answered speaking of legality and respect of the migrant workers' rights.

Int.: What are first three things that occur to you when you think about immigrants in Italy?
The first three things…One thing is to respect more rights for the …in Italy? How can I put it. Respect the rights of people who work. Their work. Make sure the migrants are respected, and the work they do. That would be the most important of all. The laws are there. But to get to the law, get it working … it's a long, long way. (3_F_Romania_52_1999)

Conclusions

The semi-legal, subservient path towards integration that lies before immigrants in southern Europe which had always been characterised by the *super-diversity* that Vertovec (2007) sees as a novelty in the UK – entails processes leading to a fundamentally two-track divergence (Emmenegger et al., 2012) in the possibilities open to them. A relative degree of success awaits those who are ready to advance with a certain ability and originality in a context characterised by injustice, which they nevertheless recognise. However, when crisis restricts the scope for manoeuvre there is a great likelihood of failure and vulnerability. In the case of care workers, albeit with the relative formal and informal privileges that have eased their paths, we have a glaringly clear example for criticism of the very concept of integration when it remains at the macro level, without arriving at the level of subjectivity and agency capacity (Wieviorka 2014).

When crisis hits, the lack of clear distinction between social inclusion and exclusion seems to become even more evident. The histories of the interviewees that emerged in our research delineate paths along which exclusion and inclusion coexist, and not always with the respectively negative and positive sign associated with them in sociological tradition. Exclusion may be chosen as a strategy to resist forms of inclusion seen as penalising, and even the paths to success are experienced traversing a grey zone where inclusion in the labour market may also see considerable scope for informal labour, chosen and managed with due awareness. As a consequence, even the successful, protected paths of care work nevertheless lead to a marginal "integration", with limited consensus at the level of culture and values.

The approach we find to be more fruitful, therefore, mindful of migration studies reflecting feminist and antiracist attitudes, proposes a view of migratory movements in terms of "*differential inclusion*" processes, critically reappraising "the widespread notion that inclusion is always an unambiguous good that facilitates a diminution of social and economic inequalities". This means taking an epistemic view of the "border as method" in the conviction, borne out by the accounts of our interviewees, that "the figures who inhabit the world's borderscapes are not marginal subjects that subsist on the edges of society but central protagonists in the drama of composing the space, time, and materiality of the social itself" (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013:204). It also means, as occasionally emerges from our interviewees' accounts, that the juridical distinction between

migration for work and protected migration for humanitarian reasons appears increasingly groundless.

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Endnotes

[1] Source: Istat, http://www.istat.it/it/files/2016/07/La-povertà-in-Italia_2015.pdf.
[2] Following Gubrium and Holstein's method of *active interviewing* (1988).
[3] Codes, used in place of names identifying the excerpts of all quoted interviews, are structured by summarizing the following attributes of interviewees: interview number_sex_country_of origin_age_year of arrival in Italy.
[4] Regional courses for care workers at different levels.
[5] The central role of emotions in our interviewees' narratives and the particular implications they take on in the case of care workers endowed with pronounced agency capacity would merit specific discussion apart, which is beyond our scope here. Reference may, however, be made to Author A (2017).