

## **The Romanians in Italy**

by  
Pietro Cingolani FIERI

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### **1. Introduction**

In this report we present the results of a research project regarding the Romanians present in Italy, analysed from the point of view of transnational practices, defined as all the “activities initiated and sustained across borders by non-institutional actors, be they organised groups or networks of individuals” (Portes 2001)<sup>1</sup>. This area, and the theoretical perspective taken, was selected in line with the comparative European project that this research work forms part of.<sup>2</sup> The project was inspired by the observation that current literature does not offer a systematic empirical description of transnational practices, something which is particularly evident in continental Europe (Rogers 2000). In a comparison of transnational studies carried out in the United States and Europe, Østergaard-Nielsen (2003) highlighted the fact that in Europe migratory studies focus on the dynamics of inclusion in the host country, and on ideological and political aspects rather than on the characteristics of the links with countries of origin.

We have tried to create an inventory of transnational practices which focuses on the intensity and social impact of these practices, in order to understand if these are occasional in nature, or established phenomena capable of generating social structures which can be reproduced over time.

For analytical purposes, it appeared useful to follow the suggestion of a number of academics (Itzigsohn, Cabral, Mendina and Vazquez 1999) to distinguish between practices in a narrow and broad sense, taking three variables into consideration: the degree of institutionalisation of the various practices, the level of involvement of people in the transnational field, and the extent of movement of people between the geographic areas concerned.

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<sup>1</sup> Portes distinguishes these practices from activities and initiatives organised by national states, which he terms ‘international’, and from large scale institutional activities, such as those of corporations, that he defines ‘multinational’.

<sup>2</sup> The project entitled “Migrants’ Transnational Practices in Western Europe” has been approved and is backed by the European Science Foundation. It involves the collaboration of six European research centres: the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies in Neuchatel, as coordinator, the Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra, FIERI in Turin, the University of Applied Sciences in Bremen, Migrinter in Poitiers, CEDEM in Liège and IMES in Amsterdam. The Italian project work was coordinated by Michael Eve, with the participation of Ambra Formenti and Pietro Cingolani (Romanians in Turin) and Mattia Vitiello (Moroccans in Rome).

For organisational purposes we identified three areas of analysis: the economic sphere, the socio-cultural sphere and the political sphere.

All of these practices take place in a transnational social arena, defined as a “series of networks of intercommunicating social relations by means of which ideas, practices and resources can be exchanged, organised and transformed in unequal ways across national borders” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). As emerged during research work, this social arena is multi-dimensional and may include relational structures of varying forms, depths and breadths, with those involved having different levels of awareness (Cingolani 2007).

So why were Romanian migrants chosen? Above all due to the considerable presence of these nationals in Italy. At the end of 2005 the archives of the Italian Home Office showed that Romania was the country to whose nationals the greatest number of residence permits had been issued (almost 271,000)<sup>3</sup>, overtaking the Albanian community and the Moroccan community thanks to an annual increase of 150% in the number of Romanians, amply justified by the results of the regularisation initiative in November 2002.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, Romanian migration patterns present a series of characteristics that lend them particular geo-political interest (geographical proximity, ease of mobility due to the fall of many border controls, and the drop in the price of travel) and cultural interest (linguistic similarities, shared cultural traditions and the established presence of many Italians in Romania).

The research work was held between January 2006 and January 2007 in the city of Turin and the surrounding villages.

In this area Romanian nationals are the main category of foreign immigrants in terms of numbers: there were more than 23,000 Romanians residing in the city of Turin at the end of 2005 (30% of the foreign population) and 34,700 in the province of Turin (making this the second most popular area in Italy, after the province of Rome) (Città di Torino and Prefettura di Torino 2006).

In Turin we carried out 5 interviews with key figures (an Orthodox priest, the manager of a Romanian cultural association, the manager of a website in Romanian, the editor of a widespread biweekly paper published in Romanian, and a trade unionist in the building sector). These were followed by interviews with 20 Romanian migrants.<sup>5</sup>

We then identified the area of origin of most of those interviewed, the region of Suceava, in north east Romania, and in particular the village of Marginea, where a research trip was carried out in the

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<sup>3</sup> This figure is however an underestimate because some categories are only partially registered, as in the case of minors under the age of 14 included on the residence permit of one of the parents, and those born in Italy, and the case of foreign nationals who had just renewed their residence permit. With a view to including these categories the “Immigration Statistics Report” published by Caritas/Migrantes estimates that there are at least 362,000 Romanians living in Italy.

<sup>4</sup> This confirms the upward trend which characterised the 90s following the opening of the borders of Eastern European countries. An analysis of historical patterns reveals a sudden, sweeping influx of Romanian immigrants to Italy in 1991, up 73% on the previous year. In subsequent years the percentage increased at a lively pace, around 20%, with low points in 1994 and 1998, but then a fairly consistent rise after 1999 thanks to the effects of the regularisations of 15 December 1998 and November 2002.

<sup>5</sup> The group breaks down as follows: 17 people from the Suceava region (9 of these were originally from Marginea), 2 from the city of Bacau, 1 from Timisoara and 1 from Iasi. Out of the 20 people interviewed, there were 12 men and 8 women. Those interviewed were aged between 20 and 56 (9 of them between 20 and 30, 8 between 30 and 40, and 3 between 50 and 56). 12 of those interviewed were married and 8 were single; 10 had children. 13 of those interviewed had a residence permit and 7 did not. 8 of them had been in Italy from 2 to 5 years, 9 from 6 to 9 years and 3 over 10 years. Their jobs were in the building sector (1 bricklayer, 1 joiner, 1 decorator, 1 electrician and 1 tiler), in domestic assistance (3 caretakers, 2 home helps and 2 maids), industry (2 factory workers), transport (2 drivers) and food (1 pastry chef, 1 importer of Romanian products and 1 restaurant owner). One of those interviewed was unemployed.

spring of 2006. During this mission, as well gathering material and statistics we carried out 10 interviews with returning migrants and migrants' family members, all involved to varying degrees in transnational practices.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. What links between mobility and transnational practices?**

In the recent academic debate on migrations from Romania, one of the most frequently discussed topics is the circulatory nature of these flows and the peculiarity of this mobility compared to more classic forms of migration, where settling in the host country was seen as the alternative to returning to the country of origin. Many recent studies have described the creation of a new European migratory arena, in which Romanian citizens have begun to operate, often illegally, and exploiting loopholes in state and national systems.

Permanent migration, registered by means of cancellation from registry office records in Romania, is a phenomenon which regarded above all the German minority in the initial years after the fall of the regime.<sup>7</sup> According to the data gathered by the Romanian National Institute for Statistics, emigration fell from 97,000 in 1990 to 10,095 in 2004 (National Institute for Statistics, Statistical Yearbook 2005) and a study regarding the population's expectations on the subject of leaving the country (Lazaroiu 2003) showed that 18% of those interviewed wanted to work abroad but only 4% wanted to leave Romania permanently.<sup>8</sup>

As various academics have highlighted (Diminescu and Lazaroiu 2002; Sandu 2000), an analysis of recent migration flows from Romania should be set in the context of mobility flows that took different forms before and after 1989, and are not limited to the type of "transnational migration" that this research project focuses on. In the first place we can identify three forms of spatial mobility that have arisen and intersected over time: internal migration, cross-border migration and international migration. With regards to internal migration, during the Communist period much of the country's rural population was involved in moving between their areas of residence and urban industrial areas. This took the form of a permanent move to an urban area, or a seasonal move, in the case of moving from less-developed regions to more industrial areas, or even a daily commute, in the case of industrial areas nearer to home. The economic policy of the regime was based on converting rural areas to a more industrialised form of agriculture, to free up the work force, and developing industry in urban areas, at grass-roots level, throughout the country.

Alongside this policy there was a strategy to discourage permanent moves to the big cities, as being granted residence status and a city identity card was a privilege reserved for the few, while commuting was encouraged, with the provision of daily public transport services.

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<sup>6</sup> The interviews in Turin were carried out by Ambra Formenti, while the field work in Romania was carried out by Pietro Cingolani. Michael Eve supervised the work for the duration of the project. Thanks also go to Emilia David Drogoreanu for her advice and help in putting the project together.

<sup>7</sup> This phenomenon was already in existence in the final years of the regime: while after 1989 an annual average of 18,000 people were involved in permanent emigration, between 1980 and 1989 the annual average was 29,000 people (Sandu, Radu, Constantinescu, Ciobanu 2004).

<sup>8</sup> This information does not offer a reliable snapshot of international mobility. The National Institute of Statistics has not performed specific studies on the topic, nor does it include questions on migration abroad for work purposes in its questionnaires. As highlighted by Lazaroiu (2003) measuring circulatory migration is extremely complex from a methodological point of view, because it involves taking into account different cycles, short periods of time, changes of destination and complex itineraries between one foreign country and another. The data available on circulatory migration comes from a research project organised by the Ministry of Information, the Home Office and the IOM in Bucharest at the end of 2001. This was performed in 15,000 villages and 100 small towns, by means of a questionnaire submitted to a local representative. At the time of the study, around 200,000 people were abroad and 120,000 had been abroad in previous years. 47% of these had returned to Romania at least twice during their stays abroad.

At the beginning of the 90s, rising inflation, the closure of many manufacturing plants, and urban unemployment, gradually led to a reduction in this phenomenon, until 1997 when the trend was reversed, and the predominant form of internal migration became that from the cities towards the country (Rotariu and Mezei 1999). Cross-border migration, which began during the Communist period and continued immediately after 1989, was based on the advantages derived from differences in earnings and spending power between Romania and neighbouring countries like Yugoslavia and Hungary. Specifically, from the late 80s onwards, many Romanians worked as short term migrants in informal trade, what many researchers term “suitcase trade” (Wallace and Stola 2001). A series of socio-economic factors such as the establishment of semi-permanent minorities specialised in trade (Chinese, Vietnamese and Armenians), increased customs controls and the reduction in international income differences, led to a decrease in this form of mobility over 2 – 3 years, and heralded the appearance of new forms of migration, on an international level. The forms of mobility presented (internal and cross-border migration) should not be seen as exclusive categories, but have often been experienced by the same people at different times in their working lives, subsequently becoming various forms of international migration.

International migration, not just to Italy, but also to Germany, Israel and Spain, can be analysed by studying the duration of the period spent abroad, and the frequency and length of return visits to Romania. There is a range of options which goes from permanent emigration without return, or with sporadic return trips for holidays, to long stretches of migration (with a number of years spent in one or more foreign countries interspersed with periods spent in Romania), to seasonal migration, with brief periods spent abroad alternated with brief periods spent in Romania during the year. The latter form emerged prevalently from 2002 onwards, when the abolition of the visa requirement led to the formation of migratory strategies based on spending 3 months as a “tourist” in Italy, and 3 months in Romania.

In the case of Marginea, most of the families from this town who have members in Turin have a previous history of migration. In the Communist period the men used to go and work in the ports on the Black Sea, or in building sites in Timisoara, or Oradea in the east of Romania, in Bucharest, or canal building in Costanza in the south.

This has contributed to the creation of memories of mobility, meaning that the present day international migration is a variation on strategies already ingrained in families as of the sixties.

A retired secondary school teacher put it as follows:

The work force freed up by the introduction of collective farming left their home towns because there was no work left: there was the basket factory, or the wood factory, but nothing else. Many of them went to work on building sites in Radauti, the nearest town: they worked an eight hour shift then came back home to Marginea in the evening to look after their houses. Some went to work in the mines in Tulcea and Gura Humorului, where they mined uranium - many of them got silicosis and died before they were 30. All of them went away to work and sent their money back home. The ones who went to work on the farms in Costanza and Oradea used to bring back great quantities of wheat. (Gavril, Marginea, April 2006)

When the country entered Europe (on 1 January 2007) the last step towards the free circulation of people was taken. Entering and staying in Italy is no longer ruled by the legislation regarding citizens from outside Europe, the consolidated act on immigration. Romanians who stay in Italy for less than three months have no legal obligations, and once the three month period has elapsed, all they have to do is register at their local registry office, showing the papers that prove they are in paid employment or self-employed, with the means to support themselves, and health insurance cover.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Conditions have also changed with regard to taking on employees, as Romanians are no longer restricted by the decrees on immigration flows which determine the number of workers from outside Europe who can enter Italy each year, divided according to sector and nationality. Workers in the building sector, heavy industry, farming, tourism and the hotel trade, domestic assistance, as well as highly qualified and management level workers, and those engaged in seasonal work, can be taken on directly, without previous authorisation.

After more than ten years' work in Italy, the number of people who return to Romania with the idea of settling there permanently, is increasing (Cingolani and Piperno 2005). This category is still in a minority but is destined to grow over time, as the social and economic situation in the country stabilises.

After analysing a series of variables (economic resources of the individual and family group, the community's social capital, communications and the institutions supporting migration, phenomena of frustration and competition in the local communities), the sociologist Dumitru Sandu (2005), drew up a profile of the Romanian towns most likely to generate phenomena of transnational migration. These towns presented a history of migration under Communism, a high level of ethnic variety in the population, a high level of human capital, a high rate of youth unemployment, and occupied a strategic geographic position (being situated near roads with European connections or near larger towns). According to this academic, another element that led to increased mobility was the status of the migrant in the destination country: migrants who are unqualified or illegal workers are more vulnerable to economic changes and more willing to modify their own mobility plans.

Other academics (Costantin 2004) underline that the dividing lines between different forms of mobility are very blurred and that often, unexpected external factors lead people to modify their original plans. For more recent migrants, circularity and the "installation in mobility" (Diminescu 2001) have come to represent daily organisational strategies. From field work carried out in Romania it emerged that there are many people with a permanent job at home who use the two - month summer holiday to increase their income by working in Italy, before returning home to resume work in the autumn: this is widespread among secondary school and university students and civil servants (teachers and employees of the public administration).

My sisters will stay in Romania. They came too last year, last August. They said they would come for the holidays, then I found work for them and they worked too, and earned some money. My younger sister managed to make 1000 € in a month and a half, and in Romania that is quite a lot of money. She managed to buy herself a good mobile phone, a really smart one, and some digital cameras with the money. She managed to do a bit of everything, to go on with school, because she has to pay for board and lodging. (Mihaela, Turin, October 2006)

Moreover, the choice of a circulatory strategy is also heavily influenced by age: those who leave Romania when they are young, without their own family ties, are more likely to stay in Italy for long periods, and illegally, as they have fewer ties in their home country. For many young people their experience in Italy corresponds to becoming an adult, and represents a crucial stage in their development. Many of the accounts of the first trip outside Romania have the same emphasis on the aspect of the unknown, viewed almost like an initiation: Turin corresponds to the formative arena of the unknown.

It was 1995 and I was 17. I had just finished year 10. There were four of us, with just a rucksack each and a change of clothes. My mother didn't want me to go, and hid my passport, but I managed to persuade her and she gave me her blessing. We travelled through Hungary at night, then we got to the Italian border, in the snow. I could hear the customs officials talking. Then we started to run. And finally we made it into Italy. I stayed in Turin for many years without ever going back home, and also because I didn't have any papers. And in any case I wasn't married, there was nothing to go back for. (Gavril, Turin, September 2006)

For more mature migrants the outlook is different, as they set off for abroad as representatives of a family unit, with financial responsibilities and clearer plans.

For these people, being illegal aliens meant being condemned to immobility far from home, while the increased freedom after 2002 was an advantage. Regular return trips to Romania made it possible to combine working abroad and dealing with family responsibilities: return trips represent an opportunity to catch up with domestic affairs, keep an eye on the children and be present at key times in the farming year.

I went abroad when I was 40 and I had 2 young children, because I had lost my job and we had no way of getting by. I work for a wine-grower in Asti who has a lot of vineyards. I usually go in the spring, when the vines need pruning, then

my wife goes in the summer and looks after the farmer's children, then I go back in the autumn for the harvest and in the winter we are both in Romania. In this way there is always one of us looking after the house: when my wife is away I look after the children, do the washing and the cooking. The only drawback is that I have saved less money than those who work away from home for long periods without any breaks. (Gavril, Marginea, April 2006)

Another interesting element is the relation between type and strategy of mobility. As a group the Romanians in Turin are relatively recent, compared to other nationalities who have resided there for longer, but the make-up of the group has changed considerably. While at the beginning (from 1990 to 1995) most arrivals were unmarried men, who represented the 'exploration' group (Potot 2003), or women joining their husbands, at the end of the 90s, increasing numbers of women began to be the first member of the family unit to leave. Indeed in Italy the great increase in the demand for home assistance, connected to changing relations between the active sector of the population and the older, disabled, not self-sufficient sector of the population, together with the shortfalls in the welfare system, has led many mothers to migrate alone, often keeping them away from their children and husbands for years at a time. It can be observed that this group of women has benefited the most from the increase in mobility.

First it was the men who came to Italy. Then from the mid 90s, the number of women increased a lot. We left our children at home. I came here in 2000 and since then I have always looked after old ladies. After 2002 things got better for Romanian women because we can take turns every three months, and be with our men and our children. It depends on the flexibility of the Italian women, because they have to be willing to accept a different person. When I go home, I send my sister to take my place. (Artemisia, Marginea, June 2006)

The women's frequent return trips are also important from a symbolic point of view, to reassert their public image of being good mothers, attached to tradition and their homes, an image which is undermined by spending time far from home, and acquiring new wealth. Indeed in many local Romanian communities there is public disapproval of these women, who are accused of being out of control, creating social disorder and being responsible for their husbands' alcoholism, abandoning their children and breaking up the community. (Keough 2006)

The increase in mobility has also modified the profile of those leaving. For many of the young people interviewed, the reduction in the cost of the trip and the greater ease of entrance into Italy has made the decision to go a lighter one, in the awareness that leaving is not a permanent, irreversible step. The temporary nature of these plans is often criticised by their older compatriots, those who came to Italy at the beginning of the 90s and made greater sacrifices to do so:

I think that those leaving Romania now have a different mentality: Italy has become a fashion, and those who have nothing to do here just go there. For me Italy was an achievement. Now there is a different mentality: people go to have a good time, to spend their money right away. There is a saying among prostitutes: 'First I live well, then I screw'. These youngsters go to the disco and then they might not go to work for three days. They don't know how to do anything and they don't put anything by for life at home. They leave, like a holiday, and if it doesn't go well, they come back here a few months later. (Gheorghe, Marginea, May 2006)

Part of public opinion and the mass-media in Romania tends to stigmatize this behaviour, and there is even an expression to describe this specific anthropological group: "*bongiornisti*".

The 'bongiornisti' came into being at the end of the 90s. They are usually young people who have not finished school, or if they have, without very good results. They dream of having loads of money, and they think that they will be able to make a lot of money in Italy in 3 months. They don't think that to earn money you have to work hard, and get over the strong culture shock when you arrive there. This is the group of people most at risk of entering crime. Or maybe they get a job, but they don't have any skills, because at home they hadn't learned to do anything. They come back to Romania soon after, but they can't admit their failure so they come back acting as if they were successful people. (Romanian journalist, Radauti, June 2006)

In the following paragraphs we will try to understand how much this increased mobility, which characterises Romanian nationals more than other immigrant nationalities present in Italy, translates into specific transnational practices.

### **3. The importance of the family**

The first point of observation of transnational practices is represented by the family. The *family* mediates relations between the individual and the outside world and provides a useful element in understanding the behaviour of the migrant.

Family life signified a refuge and a safe place in the years immediately after the fall of the regime, when it represented the primary arena for formulating strategies to cope with the crisis (Cingolani 2007): family members combined their non-monetary income deriving from agriculture with the salaries and various other sources of income from the informal economy.

In all of our interviews it emerged how vital family networks were at various stages in migration: on departure, because they provided resources for the journey, on arrival because they offered initial support, and also at later stages, when they offered a point of reference and support in making important decisions (Brettell 2000). During migration families did not remain unchanged, but often acquired new configurations: what has been observed is the selective formation of family ties from both the emotional and material points of view, as the customary correlation between family unit and cohabitation was ruptured (Wilk and Netting 1984: 18-19).

Many families separated by migration manage to reunite after several years, but the reconstruction of the family unit in a new context implies the reconfiguration of the social relations within it. The practices observed show transnational families with set-ups which alter according to the circumstances<sup>10</sup>.

The story of Ilie is an interesting case in point: in 2000 he left for Turin, leaving behind his young wife and their two children. After a year and a half, when he had created the conditions to enable them join him, they came to live with him. In Turin two more children were born, but the increasing cost of maintaining the whole family led to the couple deciding to send the children back to Romania to be looked after by relatives.

Until 2001 I only spoke to the children and my wife Maria on the telephone. Then after a while they arrived with the visa. At the beginning we were all squashed into one room in Turin, then we found a bigger flat outside the city. Marius and Vasile were born. Daniele has done 2 years of nursery and 1 year of primary school in Italy, and Pietro has done 3 years of primary school. They have lots of Italian friends. But now we are thinking of bringing all the children here to Romania, with just my wife and I staying in Italy.

If you work and you have no-one to help you you can't bring up four children. In the last five months I have been here with the four children and my wife has been in Italy by herself. In September we will leave again and we will pay Maria's sister to look after the two older ones, while my mother-in-law will have the other two. Going back and forth is a bit complicated, but it is the only solution. Up to 2001 I was a long distance father, then I was a real father to the whole family, then I was a mother when Maria was in Italy by herself, and now I will be a long distance father again. (Ilie, Marginea, May 2006)

The studies by Vlase (2004a, 2004b) examine a specific female migratory chain from Vulturu, in the Focsani region, to Rome, and highlight the way in which women, though possessing less migratory experience than men, have redefined their position in their community of origin and domestic group. Vlase observes how, before migration, the role of women was more passive, and linked to the decisions made by the men, and there was no effective economic acknowledgement of the work carried out within the family. Economic emancipation has led to roles being renegotiated,

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<sup>10</sup> "We suggest the term 'frontiering', to denote the ways and means transnational family members use to create familial space and network ties in terrain where affinal connections are relatively sparse... Frontiering denotes the encounter between people, and hints at various ways of encountering that may be more or less amiable, creative and fulfilling or conflict-ridden" (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002: 11).

and given rise to new models of family life which have modified social expectations, even for non-migrants.

The analysis of social life in Italy shows that social relations are often restricted to members of the same family, or extended family, present in the country. This closure within the family is a reaction to the advent of exploitation within the community and the growing lack of trust.

A bricklayer who worked in Turin for around three years reports on the mechanisms of exploitation within the community:

To set up in business you need a lot of money: a car, tools, you have to pay all the taxes, and get a residence permit, and you need to know Italians. But I didn't have any of that, what could I do? I am not like the gangsters from back home who get others to work for them, but don't do anything themselves: for 50 euros a day they shout at the others: "*Get moving, you good-for-nothings, it's night-time*".

The ones who made lots of money in Turin are the ones who left before me in 1994. Those people don't even talk to you, they turn up their noses and treat us as inferiors. At least before in the factory we were all the same, there was no-one shouting, "*good-for-nothings*". Romanians are selfish, they don't want to give other people work. If someone has a job, and they earn 1200 euros a month, they would never come and help you out! There are also Romanian women who take advantage of other Romanian women: they ask for 600 euros and then they find you work. The only security for me is the family. (Costantin, Marginea, April 2006)

The family is the first unit where migration is dealt with from the emotional and economic point of view. For instance, for women who work in Italy the birth of a child represents an additional expense and a commitment that they handle in different ways: some take the baby back to Romania and give it to a sister or mother to take care of, or in other cases the mother comes to Turin to look after the baby. The phenomenon of older women migrating to Turin to act as "transnational grannies" is not uncommon. Many of these women live in segregated conditions, entirely within the domestic arena: they have no need, and no time, to make acquaintance with Italians because their children act as intermediaries with the local society and supply all the services they require:

At the beginning I was in Marginea with the baby. Then my daughter Adela wanted the baby with her in Turin and I went there to look after him because she was young and inexperienced. When I was in Turin I didn't learn a single word of Italian because I was in the house all day looking after the baby, and only went out on Sunday to go to mass. But what do I care, I went to look after the baby, not to be a tourist. (Rodica, Marginea, May 2006)

In large families all the members help each other out and as well as putting their savings together, they alternate between Romania and Italy in a kind of collective strategy.

There are 9 children in my family. In 2000 my mother left and my oldest sister Gabriella was left in charge of all the others – she was the deputy mother. After 3 years in Turin my mother decided to go back to Romania because she was old and she wanted to give Gabriella the chance to see Italy, because she was young and had her whole life ahead of her. Gabriella took my mother's job. The new house is also the result of the work of all the family: all the money we have all saved has gone towards the house. (Ovidio, Turin, March 2006)

Also with regards to transnational business activities, partners are prevalently selected from within the family. This is the case with a successful firm which buys up used tyres in Italy and sends them to Romania, where it reconditions and sells them. The company is owned by four brothers, two in Italy and two in Romania:

All four of us brothers have always tried to help each other out, and this is the secret of our success. Many firms are set up and then things don't work out because the partners fall out. Romanians are not good at working with others, they want to do things by themselves: if there are two Romanians together that is already one too many. All of us married late because we wanted to get the company established first, because when wives come along there are always problems too. (Viorel, Marginea, April 2006)

Apart from blood relations, in Romanian society 'spiritual' relations also play a very important role (Gheana 1982). Godfathers and godmothers (*nasi*), present at both christening ceremonies and weddings, are the most important figures outside the primary family unit, as they are obliged to

support the godchild both in the event of family arguments and if financial problems arise. In migration the role of the godfather continues to be important: for lending money, finding accommodation, or getting work.

All of us, when we need something, ask our godfathers, because we know that they can't turn you down. When I came to Turin I had nowhere to live and my *nas* took me into his house for three months, and didn't ask for a penny. And it is thanks to him that I found the job I have now. When I had problems with my wife and we were close to divorcing, he got involved and helped us sort things out. (Romeo, Turin, December 2006)

The family group therefore represents the key unit for cultural production and reproduction, the arena where people try to bridge the gaps that migration creates. There is a list of daily 'micro-practices' linking Romania and Italy, from assistance to younger family members, to financial cooperation. As we will highlight in the following paragraphs this is a weak form of transnationalism (Cingolani and Piperno 2006), as in most cases these are very individualised strategies, with a low level of collective participation, and liable to change over time.

#### **4. The economic sphere**

Most Romanian migrants are involved in transnational economic activities in some way, starting from **sending money or goods to other family members**: this activity represents the first level of involvement in transnational practices, a minor level. It is a two-way flow (Mazzucato 2005) – not just from Italy to Romania but also vice versa. During some critical periods it might be the migrant in Italy who receives money and support from home.

I got here last year and I didn't have any work for the first three months, because it is more difficult to find work now. In that time I had to pay for board and lodging and so my wife sent me 200 euros a month. (Costantin, Marginea, April 2006)

There are certain products that cost a lot less in Italy and are better quality, because while there is a proliferation of big supermarkets in the big cities, in rural areas there are only small grocers' shops where prices are very high. The most common products are washing powder and cleaning products, some food products (like olive oil and coffee) and the second hand clothes that some charities give out. As for the goods that are sent from Romania to Italy, these include cigarettes, home-made food products (pork-based products, grappa, fruit jams). Many of these have sentimental value as well as economic value, reminding people of home.

The family house represents the first investment for all: this is linked to cultural traditions according to which sons must build themselves a house before marrying:

To find a wife you need to have a house. If you get married without a house they call you "*maritat*" rather than "*unsurat*", and you would be a disgrace in the village. In other areas, like Costanza, young couples would go and live in a hotel until they had a house, it didn't matter, but here in Moldavia it has always been different. There was a time here when industry was taking off, and some young couples moved into apartments and sold their houses. And they really regretted it. Having an apartment in the city has never been an ambition for us. There were buses every half hour and so it wasn't difficult to work there and come back to Marginea in the evening.

Even now young people still want their own house: last year alone there were 260 permits issued for new houses, in a town with 3000 houses. (Gheorghe, Marginea, May 2006)

The house also represents a symbolic and material link with the home land: a guarantee that however things go in Italy, there is always a point of reference at home.

Now I want to build a house – but not because I want to go back, just for emergencies. Like, if something happens to me and I can't work any more, or I can't stay in Italy any more, at least I know I have a house and I can go back home. But if I don't and I just spend the money here and there, when something happens to me and I can't work any more, or I can't stay here, I go home and then what? I would have to go back to my parents! And my parents should say, "You

have worked for four years, you made money, and where is it now? You can't stay here, there are your two younger brothers". Because in Romania the youngest brother stays at home, while the other two get married and leave, right away, at 23-24-25 – they get married and set up home. If I can't use my house my brothers will take it. It wouldn't get left there for the ghosts, my brothers would use it, someone would use it. (Andrei, Turin, June 2006)

Houses are also used for the purposes of ostentation. This "house mania" also reflects elements of emulation of Italian culture, as a craftsman, who lived in Turin for eight years and has now gone back to Romania, explains:

In Italy you build your own house when you really have a lot of money, but here there are people who want to have houses with 15 rooms. They have seen Italians with these big houses and they don't know how rich they are, because most Italians rent their houses, they are used to renting. Our young people transfer here what they see in Italy, and make huge sacrifices, and build palaces. In this town, with 3000 houses, there are bound to be 1000 empty houses, just used from time to time. Houses aren't dead capital, they are living capital. And when you get over 10 rooms, what do you do with it? Then there's the heating: in January it's minus 30 here. You've got to have a huge wad of money, or else. I leave at seven in the morning and get home at nine at night, so when do I get to live in the house? These are useless temples – because temples are built for God. This is megalomania, without foundations. I can see that Agnelli and Berlusconi need to host social functions, but otherwise what on earth do you need a 170 square metre living room for? And maybe the wife is a part-time home help, and the husband is a construction worker in Turin. (Vasile, Marginea, April 2006)

While it is being designed, built and subsequently maintained, the house is run by the family unit. Often it is the elderly parents who buy the materials with the money sent by the children, keep an eye on the progress of the building work, and keep the keys. The children monitor things from a distance, by phone and during annual trips home in the holidays.

Another type of transnational practice in the economic sphere is the **process for recruiting labour**. In the 90s, when the Romanian community was less structured, those who came to Italy did not have any guarantees of finding work, and set about job-seeking on arrival. Over time the "guarantee" process became established, whereby an acquaintance supplied a contact in Italy and acted as guarantor with the employer. The intermediary was remunerated by means of an advance payment or with part of the first salary. In this way Romanians functioned as transnational employment agencies. Some even came to specialise in this, and make it their main source of income:

First I worked as a cleaner for Susy, a lady in Turin, then she asked me if I knew anyone who could work for her friends. So I called Romania and brought people I knew here to Susy. These people gave me and Susy money, because we found them work... I only helped women, the men have their own network of word of mouth on the building sites. It's two separate worlds. (Vanda, Marginea, April 2006)

Between 2000 and 2006, Vica, a woman from Marginea, came to Turin eight times for periods of no longer than three months, and worked to fill in for fellow Romanians who were going back to Romania for various reasons (to renew their passports, for a relative's funeral, or to look after a sick relative). The first time she found work thanks to an intermediary who had been living in Turin for several years, then over time and as she made more contacts in Italy, she began giving other Romanian women work contacts.<sup>11</sup>

In recent years it has no longer been just a case of acting as an intermediary for an Italian employer – there are Romanian entrepreneurs who have set up businesses in Turin and recruit teams of workers from among their acquaintances back home, making it easier for them to enter the country and settle in.

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<sup>11</sup> This process applies above all to women: among the men interviewed, prevalently employed in the building industry, work is found in situ. Many people told me about the practice of waiting in public parks in front of railway stations, where the "foremen" from the building sites came to recruit informal workers on a daily basis.

I started my business and I needed workers. I chose them from among fellow Romanians. This is an advantage for me, because I need a team of people that work well together, that know each other and that I can trust. And it's also an advantage for them, because when they get here they have a guaranteed job. (Romanian construction firm owner, Turin, November 2006)

Then there are a few cases of foreign companies which open in Romania and require specialised labour which they cannot find in situ. These companies make use of the transnational networks, thus enabling qualified Romanian workers to return home from Italy. For instance, a large Austrian multinational company has purchased a large stretch of land near Marginea to build a wood-working factory. At full capacity it will employ more than 1,000 workers and there are numerous people in Turin planning to return home with a view to being taken on as skilled workers in the factory. The idea of a secure job, with a higher salary in line with European standards, and the chance to live in their own houses, rather than paying rent, and keep the family together, are all strong incentives to return home, which increasingly detract from the appeal of international mobility.

A third level of transnational practices is represented by the set of **transnational entrepreneurs**, a distinct group of immigrants engaged in regular cross-border business activities which provide their primary source of income. For these people the links between the two end-points of the migration process represent an "alternative form of economic adaptation" (Portes *et al* 2002).

This group can be studied in terms of the location of the company headquarters, the nature of the goods transported and the direction in which these travel:

- the first category regards those who profit from transporting money, goods and people. These exploit the presence of "borders", because the very existence of those borders – both of an economic nature, namely the differences in the cost of the goods in question, and of a political nature, namely national frontiers – represents their primary source of income.

This group includes the *bişniţar* (money-changers) and transporters.

In Romania, when people started migrating abroad, there was a great amount of foreign currency in circulation, and this led to the formation of a double economy, in which the *bişniţar* played a fundamental role:

There has always been more money around in Marginea than in other towns. Until 2001 those who went to Italy were paid in lira, but in the town there was no-one who would change lira, because the *bişniţar* preferred marks or dollars. People coming from Italy had to get here with marks or dollars. Since the euro came in, in Marginea people prefer the euro to the lei, because it is seen as more stable. Many people go to the *bişniţar* because they are better than the banks, they give you the money right away and without commission. They take the money and sell it on, they are like walking banks. (Vica, Marginea, June 2006)

Couriers initially specialised in transporting goods and money, but then subsequently, as the mobility of people increased, they began transporting passengers: this goes from big companies like *Atlas Sib*, with branches throughout the country and hundreds of subcontracted drivers and agencies, to medium-sized companies with ten or so vehicles, to individual migrants who have bought a minibus and travel between Romania and Italy on a weekly basis. The initial investment, the purchase of the minibus, is in itself a transnational transaction, as in most cases it occurs abroad, in Germany or Italy. After this initial investment people start up in business, trusting in word of mouth and the network of contacts in the immigrant community in Italy. Bus-stops, or the notice-boards in the churches attended by Romanians are the best places to advertise. These transporters represent a concrete link between migrants and family members who have stayed behind in Romania, and relations of trust are fundamental in terms of sustaining this activity because the drivers are often entrusted with the sums of money, and if irregular passengers are on board the drivers are the ones who have to bribe the border police.

In 1996 I started taking parcels. There was a community of Romanians in Turin and I was one of the first to offer this service. Everyone wanted to send things home...at the start we were poorer and people used to send the second-hand clothes from Cottolengo, and sweets, then they wised up and started sending washing machines and TVs, and designer gear that costs less in Italy than in Romania. And olive oil and sugar, and washing powder. I used to charge 3000 lire per kilo. I managed to fill up and do three trips a month. Back then the customs officials used to close an eye, not like now. Then in 2002 I started taking people– if you come with me you'll be home in 26 hours. (Sica, Turin, October 2006)

- There is a second category of small-scale business people based in one country who exploit their contacts with the other country to import the materials they require for their business.

In Romania this occurs mostly in the building industry and the catering trade: in Marginea there is a pizza chef who imports traditional products like tinned tomatoes, mozzarella and pickled vegetables, and aims to supply the other pizza restaurants in the area; there is a tyre factory that imports used tyres from Italy and reconditions them, and there is a factory that makes interlocking concrete blocks, that has imported the moulds for the concrete from Italy.

In Italy this activity regards above all the food and catering sector. Furtuna, who runs a restaurant in Turin, uses homemade food products brought from Romania by relatives and friends.

For example we get these spices, that this guy or other guys bring us – little bags of spices we need. But there are also products that are not on sale commercially, things that are just home-made. We get visitors and travellers to bring them. For example: we make these soups, and one ingredient is this special broth. My mother tried to teach me how to make it for more than 20 years but I have never managed it. It is a low fat broth, but I don't know how to make it, because you need to ferment wheat germ, that is the base, then you add water and leave it to ferment again. We have it sent by relatives, friends, acquaintances. (Furtuna, Turin, November 2006).

Furtuna also buys products from Cristofor, a businessman who has set up a company importing food products from Romania, in partnership with an Italian. Cristofor supplies 126 shops throughout Italy and handles most of the import-export market for Romanian products in Turin. He also supplies 12 stalls in the indoor market at Porta Palazzo, many of which are run by Romanians. The company is based in Turin, and uses external companies for transporting and distributing the goods. Cristofor goes to Romania for work 3 or 4 times a year, but runs the business mostly by phone. The factories he buys from are in Romania, but also Slovenia, Germany and Austria. Importing from EU countries is much simpler and more profitable, due to the lack of customs and excise controls.

For the moment we cannot import meat products from Romania, so we have them made in Slovenia under our own brand name, using the Romanian recipe. Because in Slovenia we have managed to get them to smoke things with natural beechwood smoke, something which they don't do in Italy. So we have our own products with our own brand name and all, high quality products.

[...] Now we have started, we wanted to import from Germany at the beginning, then we let it go, because it was not worth it. Now from Austria we are getting the first load next week. It is a company that makes sauerkraut. [...] Because [the products] are similar, we go for 2 or 3 products that are similar to Romanian products, not a wide range. (Cristofor, Turin, October 2006).

- Thirdly there are migrants who run two complementary businesses, one in Italy and the other in Romania, to minimise the risks deriving from financial problems that may arise in either country. This is the case of the owner of a pizza restaurant who has just returned from Italy, and whose partner has stayed in Turin, running a small building company, or the owner of a building warehouse in Marginea who continues to run a building company in Turin.

At the moment I am not the owner of the company, I just manage the funds that the owner sends from Italy. Up till now he hasn't earned anything, but has just made investments, and now we are building that warehouse over there. There are advantages to the fact that the owner is in Italy: as part of the material can be bought in Italy, every time the owner sees a company that has gone bankrupt he goes to buy the material they are getting rid of. I reckon he has set up this company as a fall-back if business in Italy doesn't go well. If the cost of labour gets to 50 euros a day, he will want to

move back to Marginea – he’s getting ready to come back. If average wages rise, it won’t pay to be in Italy, where you work for 800 euros a month and it’s hard to pay all your expenses and the rent. (Ghite, Marginea, May 2006)

The transnational approach to the economic sphere, as well as focusing on activities that “require regular, on-going social links over time and across national borders” (Portes 1999: 219), highlights the way in which these links alter the main concepts that migrants base their financial decisions on. The contact with Italian society, and between Romanian migrants and Romanians who have never emigrated, changes the horizons of what are perceived as feasible goals, and changes people’s values, objectives and expectations for the future (Ciobanu 2003).

Among some of the migrants who have spent time in Italy there is a self-representational rhetoric that leads them to take their distance from many fellow Romanians, because the latter “still think like a hundred years ago”. These images are part of what Buchowsky calls “a new form of orientalism”. The dichotomy that persisted for years during the Cold War, between “us” – civilised westerners, and “them” – primitive, uncivilised people of the east, now exists in East European societies, where the “spatially exotic other has been re-invented as the socially stigmatized brother” (Buchowsky 2006: 476).

We learned a lot abroad, first of all in terms of good manners: we don’t get drunk at weddings any more and we don’t break glasses – the mentality has changed. The older people and those who have never left the country aren’t used to this modern world, but it is the mentality that you can’t change. In Italy I learned a different way of working. My friend worked as a lathe operator here, working on the same pieces for 20 years. In Italy there is something new to do every day. I learned to weld, and to operate the numerical control lathe. I learned how to be precise and professional. Perhaps the most important thing is that I learned to do business – in Romania the concept didn’t exist”. (Valentin, Marginea, May 2006).

From the transnational point of view the flow of migrants’ resources (whether they be sums of money, business investments or support for the development of local communities) gives rise to multiple relations which regard not only Romanian migrants but also Italian business people. Sacchetto (2004) analyses the multiple relations which connect Italian business people in Romania and migrations of labour from Romania to the Veneto region. From the point of view of foreign presence, Italy, and the Veneto region in particular, represents the leading investor in post-Ceausescu Romania (Stocchiero 2002, ICE 2004). The most common model is based on the piece-work approach, which enables employers to keep pay rises to a minimum and avoids the politicization of the workplace, while company headquarters remain in Italy. Moreover, part of the migration in Italy comes from the very areas of Romania where there are Italian businesses (Lazaroiu 2001), though it has not yet been established which phenomenon arose first and sparked off the other. In some cases people go to work in Italy then return to Romania to work in foreign companies there.

As emerged in an international conference organised in 2005 by the Babes Bolay University and the Cluj-Napoca Italian Cultural Centre entitled “Italians in Romania, Romanians in Italy today”, research into these multiple relations is in its early days, but already looks promising.

## **5. The social and cultural sphere**

Romanian migrants are involved in social relations on various levels, from the family sphere to that of the more extended community: these relations may be structured in different ways, from relations of reciprocal assistance on an informal level, to involvement in the work of formally established associations. As previously mentioned, for most of those interviewed social relations were limited to their own families or extended families.

In many cases this may extend to dozens of people present in the same city or surrounding villages, to the point that there are more family members in Italy than Romania.

There are more than 20 of us, with my brothers, sisters and their children, in Turin and Chieri. In Romania there are my parents, my brother and his family, just 7 in all. When we have free time we spend it together – we eat together, have a

coffee or a glass of grappa. I have brothers in Moncalieri, and we go there or they come to us. But things between us have changed since we came here... (Vasile, Turin, October 2006)

The more extended networks of acquaintances may be of use during the initial period after arrival, but these links tend to fade out gradually.

The friendships with other Romanians gets lost: once is fine for a coffee, but the second or third time is a nuisance. In Romania it's the opposite: if you turn down an invitation people get offended. But things have changed, now there is *mandria* (pride) here. Now we have all come here we have lost touch. I'll give you an example: my neighbour Ileana from Marginea went to Rome, and I hadn't seen her for a year. In August I invited her in my house in Marginea but she said "I don't know, I don't know", though up to 5 years ago we saw each other all the time. Then it's difficult to find the time: in August we went home for 3 weeks and everyone wanted to see us, but we had so much to do, what with the house... Maybe when we move back to Romania we will start seeing people again. (Vasile, Turin, October 2006)

One interesting aspect is the relations that form within the group of Romanian immigrants, between regular immigrants, present in Italy for longer, and irregular immigrants. The former are vital in terms of mediating with Italian society (employers, social/health services, accommodation) and to minimize the risks that await new arrivals. In one study on Romanian immigrants in Milan, Anghel (2006) underlines how the transition to regularity often occasions the weakening of community ties, leading to a greater degree of individualisation of the migration experience. The social pact between irregular and regular immigrants is based on weak links, which are constantly being broken and renewed. Anghel views "community" as an arena with mutable confines, that one enters and leaves as one's legal status changes. Ponzio (2005), starting from a study of Romanian migration in Turin, highlighted the ambivalent aspects that characterise close-knit social networks. On the one hand such networks are vital for the initial period of life abroad, while on the other they risk enclosing the migrant within a network of segregated social relations that prevent him or her from making headway in Italian society.

These ties are therefore utilised in a functional way, but rarely translate into closer forms of collaboration. At the heart of this low level of social participation there are various elements: the past in Romania, the nature of the migration initiative, and the make-up of the social group in question.

Most of the migrants interviewed came from rural areas, and the forms of social relations they were accustomed to were very different from those which may arise in an urban context in Italy. In the villages moments of leisure were characterised by specific rituals with set times and spaces, while in Turin leisure time is spent in increasingly individualised, fragmented ways.

In the villages people got together above all on Sundays, to see films or shows at the Cultural Centre, or for festivities like New Year, when all the young people would go round from house to house in big groups. Here in Turin we don't meet up much because everyone works at different times and we also live far apart. (Vica, Turin, October 2006)

This individualistic mentality should not be viewed as purely linked to migration – it is an aspect which characterised social relations in Romania under Communism and in the initial years after the fall of the regime: in present day Romania few people aspire to positions of political responsibility in their local communities, and the need to survive in a period of economic change has speeded up the process of social disaggregation, familism and social atomization (Kideckel 1993).

Many view their time spent in Italy as a way to accumulate savings with a view to returning home, and from this point of view time spent on social activities is seen as a "waste of time". This aspect is accentuated among those who opt for a circulatory model (alternating brief periods of work in Italy with brief stays in Romania), in which the time spent in Italy does not allow for forms of social life outside the workplace.

Most Romanians who go to Italy only go there to make money. And in the end they don't know anything about Romania or Italy. And anyway the money they save there they spend on entertainment when they go home. I have been in Turin, where I worked for a small joinery firm, then in Rome where I worked for a company that laid parquet

flooring, and in both places I visited museums, monuments and got in touch with the local Romanian cultural associations. But I have always been curious, and I didn't go to Italy just to make money, but to learn something too. (Costiche, Marginea, April 2006)

There are transnational cultural offerings for Romanian immigrants, mostly consumed within the domestic arena. The paucity of relations in the public arena is compensated for by the possibility to maintain mental and sentimental ties with the homeland by means of satellite TV and video cassettes. The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2001) terms this kind of private consumption "*virtual neighbourhoods*" or "*mediascapes*" and there exists an interesting ethnographic counterpart among the Nigerian immigrants present in Turin (Cingolani 2006). In the context of the increasing difficulties involved in reproducing a sense of local identity, caused by diaspora and the migrants' sense of disorientation, neighbourhoods, in the sense of consistent social set-ups, disperse and tend to implode. Although this phenomenon has always characterised the migratory experience, the new characteristic of these new migrations consists in generating new panoramas, strictly linked to the media and global diffusion of images and information in real time.

*Gazeata Romaneasca*, the nationally circulated weekly paper in Romanian, is widely read in Turin, and there is also a biweekly local Italian/Romanian paper called *Noua Comunicate* (the staff of which comprises both Italians and Romanians), a Romanian radio station and various internet forums dedicated to Romanians living in Italy.

As regards structured associations, the Oprea study (2005) reveals that the most active cities in Italy are Rome and Turin, also in view of the fact that these are the cities with the most numerous, structured communities. First and foremost these associations provide services to help people settle in Italy (information on legal proceedings, jobs, and the services available in the area) but they have also started to develop cultural activities of a transnational nature:

We want to translate the mobility of these people between Romania and Italy into a mobility of knowledge, and firm up the links. There are a number of projects regarding the links between Italy and Romania. We want to bring students from Romania – primary, middle school and secondary school students, and even students on degree courses if possible, to study here in Ivrea, and host them ourselves in the community. As of next year we are thinking of organising courses in Romanian for Romanian children. Because they speak Italian at school, and in order to lose their Romanian accent they speak Italian at home, because they are ashamed of being Romanian. (President of the association ACERIC, Ivrea, September 2006)

In 2005 the Turin-based charity FRATIA launched a text message fund-raising campaign in collaboration with the leading mobile phone service companies entitled "1 euro for Romania". The aim was to gather funds to help rebuild schools and hospitals in the areas most affected by the floods that summer. Using a highly individualised method of participation (the mobile phone) the aim of the association was to translate migrants' sentimental ties into a concrete form of aid. This initiative enjoyed a high profile and was heavily publicised in both the Italian and Romanian media, but still represents an exception in a generally sparse panorama.

The problem of discontinuity in people's involvement in charity work, above all in terms of voluntary work, is often underlined.

Here in Italy I have people, board members, association members, but when there is something to be done, it always falls to the few. I have said to many people, "but this affects you too, you could do something once in a while", because there is still not enough trust. Still now when I ask my fellow Romanians for something they answer, "but haven't you got anything better to do, who makes you do it, why are you working for free?" (Florica, Ivrea, September 2006)

The Romanian immigrants who work on transnational socio-cultural projects are part of an elite category of professionals (business people, journalists) whose aims, as well as strengthening the social bonds with the country of origin, are also to consolidate economic and commercial exchanges. These are genuine transnational cultural entrepreneurs attempting to capitalise on their dual sense of identity.

As emerges in other studies (Cingolani and Piperno 2006), transnational practices linked to the social sphere have important consequences in Romania, because it is the construction of a transnational social capital based on norms of reciprocity, solidarity and trust that condition the status of the migrant and his or her potential for socio-economic re-integration into the community of origin.

Migrants who build on and keep their social ties with their home country alive, thanks to good access to information and awareness of business and investment opportunities, are better equipped to plan a return home.

## **6. The role of the church as a transnational institution**

Romanian migrants belong to a variety of different denominations: most of them are Orthodox, but there is also a considerable number of Catholics and Protestants (belonging above all to Pentecostal and Adventist churches). People's involvement in the life of their respective religious communities represents a fundamental identity marker, a factor of recognition, as if within the religious sphere they went back to being "Romanian", while in their daily working lives there was a tendency for dispersion and blending into local society.

While almost all of those interviewed stated that they were believers, it is often noted that church attendance tends to fall over time in Italy. This decline in practising is not specific to the migration experience, but reflects a general tendency that can also be observed in Romania.

Here in Italy the Orthodox church is the place where you can preserve things from home: the Church reminds me of home, I can relive what I experienced at home, and rediscover my personality and my identity. But this identity is severely challenged in Romania too, and this is the problem. Communism wanted to create a new vision of man, but it was just a man without roots, a man that could be controlled. Now I don't know what is going to happen in Romania. Everyone is always in a hurry, constantly rushing, and roots and values are being lost – all everyone thinks about is making money and spending it. I think that if you have a fixed point of reference to look to, something secure, you can look forward with hope. Without that... And the number of young people coming to church is going down, not only here in Turin, but also in Romania. (Orthodox priest, Ivrea, September 2006)

The church was a point of reference for the first immigrants who arrived in Italy, as it represented the only part of the city with an ethnic connotation. At church people could meet compatriots, exchange information and find work. This role of provider of services and intermediary between the immigrant community and the local society, is not characteristic of Romanian churches alone, and has already been observed in other studies.

If however we consider the transnational role, that is the capacity to forge links between the society of origin and the host society, there are interesting differences between the various denominations of Romanian churches.

The Pentecostal religion, which was dormant in Romania throughout the Communist period, really took off in the 90s, in parallel with migrations towards the West. In Marginea alone, out of 10,000 inhabitants, 3,800 are of Pentecostal faith, and around 2,500 of those live abroad. At the end of the 80s, there were no more than 1,000 churchgoers.<sup>12</sup> The doctrine and organisational structure of this church make it transnational by nature:

Orthodox religion is a national religion as it heavily underlines the value of the homeland, Romania. Often the nation of Romania is identified with Orthodox religion. And this was also the case under Communism, whereby in some aspects the regime resembled Orthodox religion: both underlined the importance of the home country. For the Pentecostal religion this is of little importance, it is a post-national religion. In the past members of the Pentecostal church were persecuted as they represented a threat for the Romanian nation, especially in view of their links with America. Now they are very good at keeping emigrants united. What counts in the Pentecostal church is a global sense of belonging, and this is why it adapts easily to new contexts. (Orthodox priest, Marginea, April 2006)

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<sup>12</sup> These figures are reliable, as the names of all churchgoers are registered in the records of the Pentecostal community, along with information on the family situation and the current address.

In many Romanian villages there is a genuine denominational schism between families belonging to the Orthodox religion and those of neo-Protestant faith (Pentecostals, Adventists, Baptists).

This division recurs in migration, because people come to depend on different channels and networks of support (Radu 2001). Field studies reveal how affiliation to these protestant groups provides people with a form of solidarity and help (of a moral and financial nature), which is less common among the Orthodox group, where there is increasing individualisation and community relations are tending to unravel.

The two denominations are organised in different ways: in the Orthodox church each parish is responsible for its own local community and parish churches rarely form links with others present in the area. This aspect explains why there is little contact between the Romanian parish churches in Turin and the churches present in the immigrants' villages of origin.

The account of father Pizzoleiac, the Orthodox priest of Marginea, shows how between local churches (in Marginea and Turin) there is a sense of competition respect to transnational collaboration:

In 2000 I spent three weeks in Turin, staying with the Orthodox priest there, Vasilescu. I visited the families from Marginea, both in Turin and Chieri. I went to Vasilescu's mass, but he didn't want me to serve mass with him, he was worried I would take his money. So I was there as an ordinary churchgoer, just attending mass. But when I knelt before the icons the Margineans recognised me, and came up to me and dropped money into my pockets. You could hear it jingling and Vasilescu's wife was giving me dirty looks. In one morning I was given 8000 marks. It is thanks to the Margineans that Vasilescu is doing so well in Turin. But there is no form of cooperation. (father Pizzoleiac, Marginea, April 2006)

In the Pentecostal church there are two kinds of transnational bonds: moral and financial. The ministers often come from Romania to visit Turin in order to check up on the emigrants, and to keep the divided community united. To join a Pentecostal church in Italy you need to have a letter of introduction from a Romanian minister attesting to your good conduct. Likewise, representatives of the Italian communities organise regular visits to Romania.

From the financial point of view, there are many fund-raising campaigns organised to support social projects in Pentecostal communities in Romania. In the case of Marginea, for instance, the donations of churchgoers in Turin have paid for work on the place of worship, modernising school infrastructures, and helping families in difficulty (orphaned children, a family whose house burnt down).

Religious affiliation gives rise to processes of solidarity which are fundamental in the migration process: one Romanian of Pentecostal faith set up a building company in Turin in 2000 and recruited all his workers from the community of immigrants of the same faith.

In general the Pentecostal church has good relations with the West and this has led to members of that church being the first to leave the country. For example there are some people, like the preacher Modest, who received donations of 20,000 euro from America and Germany. The members of the Pentecostal church who went abroad first acted as a bridgehead for all the others, friends and relatives. In Italy you won't see members of the Pentecostal church unemployed on street corners, because they already know who will give them work, one of their own. (Vasile, Marginea, May 2006)

## **7. The political sphere**

Most of those interviewed were not much involved in political life, and usually considerably disaffected in this regard, both in Italy and Romania. First and foremost this springs from a migratory strategy which is in constant evolution, where there is little motivation for taking an interest in daily life in Italy, outside the workplace. Circular migratory flows give rise to a perception of Italy as being an area of transit and accumulation of capital, and not as a place in which to exercise citizenship.

Secondly there is a lack of trust of those involved in politics on various levels, and the feeling of having little influence over decisions which are “taken at the top”.<sup>13</sup>

I am not interested in politics, either Romanian or Italian – actually if I had a gun I would go to both parliaments and shoot them all. My God, I would love to beat up the Romanian president or the Italian one, I really would...I don't know, it's because they don't care about people, they don't care at all. They just want to get the money, have a few villas, a 21 metre yacht, the most expensive cars in the world... this is what politics is about! Romania used to be ok, but now it's a mess. (Andrei, Turin, November 2006)

In the specific case of our interviewees, and those who migrate to Italy from rural areas of Romanian Moldavia, this feeling of being marginal and having little influence over the centres of power was already present under Communism (Zerilli 2003).

The uprising against the regime was fomented in the more industrial areas of the country, where political involvement was more dynamic, including in terms of opposition and protest:

In the whole of Moldavia there were no important industrial areas, it has always been a farming region. When you went to Bucharest and said you were from there, people would say “*Moldovean prost!* (Stupid Moldavian!)”. Paradoxically the resistance to the regime came from the very areas where the workers were treated better: that was where the big numbers were, and out of 1,000 people, maybe 2 or 3 would get things started and manage to organise something. The ideas for change could never come from the country. In our area there were a few people with ideas against Communism, but there was no-one behind them, and they never managed to get people mobilised. And this feeling of marginality still exists today: we feel like we're out of things, so we just think about work and not about going into politics! (Dumitru, Turin, November 2006)

There is no shortage of experiences of involvement in political life, both on a local and transnational level, but such experiences should be seen as individual choices rather than community practices. One interesting case is that of Florica Lupasteanu, who stood as an “additional councillor” (consigliere aggiunto) on the Ivrea town council, and was elected in May 2006. She organised her election campaign with the support of Italian volunteers and immigrants of other nationalities, and was voted for not so much by fellow Romanians as by migrants from other countries.

I won thanks to the votes of the Moroccans, not the Romanians. They don't understand that I represent their rights. Many of them think I am doing it as personal career choice, not as something for the good of the community. Many of them think that I get lots of money out of it. We are the most numerous community but we can't manage to take a strong, united stance! (Florica Lupasteanu, Ivrea, October 2006)

Ban (2005) hypothesises that these individual migrants, active on a transnational level, may however act as carriers of new notions of political involvement and citizenship, and have a considerable impact in Romania. Ban presents the case of Romanian journalists who live in Italy and export to Romania political discourse on social rights in Europe, a stance in opposition to their fellow Romanians' extreme neo-liberalism and deeply-rooted lack of trust in public institutions.

While there is not great involvement in transnational political practices among Romanian migrants in Italy, in recent years, in view of Romania's inclusion in Europe, there has been growing interest in emigrants among the institutions and Romanian political parties. Entering Europe has transformed the Romania diaspora into a immense electoral constituency – and this is the context in which we could view the opening of an electoral office of the PD (Democratic Party) in Milan, and the plan to open a PNL (National Liberal Party) office in Turin. A few years ago a department for Romanians in the world was set up in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Many migrants view this initiative as Romanian government propaganda which will not have any concrete impact on the problems of the communities abroad.

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<sup>13</sup> Schmidt (2007) also arrived at similar observations in his study of Romanians living in Padua.

In Romania they are all corrupt, they are all liars, they all just look after their own interests, like in Italy. Democracy isn't about doing what you want to. And now they want to do a referendum among emigrants. The Romanian foreign minister came to Turin, and said that we must strengthen the associations abroad because they will act as a base for Romania in Europe. But how can I vote for you if Romania is the worst country right now. We are just being used. I don't even want to talk about the department for Romanians in the world. They had celebrations in Costanza that lasted a week, but I don't even know who they invited. It's all just a way of getting more votes: probably it was just some of the bigwigs' cousins there. But I don't think anything will really change. (Corina, Turin, June 2006)

## **8. Conclusions**

These conclusions examine four aspects that emerged during the study: the importance of the diachronic dimension, the density of transnational practices, the link between mobility and how practices are constructed, and the rapport between the individual/family dimension and the collective dimension.

Romanian immigrants only started arriving in Italy relatively recently, but the community has developed very quickly in terms of numbers, and its social/demographic characteristics have also evolved.

Romanian immigration can be divided into three stages: the "discovery" phase, from the early 90s to 1995 (mainly comprising young men who stayed in Italy for long periods without documents), the "consolidation" period, from 1996 to 2001 (which saw an increase in the number of women, either joining their husbands or migrating alone, and the regularisation of part of the community), and the "circulation" period, from 2002 to 2007 (characterised by an increase in the number of people staying in Italy for brief periods), up to the "fall of the borders" (as of January 2007).

The transnational practices that we have identified must firstly be placed within the correct historical setting: it is important to understand when they came about, under whose influence, and in what geo-political context. One example could be transnational practices in the economic sphere: small-scale businesses in the transport sector developed during the first phase to take goods and savings mainly from the men in Italy to their families in Romania; during the second phase, as the community got established, foodstuffs were also transported from Romania to Italy, to respond to the increased demand for goods which were not available in Italy; while in the third phase, the increase in the circulation of people has led to a specialisation in passenger transport. The entrance into Europe and the reduction in customs charges will probably lead the sector to focus on the transport of goods once again, while the numbers of people in transit will tend to decrease, especially regarding those from more highly developed areas, where there are now more stable job opportunities and salaries are increasing.<sup>14</sup>

Another example is the behaviour of the Romanian political parties: during the first phase of migration, the Romanians present in Italy were not on the agenda, because their irregular status rendered them politically invisible. As the date with Europe drew near, the parties began to formulate transnational strategies to include the new citizens. These range from official visits to twinning initiatives to the opening of party offices in the main Italian cities.

The practices we have identified in the various spheres vary greatly, and can be distinguished according to the level of institutionalisation, the level of involvement of those concerned, and the frequency of trips taken between the geographical locations involved. To draw on the model formulated by Itzigsohn, Cabral, Mendina and Vazquez (1999), who studied Dominican migration in the United States, these practices can be mapped as the following table shows:

### **Transnational practices**

### **In the narrow sense**

### **In the broad sense**

<sup>14</sup> There are no precise estimates of the phenomenon, but this is the widespread perception that emerges from the interviews carried out with migrants. In a conference held in Turin in the autumn of 2006, the mayor of Bacau, (a city in Romanian Moldavia that many of the migrants present in Italy come from) declared that between 2005 and 2006, the average salary rose from 200 to 300 euros and that 12,000 workers returned home and have found or are looking for work in local companies.

<b>Economic sphere</b>	Companies present in two countries (high level of institutionalisation, ongoing participation, regular trips)	Construction of the family home from a distance (low level of institutionalisation, ongoing participation, sporadic trips)
<b>Socio-cultural sphere</b>	Bilingual newspaper (high level of institutionalisation, ongoing participation, regular trips)	Help provided to new arrivals (low level of institutionalisation, sporadic participation)
<b>Religious sphere</b>	Pentecostal ministers travelling to visit the two communities	Commemorating deceased family members in the Orthodox church
<b>Political sphere</b>	Romanian political party with offices in Italy	Interest in political events in Romania

With regards to the Romanians present in Italy, one of the central aspects is the relation between circular or seasonal migration and transnational practices. To what extent does frequent travel between Romania and Italy (2-3 times a year) translate into genuine transnational practices? The rapport is complex, in view of the fact that many migrants lead an existence which is confined to the social context of immigration – limited to the working environment, with few social relations, be they with fellow Romanians or with Italians. A woman working as a permanent home help spends the entire week in the house of her employer: her entire experience is played out within the domestic arena, except for free time on Sundays, and the period spent in Italy is viewed solely as a sacrifice to be borne in order to provide for a fuller life in Romania. However other migrants capitalise on the numerous presence of fellow Romanians, the demand for services and frequent cross-border trips to develop their own transnational work opportunities.

The family remains the primary unit around which plans for migration develop, and within which bonds form, and transnational practices arise. The community dimension has gradually been eroded, giving way to increasingly individualised projects: many migrants report on the lack of collective planning, even among people from the same place. Despite the high number of Romanians living outside the country, there is no diasporic sentiment, no feeling of belonging to an imagined ‘community’, and this explains why there are no collective projects targeting the community of origin.

It is interesting to observe that this collective dimension, which is lacking among the majority of immigrants, is in fact of vital importance for Pentecostal religious groups. The structure and doctrine of these groups places great importance on the transnational cohesion of worshippers, and this gives rise to close-knit networks of economic, social and cultural exchanges within the groups – an area which definitely merits further study.

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