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Cacciatore, F. and Pepe, G.

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Performing new identities: the community language of post-crisis Italian migrants in London

Francesco Cacciatore[a] and Giulia Pepe[b1]

[a]Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, University of Salerno, Italy; [b]Department of English, Linguistics and Cultural Studies, University of Westminster, London, United Kingdom

After the 2008 global crisis, Italy has experienced a relevant resumption of emigration. Tens of thousands of young Italians have chosen London as their favourite destination, giving birth to a new Italian community in the city. This article focuses on the transformation of migrants' national identity and on a distinctive device of identity expression: language. Sample cases, excerpted by a dataset collected for an original project, are used to explain how the insertion of English elements in the native language becomes expression of the loss of pure national identity and of the renegotiation of transnational and migratory identities.

Keywords: Italian migration; Italian national identity; transnationalism, translanguaging; London

1. Introduction

Understanding the issue of national identities in migrant communities is a fascinating – and well researched – topic, which gained new and complex layers of analysis in the age of globalisation. The wave of emigration that started to affect Western Europe after the 2007-2008 financial crisis has a clearly globalised character. The destinations chosen by a consistent part of these new migrants are large cities and metropolises: places where any perception of national identity that the individual may possess is constantly challenged by an increasingly globalised (and, we may add, de-personalising) social context. Thus, understanding what feelings of national identity, if any, characterise these new migrant waves can be a rewarding, but increasingly complicated, task.

One of these new waves, and the subject of study for this paper, is that of young Italians moving to London. Scholars usually recognise three distinct phases of Italian emigration to the United Kingdom, starting in the nineteenth century and ending with what we could define as the 'European' phase, which started after the UK joined the European Common Market, in 1973 (Sacco, 2013). Regarding recent emigration, the mainstream narrative focused on the *brain drain* image. The main point of this description was to differentiate the most recent emigration wave from past mass emigration. No longer

[1] Corresponding author: giulia.pepe@my.westminster.ac.uk

were the unskilled, poorly educated labourers forced to leave the country, but a generation of highly skilled and mobile individuals, the Eurostars (Favell, 2008), travelling between the great cities of Europe and the world, making the best use of globalisation. This narrative evolved in a pessimistic way after the beginning of the crisis. Italy was losing its talented youth, its 'best', who was forced to leave a country smothered by corruption, bureaucracy and nepotism, and ruled by the elderly. Despite their qualifications, the young people were being offered fixed-term, low-pay jobs, with no career prospects, and for this reason, they preferred to leave the country (Tirabassi and Del Prà, 2014).

Recent studies have proved that this narrative was over-simplistic, and, more importantly, not really backed by data, relying essentially 'on qualitative and human-centred empirical research that samples on the dependent variable' (Tintori and Romei, 2017, p. 58). Starting from the assumption that the *brain drain* image has to be overcome, this paper will argue that the most recent Italian emigration to London, the one that started after the effect of the global economic crisis manifested in Italy in 2011, and can then be defined as *post-crisis*, possesses specific connotations that require a different analytical approach. This article also argues that members of the wave are subject to a process of re-negotiation of national identity, promoted by two issues: one is due to their provenance from a country with a weak national identity, the other is due to their residence in a highly globalised living context.

How, then, can we begin to understand the issue of national identity of young Italians in London (and, by extent, in other similar groups)? This paper argues that a good answer is to study the language of its members. For a long time, language has been defined as a salient marker of group membership and social identity (Giles and Johnson, 1987). Ideologies of language are never about language alone, but are always socially situated and tied to questions of identity (Woolard, 1998). If nations can be considered systems of cultural representation, and the construction of a shared identity goes through the affiliation to a common mother tongue (Anderson, 1991), it is a logic consequence that a common language is the most central constituent in the formation of a national identity (Piller, 2001).

This paper will first present the historical and geographical context of the most recent Italian migration to the UK, providing also a brief history of the previous emigration waves, in order to better understand the differences and the specific character of the post-crisis migrant community. It will then address the socio-cultural dimension of the post-crisis wave: the influence of the globalised structure of

the metropolis and the lack of a traditional migrant welcoming network in London. The consequences of this are, on the one hand, the shortcoming of what has been defined a transnational identity, and, on the other, a wilful process in which the migrants try to preserve or re-negotiate their national identity through the use of language, and through the development of new linguistic phenomena signalling the construction of new migratory identities.

2. The data

The data used in this article were collected between September 2015 and June 2017 for a doctoral project carried out by one of the authors. However, a preliminary ethnographic observation of the new Italian migratory wave has started in October 2012. To obtain spontaneous data and examples of real conversations, participants were recorded in comfortable environments during natural events. The researcher was introduced as a 'friend of a friend', in order to alleviate many of the formalities of researcher-participants relationship (Guzzo, 2014; Milroy, 1987). Participants were only broadly aware of the purpose of the research but, for ethical reasons, they were always informed about the presence of a turned on recording device. In a second phase of the project, the twenty-five participants were interviewed. A qualitative interpretative approach was chosen for both data collection and analysis (Johnstone, 2000).

The historical analysis has been used in this article as the connective tissue between the linguistic study and its sociological application. The specific nature of language in migrant communities has always allowed for comparative studies where migrant communities were understood as cells that separated from a main body, undergoing their own evolution and at the same time maintaining or losing distinctive aspects of the country of origin. The story of Italian migration is so significant that it cannot be ignored when trying to understand the nature of Italian national identity or, as in this specific case, when trying to analyse a geographically localised migrant group and its linguistic expressions.

3. Italian emigration to London: a brief history

Italian migration in Europe was already a noteworthy phenomenon in the Middle Ages, but more culturally and economically significant than quantitatively. It only assumed epic proportions starting from the nineteenth century (Gabaccia, 2013). It is significant to notice, at this point, that the Italian national

state was born in the middle of the nineteenth century (1861), at the peak of the migratory wave. The new-born nation, then, was immediately characterised as a nation of emigrants.

Italian migration to the UK has never been a mass phenomenon. Economic migration started, as said, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and migrants were mostly members of the lower social classes, labourer and artisans (Sponza, 1988; 2005). Emigration for political reasons was also important: the most famous Italian exile in London was Giuseppe Mazzini, who wrote extensively about the poor conditions of Italian migrants in London. Between 1840 and 1850, the Italian community settled in the Holborn area, one of the poorest of the city at the time. Holborn was convenient not just for the low rents, but also due to its proximity to the rich city centre, where many Italians worked as street vendors. In 1863, what can be considered the spiritual heart of the traditional Italian community in London was founded: the church of Saint Peter. In 1861, census results reported of 4,608 Italians in the country, half of which lived in London. By 1901, the number had gone up to 20,000 (Sponza, 1993a). By then, occupation was focused in the hospitality, catering and food dealing sectors. This gave birth to the stereotype that still exists today. The first important change in the community happened between 1885 and 1890 as a consequence of new laws issued by the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, which meant that many slums in Holborn had to be dismantled. Consequently, part of the Italian community relocated to Soho, creating two districts with significant social differences (the people who moved to Soho were the most well-off, those employed in catering and hospitality).

On the eve of the First World War, the Italian community in England and Scotland numbered at about 25,000, with little less than half that number living in London (Sponza, 1993a). During the first half of the twentieth century, world events had a significant impact on that community. In Italy, the efforts of the Fascist regime, building on the fundamental experience of the Great War, contributed to a leap forward in the construction of a national identity for the country, through both ideological and practical endeavours, and Italian communities abroad were neither exempt nor immune from that process. The impact of the Second World War was even more significant: immediately after Mussolini's declaration of war, 18,000 Italians residing in the country were declared 'enemy aliens'. Shortly after that, 4,000 Italians were arrested and interned. Many Italians could only leave the prison camps after

the armistice in September 1943. This experience was obviously very significant for the Italian community in Britain, and contributed to the creation of a sense of 'alienation' towards the country. However, this process was diluted by another important consequence of the war: a new flux of Italian migration to the UK. In the beginning, this migration was forced: Italian prisoners of war (POW), captured mostly in North Africa, were brought to Britain as workforce, starting as early as 1941. By 1945, they numbered at 250,000. It was the first time in history that so many Italians were present on British territory. Due to the nature of their work, they were often in contact with civilians, which encouraged the development of social and intimate relations. Even if the great majority of the POW were sent back home, many wished to go back to England and the jobs they had there; the few who remained (1,500 according to Sponza [1993a]) became the vanguard of this post-war migratory flux. Italians found mass employment in sectors, such as brick factories, that British workers found too hard and underpaid. The lure of a permanent, well paid (for Italian standards) job was strong for people coming, mostly, from villages in the south of Italy (the regions of Campania and Calabria, mostly). The post-war generation of migrants conformed to the characteristics of other contemporary Italian communities in the world. Integration in British society was very limited: Italians were relegated to specific sectors and marginal occupations, and they struggled with the strong tradition of class-based system in Britain, and its socio-cultural barriers (Sponza, 1993a). This was also due to the resilience, in the Italian communities, of the attachment to a nucleus of core values that, in this case, coincided with the perceived idea of national identity: family, *campanilismo* (strong attachment to the region or territory of origin) and the Catholic religion. The progressive erosion of some of these core values, and the following necessity to re-formulate national identity, is what distinguishes the contemporary wave of migrants from their predecessors.

The next turning point in the history of this emigration was 1973, when the UK joined the European Common Market. This new migratory flux showed significant differences from the past. Many Italians moved to the UK to learn English, or because they felt genuinely attracted by a social system they perceived as more liberal and rewarding to the individual. For this reason, the definition *brain drain* has often been accosted to this phenomenon. The employment situation also changed significantly, not least because of the improved commercial relations between the two countries. More and

more Italians moved to Britain, or found a job there, as businesspersons, entrepreneurs, managers, technicians and employees of both British and Italian companies (Sponza, 1993a).

4. Current emigration: the 'post-crisis' generation

As mentioned in the introduction, the post-crisis generation of migrants shows significant differences from the *brain drain* one. Despite the fact that Italy still attracts a significant number of migrants, and presents a positive net migration, the gap between those who exit and those who leave the country has been shrinking since 2011 (ISTAT, 2015, 2014). Migration from Italy to the UK has also assumed a much more significant dimension after 2013 (Tintori and Romei, 2017). As the Italian consulate itself suggests, identifying a precise number is almost impossible, since the majority of young Italians do not register to AIRE (*Anagrafe Italiani Residenti all'Estero*), which is the register of Italians living abroad. Despite the legal obligation to do so, there are no real incentives to register, since failure to comply is not sanctioned by law. AIRE figures are thus very likely to underestimate the presence of Italian immigrants, and are also not very useful to understand current migratory flows, because they include, people born to Italian parents abroad, people who emigrated a long time ago, and those born outside of Italy who obtained citizenship by descent. Data from ISTAT (the Italian national institute of statistics) are one of the best sources to understand the trends in current emigration. According to ISTAT, between 2009 and 2013 over 320,000 people left Italy, 40% more than in the previous four years (Tintori and Romei, 2017). In 2013, for the first time the UK took over as the favourite destination, followed by Germany, Switzerland and France. This trend continued in the following years.

The official data from ISTAT, while helping in understanding the general trends, cannot be considered a source of precise information. For that reason, it is useful to compare them with data from the destination countries. The only possible way to calculate an approximate number of Italians living in the UK is to look at the amount of National Insurance Numbers' applications (hereafter, NIN) submitted by Italians. For example, looking again at 2013, according to AIRE the number of Italians registered in that year was 16,000. NIN allocated to Italians, however, were 44,000, an increase of 66% over the previous year. In London alone, in 2015, NINs request by Italians increased by 37% (Barrett, 2015). The number of migrants alone, however, can tell us about the magnitude of the phenomenon, but not

much about the community that is the subject of study. Different criteria can help with that. For example, over 80% of the Italians who received a NIN in 2013 were below 34 years old, 42% were aged between 18 and 24. Young people, then, effectively make the 'drain', but the question is: are they also carrying the 'brain'? Despite the widely accepted narrative, supported by government policies and media reports, the evidence available suggests that the percentage of graduates, while on the increase, is by far a minority in the yearly emigrant population (Tintori and Romei, 2017).

The starting point of the brain drain narrative is easily acceptable: education in Italy does not help avoid economic distress. Compared to other European countries, like Germany and France, unemployment rates among those with a tertiary education are much higher (OECD 2013a). However, comparative studies show that Italy does not export more graduates than other developed countries, with Germany, France and the UK all having higher numbers (Franzoni, Scellato and Stephan, 2012; Beltrame, 2007). The reasons could be quite simple. First, Italy does not have that many graduates in the first place: the country ranked second to last for tertiary education attainment among all OECD countries (OECD 2013b). Second, Italian graduates experience a significant skill gap that makes them unemployable in the global market.

As our ethnographic observation suggests, and as Tintori and Romei's article (2017) claim, since 2013, the new Italian migratory wave has become more diverse and varied, including more social, cultural and economic backgrounds of origin. The most evident consequence is what could appear as a de-elitisation of the migrant wave: no longer just brains looking for more opportunities and a diverse social environment, but also (and perhaps prominently) economic migrants, young men and women who could find no satisfying employment opportunities at home. Although official descriptive statistics about the Italian community in London have not yet been produced, following fieldwork observation and Italian consular unpublished data, we believe it is reasonable to hypothesise that the most recently arrived members of the Italian community in London present a wider range of differences than earlier arrivals. The migrants who moved immediately after 2007 denounced a lack of meritocracy and an exhausting gerontocracy that, according to Scotto's interviewees (2015a, 2015b), was strangling their country of origin. Similar descriptions were provided by Conti (2012), Fellin (2014), and Scotto (2015a, 2015b) and also by scholars who focused on Australian new migratory flows, such as Baldassar and Pyke

(2014). The latest arrivals, instead, can be considered effectively economic migrants and, according to what they generally affirm, they were forced to move in order to find jobs that they could not find in Italy. Their level of education can be very low: Rosini (2015) affirms that only half of the latest migrants holds a university degree.

5. Community?

The new Italian migratory wave is particularly hard to define as a community or to pin down using strict criteria, even in a geographically localised environment such as London. This is not just because of the previously mentioned variety and diversity of origins. The fragmentation of the Italian community in the UK is well established (Scotto, 2015a). In the past, this was due to the different areas of origin in Italy, and the strong cultural and linguistic diversity that this entailed. Today, other factors intervene. The difference between generations of migrants is a very important one. The two generations have a diverse relationship with the host country, based on a different cultural level, knowledge of language and education. Another is the global dimension of London: young Italian migrants encounter thousands of other young Europeans, with different cultures, values and languages (Logemann, 2013).

The main reason, however, why the wave of young Italians in London can be hardly defined as a 'community', is the lack of networks, links and structures for the new migrants to rely upon. Traditionally, previous generation migrants could rely on institutions such as the *patronati*, branches of Italian trade unions involved in the assistance of Italians who maintain or have maintained a working relationship in the UK. In the past, they assisted workers with working rights and taxation, but now they have shifted towards social security practices for retired workers. The reason is, quite simply, that young Italian migrants do not use *patronati*. They rely on completely different networks for work-related issues, both private and public. Another powerful reference point for the Italian community were the Catholic institutions. In London, St. Peter's church worked as an aggregation point for many decades, especially when the community was localised in the Holborn area (Fortier, 1999, 2006). Nowadays, the percentage of new migrants being involved, or even interested, in Catholic institutions is risible. Finally, many private associations of Italians in London exist, but they are not very active, and they barely manage to get by (Scotto, 2015a). The absence of these forms of socialisation decreased the possibility for new migrants to engage in community performances of national and transnational identity.

6. A weak national identity

The significance of national identity issues in the new Italian migratory wave in London has not escaped researchers. Relevant studies have analysed both the 'traditional' migrant community and the *European* or *brain drain* one (Conti 2012; Scotto 2015a, 2015b). It is argued here that, to describe the post-crisis wave, it is necessary to re-valuate and extend the analyses suggested so far. To discuss the issue of the national identity of Italians abroad, we start with a review of theories on Italian nationalism. Starting from a general analysis of contemporary nationalism in Italy, Dickie argued that this could be described as 'inverted patriotism'(2001, p. 28), which is used to describe the Italians' distrust over the capacities of their state. Still according to Dickie (1996), the process of nation-building is made by two elements. The first is a series of concrete initiative or actions carried by the state: propaganda, education, self-representation, etc. The second is a socio-cultural impetus that originates organically in the population, thus being out of the control of the state. Other scholars (Anderson, 2006; Gellner and Breuilly, 2008) do not agree with the idea that at the origin of a national character there has to be an objective disposition of a population. The Italian state, for instance, was born in 1861 after a turbulent succession of wars of conquest and independence. This led to the unification of almost ten different and independent territories, under the rule of the Kingdom of Sardinia. The clear will of the intellectual and ruling classes to create an 'Italian' identity (something almost unheard to at the time) is a well-known process that is encapsulated in the famous expression of leading nationalist Massimo D'Azeglio: 'we made Italy, now we must make Italians' (De Cesare, 2011). The ideal of national unity was promoted by prominent figures who, however, were exiles, or living abroad, such as Mazzini and Garibaldi (Duggan, 1994).

Many believe, then, that the impetus for national unification did not emerge organically from within the country. It is important, however, to understand that this process of state-sponsored nationalism was neither new nor unique to Italy. Nationalism, in fact, rarely emerged as an organic and spontaneous feeling, especially during the troubled phase of the construction of modern nation states. We can add that the process of state-sponsored nationalism was not very successful in Italy. The intellectuals' and statesmen's class promoted a nationalist feeling, which was mostly based on an aesthetic romantic ideal. The Italian artistic heritage, which included the Italian literary language of Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio and Bembo (Gambarota, 2011), was seen by the elite class as the common ground

from which national identity could blossom. This, however, did not resonate well with the mostly poor, rural and largely uneducated inhabitants of nineteenth century Italy (Colombo and Kinder, 2012; Conti, 2012; De Mauro, 2011; Gabaccia, 2013).

This difficulty in building a national identity persisted over the following decades and it is still recognisable today, defined by a fragile and complicated relationship between the state and its citizens (Conti, 2012), in which Italians worry over the inadequacy of their country as a modern nation state. In general, Italians tend to have a negative and partial view of Italy and its history as a country (Ferrarotti, 1997). Historically, the Fascist era has been the time in the nation's history when the relationship between the state and its citizens has been stronger, and when nationalism was most actively pursued and encouraged. Lanaro (1988) explained the lack of enthusiasm for collective manifestations of nationalism in Italy with the lack of a *siglo de oro* (golden century) in the history of Italian nation-making. It could be argued, however, that, purely in terms of nation-making, the Fascist *ventennio* was the equivalent of the *siglo de oro*. The extent of how much the Fascist regime achieved in those twenty years, once again purely in terms of nation-making, is debatable; what is not debatable is that Fascism un-did much more than what it achieved. In the collective consciousness of the Italian country, in fact, nationalism and Fascism are very tightly associated. This association left a stain on the concept of nationalism which is hard to remove, and difficult to properly understand without looking at the history of post-World War II Italy and the complex legacy of Fascism in the country.

7. Nationalism and transnationalism: migrant national identity

Therefore, the Italian national identity can be defined as weak or at least controversial. It is now a matter of understanding how this affects Italian communities living abroad, what national identity Italian migrants possess, and how this has changed over the course of the decades. Many of the issues presented above can be easily identifiable in migrant communities, including that of the young Italians in London. According to Conti, in her 2012 study based on interviews with 36 graduates who had recently migrated to the UK, the two main factors in the decision to migrate were 'holding a negative view of Italy and experiencing a weak or problematic identification with its culture' (p. 5). Going back even further, to the traditional emigration, which we can roughly identify with the first century of history of the Italian state, the ties with the local communities of origin (town, village, neighbourhood or family) recreated

abroad, were clearly stronger than the, at times non-existent, idea of a national community. The question is if the situation has changed today. Has the Italian national identity (and the Italian state) evolved enough that migrants now feel fully 'Italian'? Gabaccia (2013) agrees and thinks that Italian migrants now possess a stronger (even if not fully developed) sense of national identity, nourished within the historical ethnic communities. It could be argued that living abroad reinforces some positive perceptions of the home country. Ethnicity, and the consequent preservation of Italianness, has always represented a crucial criterion of socialisation (Ciliberti, 2007). The new Italian migrants follow this tendency, with some important differences explained below. They often lament about the quality of their social interactions, especially with English people (King, Lulle, Conti, Mueller and Scotto, 2014). Usually, Italian migrants prefer to develop networks either with other Italians or with people from other nationalities (non-British), because they share the experience of migration in a multi-ethnic context such as London, where the social dispersion of the metropolis makes it harder to develop close friendships (Scotto, 2015b).

This brings forward the issue of the identity of the hosting country. In terms of integration, in the past, a weaker national identity of origin meant that this was more easily abandoned, to integrate better in a new environment (De Fina, 2014). During the traditional mass migrations, migrants re-created in the host country model of aggregation, which duplicated those, developed in their homeland communities. We must remember that most of the migrants used to come from rural areas, and they grouped in the host countries following the links already established in their villages and small towns in Italy. It is not rare thus to find migrants coming from the same small villages, who migrated through a chain of kinship and friendship, when not hired in bulk (Guzzo, 2014; Rocchi, 2006). To be precise, this happened in particular in the UK, since Italians migrated towards small industrial towns, and they established regional, more than Italian neighbourhoods and centres (Guzzo, 2014; Zontini, 2015). On the other hand, the USA context, for instance, presents some differences. In the metropolitan area of New York and New Jersey (Haller, 2002), Italians coming from every part of the peninsula gathered and created national communities. Italian identity, and afterwards Italian-American identity, developed as a form of reaction to the racial divisions of the host country. Italians, especially those migrated after the unification, were considered neither as black migrants nor as white ones (Luconi, 2011). In a process

of *whitening* and *europeanisation* (Miller, 2013), Italian-Americans nourished their Italianness to gain power and social stability in the new country. However, in the USA, the Italian-American identity was negotiated and developed, more than Italian national identity itself, and the two contrasting cultures merged successfully in the span of three generations.

Today the dynamic has reversed: the national identity of origin, regardless of the fact that it could be stronger than in the past or not, faces the effect that globalisation had on foreign, or receiving, identities, especially in metropolitan contexts such as London. In our specific case, young Italians that move to London today are not likely to come in contact with a strong British identity, but with a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic context that is hard to define in traditional terms. On the other hand, while they possess a weak national identity of origin, this is developing a stronger 'pull' on them, mostly due to the often declared intent of young Italian migrants to return home at some point (hence, they are more inclined to preserve their identity of origin). This appears to be a real 'identity dilemma' (Conti, 2012, p. 18), generating from the migrants' sense of belonging to their home country, one towards which they feel very critical. Positive and negative views of Italy are both reinforced by the migratory experience: an Italian in London, for example, could compliment the efficiency of the bureaucracy in the UK, and lament about the lack of reliable social networks, all in the same sentence. Rather than renouncing their identity of origin, young Italian migrants live in a condition of dissidence, which, paradoxically, can reinforce their sense of belonging to the home country (Conti, 2012).

Torn between two weak identities, the new Italian migrants experience an unstable form of trans-nationalism. Traditionally, transnationalism describes the experience of last three decades migrants, who are not presented anymore as individuals in one place, but as mobile people, who connect different worlds (Giampapa, 2001; Levitt and Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 2001). Transnationalism thus describes 'the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together the country of origin and their country of settlement' (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton, 1992a, p. 1). New Italian migrants in Lon-don have at their disposal several worlds and cultures to connect, and they do not need to be anchored to such dualistic perspective. Due to the weakness of the national identity of origin and the multicultur-alism experienced in London, they can play with many identities and re-negotiate them, by changing

the traditional understanding of *Italianness* and *Britshness*. Moreover, Italian migrants in London negotiate the meaning of their national migratory identities, due to their complex relation with the previous migratory waves. The present situation increases the complexity of identity re-affirmation, which generally happens in migratory contexts.

8. The language as an interpretive key of the new migratory identity

In the past, Italian migrants had to deal with the struggle of balancing their lives in two countries, that of origin and the hosting one. Identity issues were thus related to feelings of belonging or exclusion from one of the two cultures. However, they could count on homogeneous communities, which eventually gained their status of ethnic communities, and nourished migrants' migratory identity (De Fina, 2007a). Conversely, the post-2008 crisis migrants cannot rely on the community. Most of the participants involved in the present project deny the existence of a community that support them and that permeate their experience as migrants. Since they are not involved in any traditional Italian migratory experience, the new migrants do not feel members of any community, the existence of which is thus challenged. The participants acknowledged the difference between past and new forms of gathering. From the interviews conducted for the present research, it emerged that ethnicity cannot be the only grouping criterion. The words of Alessandro[1], one of the participants, explain the new criteria on which grouping is based. When questioned on his belonging to the Italian community in London, he replied:

> I feel that my community is formed of the Italians of my university who do my same job. We are involuntarily a community more or less. But being an Italian in London is not the only thing that unites the people of the sub-community I was talking about. We feel members of a community for past experiences. We share university, similar job, we started at the same time (Alessandro, participant).

The perception of the community's absence seems to be a result of the extreme diversity that characterises recent migrants. Feeling the lack of common elements with other migrants, the participants interviewed denied the existence of the Italian community in London, although they underscored the importance of their grass-root social networks. Unconsciously, they suggested a theoretical framework, commonly used in linguistic studies of groups and social networks: Community of Practice (Eckert, 2006; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999; Lave and Wenger, 1991;

Wenger, 1998). This new form of aggregation, based on common life style and interests more than on ethnicity, are encouraged by the absence of an Italian neighbourhood and of traditional social migratory practices and institutions (churches, clubs, ethnic radio, newspapers and TV programs). In the communities of practice created by new Italian migrants, new identities are constructed and negotiated. Therefore, this form of socialisation and networking is extremely significant for the new migrants. Smaller communities based on daily concrete activities substituted the functions of traditional large homogeneous ethnic communities. During their encounters, the new migrants produce narratives. In these narratives, they share their migratory experience and through their linguistic choices, they are able to show affiliation or disaffiliation to the group, and agreement or disagreement with the new selves at their disposal (for instance, the migrant, mobile, adult selves).

The common and widespread way of identity construction in in-group talks relies on linguistic phenomena, which characterise the linguistic style of the new migrants. Although the participants denied belonging to a community, similar linguistic patterns were found in every communities of practice or small group of migrants observed. Interestingly, speakers belonging to different communities of practice agree on the appropriateness of using these phenomena among post-crisis migrants. The participants highlighted such an agreement at a more general level, which could be defined a community level. The ethnographic linguistic observation of several members of the post-2008 crisis wave supports such a claim. We thus suggest that the study of the language of the post-2008 crisis migrants provides a tool to understand their new identities, and the processes of community shaping. The present linguistic investigation offers the possibility of painting a socio-cultural picture of the new Italian migrants, since their new linguistic expression is a connecting element. This becomes relevant if we consider the absence, or the denial, of other connecting factors, which were traditionally evident in ethnic communities.

Before going deeper into this analysis and argument, it is useful to explain briefly the Italian historical migratory linguistic scenario. In the past, the Italian migrants mainly presented a dialectal linguistic repertoire (Ciliberti, 2007; Guzzo, 2014; Haller, 1987; Rocchi, 2006; Rubino, 2014). In Italy, several dialects are spoken (every city or town has a different one). Italian dialects are not varieties of Italian, but different languages presenting a common root, Latin (De Fina, 2007b). This fragmented linguistic scenario prevented interregional full understanding until 'Italian' spread and became the real

national language. However, this process only happened in the 1960s (De Mauro, 2011). Therefore, the migrants who left Italy at the end of the nineteenth century and after the Second World War were mainly dialectal speakers. Moreover, they were mostly illiterate or poorly educated since most of them had only finished primary school (Ciliberti, 2007; Castronovo Fusco, 2010; De Mauro, 2011). This did not encouraged interregional communication, although the Italian migrants who settled in mixed communities developed dialectal *koine*[2] (Guzzo, 2014; Haller, 1987), by exploring ways of communicating among fellow compatriots.

Nevertheless, since the 1970s, the Italian linguistic scenario has gradually changed and new migrants are a proof of the results of this change. For the first time in Italian mass migration history, all the migrants can easily communicate with each other by adopting regional varieties of the national standard language. Although presenting some phonetic, morphological and syntactical differences, these varieties are intercomprehensible and they have now become the mother tongues of most of Italians (Cerruti, 2011; ISTAT, 2014). To be more specific, despite the great lack of homogeneity within the wave, the Italian language, and the native competence in it, is the only element providing unity to the group.

However, as observed in many other migratory contexts (among others: Cavallaro, 2006; Ciliberti, 2007; Correa-Zoli, 1974; De Fina, 2007a, 2007b, 2014; Haller, 1987; Pasquandrea, 2008; Rubino, 2014), the language spoken by those who leave the homeland hardly remains unchanged. It is not surprising that, due to the influence of the host country's language, the migrants develop linguistic phenomena, which, from a very prescriptive point of view, contributes to a corruption of the mother tongue. Adopting a descriptive point of view, we must acknowledge that the introduction of elements belonging to the host country language is a tool, which helps the migrants to cope with their dualistic existences and with their new lives.

In this sense, Italian post-2008 crisis migrants settling in London are not very different from past migrants. The study of new migrants' in-group conversations suggests the presence of phenomena of borrowings (foreign words entering the linguistic system of another language) and code-switching (the use of two languages in one speech). Since understanding the linguistic aspects of such phenomena is beyond the scope of this paper, we do not delve further in the definition of these two terms. However,

one fundamental aspect must be highlighted. The mixing of two (or more) languages that produces a linguistic continuum, as it is happening in the speech of new Italian migrants, has recently started to be addressed as translanguaging (Lewis, Jones and Baker, 2012; Wei, 2011, 2016, 2017). Wei defines translanguaging as a process that 'includes the full range of linguistic performances of multilingual language users for purposes that transcend the combination of structures, the alternation between systems, the transmission of information and the representation of values, identities and relationships' (2011, p.1223).

Translanguaging can be interpreted here as a way to translate transnationalism into linguistic terms (De Fina, 2013). Translanguaging is living with a foot in two (or more) languages. As transnationalism has become the idea of transcending geographical spaces, similarly translanguaging responded to the need of understanding multilingual practices as a way of going beyond languages. Translanguaging is then seen by researchers as a tool used by bi- or multi- lingual speakers for developing and negotiating new identities, and to reinforce their social networks (Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Wei, 2011), especially in transnational contexts (Wei and Hua, 2013). The present research shows that new Italian migrants engage in translanguaging practices and through them, they claim their new identities, sense of belonging and roles' acting.

9. Communities of practice and practice of community: translanguaging

Continuing the comparison with past migratory waves, we must highlight a relevant difference between traditional and new migrants. At a social level, within the post-2008 crisis wave, the factors that used to reinforce migratory identities and enhance community's cohesion are absent or very weak. This results, as said before, not only in the missed feeling of community's existence, but also in the struggle to find a strong and holistic migratory identity. Moreover, at a community level, the post-2008 crisis migrants do not benefit from the traditional work on identity promoted during official and regular community practices. Fortier (2006), for instance, suggests that through the Italian mass, celebrated in the London historical neighbourhood of Holborn, Italian migrants could perform their Italian and migratory identity, by reaffirming their belonging to a community that shaped migrants' experiences and new lives. On the contrary, new migrants behave differently. The present research supports and expands what other scholars have already maintained (Conti, 2012; Scotto, 2015a, 2015b). Firstly, post 2008-

crisis migrants are not keen to engage with practices established by old migrants. Secondly, they do not seem particularly interested in developing new ones, or at least, not at a community level. In this context, translanguaging is seen as the only aggregative practice, and the acceptance of translanguaging connects the members of the new wave.

Translanguaging helps to reflect on the new experience, and on the new identities acquired due to the new lifestyle of a migrant. The use of two codes, merging into one, is the expression of the speakers' new migratory and transnational identity. Furthermore, participants, through translaguaging practices, strengthen the socio-cultural identity of the new migratory wave, balanced between traditional patterns and the break with the past. Translanguaging thus becomes a practice, a means to signal commonality of experiences. Through linguistic understanding, the post-2008 crisis migrants can signal their belonging to a group, which stands in opposition to others who do not belong to it, and who are not allowed to be involved in translanguaging practises. In the case of new Italian migrants, a new social identity is built through the identification of 'the other' (Shiffrin, 2006). In the narratives collected for the present study, the participants maintained that their new style, characterised by translanguaging, can only be used by the other migrants, but they believe it is inappropriate to use the same style with others who did not share their migratory experience. We quote the words of Daniele, a participant, who maintains:

> But you know in the end if you speak with an Italian here he is used as well so he understands you. I would not talk in this way with an Italian because this person would stare at me asking 'what did you say'? I would not do it with my friends in Italy (Daniele, participant).

He firstly claims that an Italian person would not agree with his style. Interestingly, we see that his words introduce the distinction between Italian migrants and 'proper' Italians. Than he adds that he would never use the same style with his friends who live in Italy. In other interviews and narratives, the parents or the older relatives are the relevant 'other', unable to understand this new style and not allowed to be involved in these new linguistic practices. Linguistic practices become then symbolic because they promote a break with the older generation.

Traditionally, 'the other' was identified in the people of the host country, and the dichotomy between 'they' and 'us' was thoroughly stressed (Gumperz, 1982). Nevertheless, in this case, a different

'other' emerges from the words of the participants. This 'other' is culturally more relevant since it is able to influence the choices of the speakers and the value of the participants' linguistic choices. This is partially due to the Italian migratory tradition, which already offers terms of comparison and elements of 'othering'. On the other hand, due to London's multiculturalism and multilingualism, the division between guest people and mainstream culture is not as strong as in other contexts (Block, 2006; Burk, 2005). Therefore, it is not the use of Italian against English that is relevant in this case, but the use of English in Italian discourses. It becomes a symbol, a linguistic choice that allows strengthening the separation between those who left and those who remained in Italy. The new migrants generally share common feelings regarding their new situation. Therefore, the use of new linguistic elements becomes the expression of their mutual comprehension, both at a linguistic and emotional level. Only through these linguistic practices the new migrants are able to strengthen the cohesion of the new group, which is so heterogeneous to deny its community nature, and to find common grounds to reflect on their new migratory identity.

10. Negotiating migratory identities

The recent renewed relevance of emigration had a significant impact on Italy, emotionally, politically and sociologically (Tintori and Romei, 2016). It is not surprising, then, that the contemporary sociology has been focusing on the elements that differentiate the previous generations of Italian migrants from the new one (Conti, 2012; Sacco, 2013; Scotto 2015a; 2015b). Even the present research, initially, focused on inter-generational differences. From this preliminary investigation, it emerged that the linguistic repertoire of new migrants is different, and that the way the phenomena of translaguaging are realised presents significant innovations. However, we must admit that the use of translaguaging practices is surely not an exclusive trait of the new post-crisis migrants. When adopting a translaguaging style, the new migrants insert themselves into a very long linguistic tradition. Due to this immediate link between translanguaging and the style of past migrants, it is not surprising that some new migrants interviewed for this study, negatively evaluated such practices, in order to take the distance from the traditional status of migrants. One participant, interviewed on his new style, negatively evaluates it, saying:

> My language has changed but in a negative way. I use English or Englishised words. I don't think this is good because then when I speak with Italian people they don't always understand and it seems like you are making a mistake maybe in the structure of the sentence (Salvatore, participant).

Once again, Salvatore' choice of words is noteworthy. He seems afraid to be judged by 'Italian people' for his new style, and therefore he evaluates it negatively. Although distancing himself from the migrants' style, he automatically casts himself into a different category. Later in the interview, he admits that when among other Italians living in London, he can be more relaxed and thus use translanguaging freely. Salvatore seems although aware of the fact that translanguaging is negatively perceived by those who remained in Italy, since this linguistic practice would link him immediately with the style of past migrants. This response can be related to the opinions of Scotto's participants, who underscored important differences between them and past migrants (Scotto, 2015a; 2015b). The will of keeping one's own language pure seems to be an attempt to take distance from the migratory tradition, remaining loyal to the motherland. This suggests also that the new migrants need to reflect on their migratory identity, if they do not want to be associated with already known categories.

However, this attitude is not widespread. Most of the participants embraced their new linguistic possibilities, by understanding that the mixing of Italian and English is a natural result of their new life. Generally, those who presented a more relaxed attitude towards their new style are the same who smoothly embraced their new migratory identity, which contrast with their previous uncontaminated national identity. Moreover, translanguaging becomes a means to negotiate and display not only social new identities, but also individual (De Fina, 2016). The present research suggests that, as in other studies (De Fina, 2006; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008), these new identities are constructed through linguistic practices, social interactions and the development of patterned narratives. Giulio, a participant who proudly claims his migratory status, says:

> when I go to ***nisbet*** the supplier I go to buy ***gloves*** the ***blue gloves*** I go to buy the ***blue roll*** I go to buy the ***soft brush*** I don't go to buy *la carta assorbente* and *il pennello* or *i guanti* I go to buy the *soft sponges*. To cut the chicken to chop the potatoes I ask C** where is the ***chopper***. I stay on the ***front***[3] (Giulio, participant).

Giulio is here displaying his new migratory (thus social) identity, but also his personal professional identity, inserting himself into a sub-group, those who work in the hospitality sector. As said before, the new Italian migrants in London are perfectly aware of the existence of sub-groups and, through linguistic practices, they demonstrate their loyalty for, and affiliation to, their specific sub-group. For this reason, we claimed that our linguistic perspective is functional to understand the sociology and the social identity of the post 2008-crisis Italian migrants.

11. Conclusions

If the new migrants alone are allowed to involve in translaguaging practices, we can then maintain that the participants recognise the existence of a conversational style, which is natural for the members of the same group. However, as already highlighted, the concept of group itself is problematic. The denial of the presence of an Italian community in London seems to contrast with the acknowledgement of an in-group style. From a linguistic perspective, this aspect challenges the traditional theoretical frameworks adopted in migratory contexts. An alternative way of grouping, however, has been unconsciously suggested by the participants themselves. In their narratives, they highlighted the differences between a community imposed from above (and therefore imagined), and a real community (Jones, 2014). On one hand, we have the notion of ideal community, merely based on ethnicity and the traditional understanding of migratory practices. On the other hand, we identified a type of grouping which is more concrete, grass-rooted, and acknowledged by the interviewees. Ethnicity may be the factor that triggers the grouping, which is however strengthened by the daily practices, and it remains local and confined to a specific moment. Theoretically, such a form of grouping involves the notion of community of practice (Holmes e Meyerhoff, 1999). Such a structure allows us to understand the spaces wherein the new linguistic elements can be learned and spread among new migrants.

The inter-connection among the communities of practice favours the diffusion of the only element connecting the members of different communities of practice: translanguaging. In the context of a weak national identity, and of a migrant identity that is challenged by globalisation and by a multicultural context such as London, translaguaging can then become a powerful tool for analysing a community that struggles to be defined as such, and to understand the complexity of new and developing migratory identities.

Notes

1. All the names of the participants are pseudonyms. The interviews were carried out in Italian, since it is the mother tongue of both the participants and the researcher.

2. *Koine* is the result of contact between two or more mutually intelligible varieties (dialects) of the same language (Siegel, 1985). The term was firstly used to describe a particular variety of the Greek language, but later it has been used to refer to several varieties of creoles and pidgins (Siegel, 1985). According to Ferguson, a *koine* can develop from a 'complex process of mutual borrowing and levelling among various dialects and not as a result of diffusion from a single source' (1959, p. 619).

3. All the interviews were conducted in Italian. The words in bold and italic were pronounced in English.

Notes on Contributors

Francesco Cacciatore holds a PhD in History at the University of Westminster (London). He is a Doctoral Researcher at Univeristà degli Studi di Salerno. His research interests include nationalism and nation-building, the Cold War and intelligence history.

Giulia Pepe is a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Westminster (London). Her research interests focus on language in context, Italian language and dialectal varieties, linguistic phenomena in migratory contexts.

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