Missing the Global Turn: Italy, the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the Belated Removal of the Geographical Limitation

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In 1990, the Italian Parliament approved the country's first comprehensive piece of legislation on immigration and political asylum. One of the key elements of the approach launched by the new law was its abolition of the 'geographical limitation' permitted by Article 1 of the Geneva Convention of 1951, which meant that Italy, like other countries, could now award refugee status to men and women in flight from places outside Europe. In the context of international regulations on refugees, this was a decidedly belated step. In 1967, in New York, countries had signed the 'Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees', rescinding the condition in the Geneva Convention whereby the basis of an asylum request had to relate to events prior to 1951. The protocol also determined that the 'geographical limitation' – the option to award formal refugee status only to people coming from Europe – was no longer open to new signatories to the Convention; it could, however, be retained by Italy and the other states that had made this choice back in 1951.[1] The Italian authorities had then continued to operate this restriction.

By 1990, it appeared imperative that the geographical limitation exercised in Italy's operation of the Geneva Convention be removed, for a number of reasons. First and foremost, this was a requirement if the country was to be part of the 'Schengen area'. Furthermore, in response to the disintegration of the bipolar world and the consequent sudden intensification of migratory flows from Eastern European countries towards the West, Italy urgently needed to be part of a shared approach across the European Economic Community (EEC) to the issue

[1] *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 606 (New York, 1970), 268–77.

of mobility.[2] Finally, Italy had seen a new wave of civil mobilization against discrimination towards immigrants, which had rapidly taken shape in the wake of the racially motivated murder of Jerry Masslo in August 1989. An activist who had been forced to leave apartheid South Africa, Masslo had been obliged to live in Italy as an undocumented migrant precisely because the legislation in force did not allow for recognition of his status as a refugee.[3]

The reasons for abandoning the geographical limitation have been clearly set out by the somewhat sparse literature on the history of asylum in Italy. However, why exactly was it that the country made this decision at such a late stage? Many of the studies simply mention a 'delay', which is implicitly regarded as an inevitable consequence of the 'Italian exceptionalism' that commentators customarily relate to the country's backwardness, the lack of responsibility taken by its governmental bodies, and the incompetence of Italy's political class.[4] The implied reference to an 'Italian anomaly' has been matched by a dearth of analysis of national policies on asylum and immigration from a comparative perspective, or a perspective that at least locates these policies within the international context.

This article investigates the reasons for Italy's very belated extension of the option of political asylum to the non-European world. It does this by intercutting analysis on various different fronts: the strategies of successive national governments; the positions taken by the political opposition; the actual presence on Italian soil of people needing asylum, and the

[2] Simone Paoli, *Frontiera Sud. L'Italia e la nascita dell'Europa di Schengen* (Milan, 2018), 133–160.

[3] Donato Di Sanzo, *Braccia e persone. Storia dell'immigrazione in Italia ai tempi di Jerry Masslo (1980–1990)* (Turin, 2020).

[4] For the narratives relating to 'Italian exceptionalism', see the lecture by Donald Sassoon, 'Intellectuals and the Politics of Exceptionalism' [video], Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Bologna, 21 Nov. 2011, https://www.bipr.eu/eventprofile.cfm/idevent=4D1B70D8-D8A3-FB17-5576365008A51655/Donald-Sassoon-Intellectuals-and-the-Politics-of-Exceptionalism&zdyx=1, accessed 29 Sept. 2020. See also Donald Sassoon, 'The Italian Anomaly?', *Comparative European Politics*, xi/3 (2013).

response of local communities; and Italy's location in the international setting. As we will see, at least until the end of the 1970s the Italian authorities concentrated on keeping the country in the role of a 'transit land', ready to welcome refugees but only in order to assist their resettlement elsewhere (principally in the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand). Meanwhile, the presence of asylum seekers within Italy's national borders, although limited in terms of numbers, had a definite impact on the relationship between local authorities and central government, on the determination of rules for the use of public resources (whether formally codified or not), and on cultural developments around the figure of the '*straniero*' ('foreigner'). In contrast to the usual position, this article argues that the refugee issue is actually an integral element of the history of postwar Italy, including the lengthy period prior to the turning point marked by the legislation of 1990.[5]

The Italian case seems important because it forces us to rethink some of the interpretations of the second half of the twentieth century that have been put forward by 'refugee history'.[6] In particular, the path taken by Italy shows how it remained disconnected from the global turn in policy on refugees, which studies place in the period that spans the late 1950s and early 1960s. During this phase, state institutions, voluntary agencies, and international public opinion all experienced profound changes in their perception of refugees: they were starting to be seen as an issue at the global level, rather than just a European problem. The biggest contribution to this perceptual shift is usually seen as the United Nations' nomination of

[5] Illustrating the more traditional perspective, recently published histories of Italy's republican era do not address the issue of refugees during the Cold War period. See, for example, John Foot, *The Archipelago: Italy since 1945* (London, 2019); Guido Crainz, *Storia della Repubblica. L'Italia dalla Liberazione ad oggi* (Rome, 2016); Agostino Giovagnoli, *La Repubblica degli italiani. 1946–2016* (Rome–Bari, 2016).

[6] On the recent emergence of 'refugee history', see Pamela Ballinger, 'Impossible Returns, Enduring legacies: Recent Historiography of Displacement and the Reconstruction of Europe after World War II', *Contemporary European History*, xxii/1 (2013).

1959–60 as ‘World Refugee Year’; Italy, however, played only a minimal part in this event, and right up until the end of the 1970s continued to see the refugee issue mainly as a problem for its internal policy. The Italian case thus obliges us to question the actual impact of the global turn described in the studies. It also encourages us to expand the investigation to Europe’s other Mediterranean countries that seem to have followed a similar path in their policies on refugees. A comparative analysis of asylum in southern Europe might address the imbalance within the literature, which to date has mainly focused on the experience of northern Europe and the United States. This shift will potentially shed new light on the history of the refugee regime since the Second World War.

A transit land on the way to the West

Those drafting the Refugee Convention signed in Geneva in 1951 had inserted both chronological and geographical limitations because, as was observed during the preparatory work, ‘too vague a definition’ would be like signing ‘a blank check’.[7] To restrict the potential reservoir of asylum seekers, countries were given the option of limiting their recognition of refugee status to people from the European continent, and, critically, the year 1951 was identified as the cut-off point for events that had triggered flight. These provisions reflected a political vision of the issue that was strongly influenced by the upheavals of the Second World War and was entirely focused on that moment, in that the refugees under consideration were only those in existence at the time.[8] Although only a few countries from the old

[7] Cited in Kazimierz Bem, ‘The Coming of a “Blank Cheque” – Europe, the 1951 Convention, and the 1967 Protocol’, *International Journal of Refugee Law*, xvi/4 (2004), 609.

[8] Ibid. For the impact of the management of displaced persons after the war on the development of international agreements regarding refugees in the 1950s, see Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War’s Wake: Europe’s Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford, 2011), 150–63.

continent opted for the geographical limitation (France, Portugal, Luxembourg, and the Vatican City, as well as Italy), it was still the case that until the end of the 1950s the policies, practices, and programmes directed at refugees remained markedly Eurocentric in all Western countries. Millions of men and women had been forced by the war to leave their own countries, and had then remained for long periods in camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy. When this matter of 'displaced persons' had been resolved, at least officially, the notion of the asylum seeker par excellence on the European continent became the fugitive from Eastern Europe's Communist bloc.[9] The issue first emerged in 1948, when the Communists came to power in Czechoslovakia and in consequence thousands of supporters of the Third Czechoslovak Republic left the country. Eight years later, the Red Army's suppression of Hungary's anti-Soviet uprising led to the departure of more than 180 thousand people. This was the first significant occasion when the Geneva Convention was applied, and the 'Iron Curtain refugees' came to occupy a central position in the policies on aid and reception adopted both by individual national governments and by the United Nations.[10]

In Italy, the focus of governmental policy on refugees had already been determined in the period immediately after the Second World War, which was marked both by the presence of displaced persons and by population movements triggered by the redrawing of borders and loss of the country's colonies. Management of the displaced population was based on the distinction between '*profughi nazionali*' (national – Italian – refugees) and '*profughi stranieri*' (foreign refugees), and thus on the introduction of a dualistic approach that kept

[9] Peter Gatrell, *The Unsettling of Europe: How Migration Reshaped a Continent* (London, 2019), 51–68.

[10] UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action* (Oxford, 2000), 13–32.

separate the protective measures and support envisaged for these two distinct groups.[11] The Italian authorities managed to delegate most of the responsibility for the care of 'foreign refugees' to the various international organizations operating in the country, which were also involved with resettling these people in other countries.[12] In 1948, Article 10 of the new constitution of the Republic of Italy stated that '[a] foreigner who, in his home country, is denied the actual exercise of the democratic freedoms guaranteed by the Italian constitution shall be entitled to the right of asylum within the territory of the Republic, under the conditions established by law'. However, no specific legislative measures were then introduced to follow up this constitutional commitment.

Italy's ratification of the Geneva Convention, in 1954, passed all but unnoticed, and then for more than ten years the issue of asylum received little attention, in either political or public debate. The infrequent articles that appeared in the Italian press conveyed the reassuring image of a country that had positioned itself as a place of transit for refugees from Eastern Europe.[13] Newspapers focused on the processes and procedures that allowed people from behind the Iron Curtain to move on to other countries. After their arrival in Italian territory, asylum seekers were given temporary accommodation in the 'Centri di assistenza profughi stranieri' (CAPS: Foreign Refugee Support Centres) in Padriciano (just outside

[11] Pamela Ballinger, 'Entangled or "Extruded" Histories? Displacement, National Refugees, and Repatriation after the Second World War', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, xxv/3 (2012); Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2019), 43–76.

[12] The principal organizations were, from 1944 to 1947, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees; and from 1947 to 1951, the International Refugee Organization. See Silvia Salvatici, 'Between National and International Mandates: Displaced Persons and Refugees in Postwar Italy', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 49 (2014), 514–36.

[13] Diego de Castro, 'L'obbligo di rispettare il diritto di asilo politico', *La Stampa*, 7 March 1956, 5; Igor Man, 'Per i profughi politici l'Italia è un territorio di "primo asilo"', *La Stampa*, 16 Jan. 1969, 2.

Trieste), Capua (Campania), and Latina (south of Rome). Their cases were assessed by a 'Commissione paritetica di eleggibilità' (Joint Eligibility Commission), which brought officials from Italy's Interior and Foreign Ministries together with members of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) delegation to Italy. The award of refugee status guaranteed access to a resettlement programme, which in due course involved transfer to another country.[14] This system allowed Italy to present itself as a reception country, without having to commit itself as a new home for people in flight. This image of generosity, with no negative consequences for Italian citizens, was emphasized by the press. Meanwhile, the Italian Joint Eligibility Commissions accommodated Yugoslavian, Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, Romanian, and Bulgarian refugees for periods of varying length.[15]

Italy's image as a transit country became well established in public discourse, and was matched by the reality. The United States government had been happy to endorse this kind of approach from 1945 onwards, since some European countries – Italy included – did not seem stable enough to deal with the influx of Cold War refugees. Addressing the US Congress in 1952, President Truman highlighted the potential negative impact on Italy and Greece of the arrival of people from Eastern Europe: 'Italy is struggling with very serious problems of overpopulation and is urgently trying to resettle large numbers of its people overseas. Greece faces great difficulty in absorbing the refugees of Greek origin who are being driven out of the Balkan satellites by the communists. Thus, the brutal policies of Soviet tyranny are aggravating overcrowded conditions which are already a danger to the stability of these free

[14] Nadan Petrović, *Rifugiati, profughi, sfollati. Breve storia del diritto d'asilo in Italia* (3rd edn, Milan, 2016); Luca Einaudi, *Le politiche dell'immigrazione in Italia dall'Unità a oggi* (Rome–Bari, 2007), 49–50.

[15] Giulia Angeletti, 'Il campo profughi stranieri "Rossi longhi" di Latina (1957–1989)', *Studi Emigrazione*, clxxxvii (2012).

nations'.[16] This view helped to shape the general international approach to the reception of asylum seekers,[17] which Italy then tried to maintain for as long as possible. The CAPS system centralized the asylum requests and the composition of the Joint Eligibility Commissions ensured that refugees with formal recognition could be moved on to a third country. Between 1952 and 1962, according to UNHCR statistics, 37,152 refugees were taken in just by the Padriciano centre, which was particularly busy because of its proximity to the Yugoslavian border, and 35,621 of these were resettled elsewhere; only 220 people were 'integrated into the Italian economy'.[18] If, however, we go beyond the overall picture and look more closely at the various groups of asylum seekers, or at particular local situations, many aspects of Italy's generalized image as a 'transit land' are soon thrown into question.

Events relating to the Hungarian refugees provide a good example of these issues. In December 1956, trains carrying men and women forced to leave Hungary, which had been occupied by the Red Army, were met on station platforms in Italy's two principal cities by welcoming crowds and dignitaries of the highest rank: the Christian Democrat prime minister

[16] Harry S. Truman, 'Special Message to the Congress on Aid for Refugees and Displaced Persons', 24 March 1952, quoted in Gatrell, *The Unsettling of Europe*, 84.

[17] The US government was the first UN member state to oppose strengthening the UNHCR (created in 1951) and to entrust the management of refugees from behind the Iron Curtain to its own agencies, supported by federal funding. See David Kennedy, *The Dark Sides of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), 199–233; Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (Oxford, 2001), 50–81.

[18] Missione in Italia dell'Alto Commissariato delle Nazioni Unite per i Rifugiati (UNHCR) (ed.), *I rifugiati stranieri in Italia. Situazione giuridica, amministrativa e sociale secondo le leggi e i regolamenti vigenti* (Rome, 1963), 12.

Antonio Segni in Rome, and Archbishop Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, in Milan.[19] While the public welcome for opponents of the Communist dictatorship drew much attention, the practical commitment was more modest but still significant. According to the report submitted by the UNHCR to NATO's Committee of Political Advisors in October 1957, Italy had accepted around 4,000 refugees in the period since November 1956: certainly far fewer than the 174,000 or so who had reached Hungary's neighbour Austria, but not dissimilar to the numbers who had been given support in Denmark and France.[20]

By agreement with the Italian authorities, the main agency to become involved with the Hungarian refugees was the Italian Red Cross (CRI), matching the leading role played by its sister organizations in other countries, including Switzerland, Denmark, and West Germany.[21] Alongside the CRI, numerous public and private agencies, both secular and religious, also offered their support to these people who were on the run from the Red Army.[22] The Hungarian arrivals were soon widely dispersed across Italy, despite the fact that their overall number was relatively low.[23] However, perceptions of the order of magnitude varied

[19] See the Pathé News footage shot in Rome and Milan, https://www.britishpathe.com/video/hungarian-refugees-arrive-in-rome and https://www.britishpathe.com/video/hungarian-refugees-in-milan respectively, accessed 29 Sept. 2020.

[20] North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Digital Archives, Series AC/119 Political Committee, Report on Hungarian Refugees, 17 Apr. 1957. The information on Italy in this document closely matches the data provided by the Chief of Police to the Italian Interior Minister; see Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Ministero dell'Interno (MI), Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Latina, "Campo transito" per profughi stranieri, 2 May 1957, 6.

[21] Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Committee of Ministers, Aid for Hungarian Refugees, Doc. 620, 11 Jan. 1957.

[22] Ibid.

[23] In December 1956, there were refugee camps of varying sizes in Marina di Jesolo (Venice), Sottomarina di Chioggia (Padua), Marina di Ravenna, Ca' di Landino (Bologna), Igea Marina (Rimini), Marina di Massa

according to the point of view. In the eyes of prefects, mayors, and *carabinieri* stations, the presence of just a few dozen refugees seemed destabilizing and bound to have some impact, given that some of the villages where they were accommodated had only a few hundred inhabitants. In addition, there was more than just the numbers to be considered. The *carabinieri* in Bologna, for example, were very concerned by the placement of 129 people at the holiday camp in Ca' di Landino, a tiny hamlet in a small municipality with a Communist majority. The area's political identity had not been disclosed to the refugees in flight from the new Hungarian regime, but it was feared that when this became apparent the resulting tensions would be difficult to manage.[24]

Everybody – the government, local administrations, the general public, and the refugees themselves – of course knew that the people who had fled Hungary would not be staying in Italy for ever. The Italian authorities had only committed themselves to awarding the Hungarians temporary asylum, and maintained constant pressure on the UNHCR and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM), which had been created just a few years earlier in order to coordinate the migration process for European populations, for the refugees to be resettled in the United States and Australia.[25] However, the idea of 'temporary' asylum was far too ill-defined, and it very quickly became obvious that people's lengths of stay would become much more drawn-out than could possibly have been envisaged in the persistent reference to Italy as a place of transit.

(Massa Carrara), Tirrenia – Calambrone (Livorno), and Tirrenia (Grosseto). See ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Bologna, letter signed by Emerico Várady.

[24] ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Bologna, Sistemazione dei profughi ungheresi nella colonia di Cà di Landino, 5 Dec. 1956.

[25] On the mission and structure of the ICEM, see Edward Marks, 'Internationally Assisted Migration: ICEM Rounds Out Five Years of Resettlement', *International Organization*, xi/3 (1957).

The delay in resettlement, and the lack of reliable information as to when and how any procedures would be initiated, soon led to some lively protests from the refugees, who were anxious to bring a rapid end to the position of uncertainty forced on them by their stay in Italy. At the root of all their complaints lay the accusation of a broken promise: before leaving Hungary, the men and women now accommodated in Italian reception centres had heard broadcasts by Radio Free Europe that gave beguiling descriptions of a West that wanted to help and an American society that was ready to welcome them.[26] They therefore felt that the people whom they were obliged to accept as their referees – Red Cross representatives, prefects, local administrators, and the police – were either ineffectual intermediaries or despotic gaolers. At the centre in Marina di Ravenna, the largest in the country, tensions first came to a head in December 1956 when about seventy refugees took part in rowdy and unruly protest action, demanding to be sent on to Austria: from there, they believed, resettlement elsewhere would be immediate.[27]

Fearing that the situation at the centre might explode, the Italian authorities did what seemed necessary and escorted seventy-three people to the Austrian border. The issue was by no means resolved, however, because back in Marina di Ravenna there continued to be 'an anguished and strong desire, held by a large majority of the refugees, to reach Austria'; the word had even spread that an air bridge had been organized for immediate transfers from

[26] ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Ravenna, Centro di ospitalità per profughi ungheresi istituito dalla C.R.I. in Marina di Ravenna, 21 Jan. 1957.

[27] ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Ravenna, Telegramma al Ministero dell'Interno. Precedenza assoluta, 13 Dec. 1956. The camp in Ravenna accommodated about three hundred Hungarian refugees. In January 1957 it was the subject of a special report by RAI, Italy's public broadcasting organization, 'Budapest: ora zero per il mondo', directed by Sergio Zavoli; see http://www.teche.rai.it/programmi/budapest-ora-zero-per-il-mondo/. See also Sergio Zavoli, 'Budapest: ora zero per il mondo', *Radiocorriere*, 30 December–5 January 1957, 12–13.

Austria to the United States.[28] A visit to the centre by representatives of the ICEM made no impact. After a demonstration that involved over a hundred refugees setting out for the railway station with all their luggage, a meeting was arranged between representatives of the Hungarians and the Austrian embassy in Rome. Relative calm was restored in Marina di Ravenna only after Austrian diplomats had assured the refugees that emigration programmes had stalled everywhere, and that their presence in Italy did not, in itself, represent any disadvantage.[29] There was a similar episode in Marina di Follonica, in southern Tuscany, where a delegation of refugees secured an appointment with the American consulate in order to get confirmation that their wait in Italy would soon be at an end and their wished-for transatlantic emigration would actually take place.[30]

The events that can be reconstructed by a close examination of specific local situations give us a different perspective on the role played by Italy as a country of first asylum. The refugees themselves wanted to keep their stays on Italian soil as brief as possible, and put pressure on the local, national, and international authorities to bring about their rapid emigration to another continent. In the years that followed Italy's signing of the Geneva Convention, the realities of its situation as a transit country were therefore not simply determined by government strategy. They were instead the outcome of a multifaceted and multilayered process that involved numerous actors – the Italian authorities, voluntary agencies, intergovernmental bodies, and the refugees themselves – and took shape in the

[28] ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Ravenna, Profughi ungheresi ospitati presso il centro di raccolta della C.R.I. in Marina di Ravenna, 28 Dec. 1956.

[29] ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Ravenna, Centro di ospitalità per profughi ungheresi istituito dalla C.R.I. in Marina di Ravenna, 21 Jan. 1957, 2.

[30] ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Grosseto, Legione territoriale dei Carabinieri di Livorno, Follonica (Grosseto): profughi ungheresi, 14 Dec. 1956.

interplay between a wide range of places and contexts: from the individual reception centres to national and international diplomatic bases.

Beyond immediate relief

In April 1957, there were about 3,800 Hungarian refugees still present on Italian soil, despite the assurances they had been given about their imminent departure.[31] Their protracted wait for emigration presented problems for all those concerned. The refugees themselves were asking for greater freedom of movement within Italy and the opportunity to work: their extended presence in the country made confinement within the reception centres feel increasingly restricting. As the emergency phase passed, the Red Cross and the local authorities saw the change in the situation as signalling a change in their role. They still needed to respond to the new demands from those living in the reception centres, who argued that the lengthening of their stay should lead to a rethinking of the rules that governed their daily lives. The inordinate responsibility shouldered by Italy's local institutions derived both from the lack of national legislation on asylum and from the nature of the international refugee regime, which focused on the protection of people in flight and did not provide long-term solutions once humanitarian assistance had been given.[32]

As management of the reception centres no longer appeared to be a very short-term matter, the refugee issue now belonged within the sphere of governing the country. In this regard, the prefects (representatives of the national government at provincial level) were key figures: they maintained an active oversight of the reception centres; they were reference points for both

[31] NATO Digital Archives, Series AC/119 Political Committee, Report on Hungarian Refugees, 17 Apr. 1957, 11.

[32] Katy Long, 'When Refugees Stopped Being Migrants: Movement, Labour and Humanitarian Protection', *Migration Studies*, 1 (2013), 4–26.

the Red Cross and local councils; and they were in constant communication with the Ministry of the Interior, which together with the Foreign Ministry was responsible for asylum procedures. The fulfilment of these responsibilities found expression in the development of operational directives that derived from a particular view of the refugee population, its standards of conduct, and the freedom of action that it could be granted.

In late January 1957, the prefect of Ravenna, Giulio Scaramucci, sent a report to the Ministry of the Interior in which he presented a concise and somewhat generalized picture of the situation: discontent and dejection prevailed amongst the refugees, encouraging them to put forward excessive requests such as greater freedom of movement and some cash for shopping. Idleness and promiscuity among the young people of both sexes encouraged immoral behaviour, which was attracting the attention of Marina di Ravenna's permanent residents. Although the details vary according to the specific local context, many of the features noted by Scaramucci frequently crop up in the stereotyping descriptions given of the refugee population: bad behaviour generated by idleness, moral corruption, and ingratitude, which was implicit in their demands.[33] It is important to note, however, that the banality of this repertoire of images did not stop the prefect of Ravenna drawing on it to construct a rationale for the formulation of 'precautionary measures aimed at avoiding, in the immediate future, awkward and serious situations'.[34] He advised that provisions should include the

[33] See, for example, the theories about refugee alienation that circulated after the Second World War. These described displaced persons as listless and apathetic, affected by a psychological malaise that sometimes degenerated into regrettable behaviour such as parasitism. See Eduard Bakis, 'D. P. Apathy', in H. B. M. Murphy (ed.), *Flight and Resettlement* (Lucerne, 1955); Louise W. Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization: A Specialized Agency of the United Nations: Its History and Work, 1946–1952* (Oxford, 1956), 277–8; Edward A. Shils, 'Social and Psychological Aspects of Displacement and Repatriation', *Journal of Social Issues*, ii/3 (1946), 9–10.

[34] ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Ravenna, Centro Assistenza Profughi di Marina di Ravenna, 28 Jan. 1957.

establishment of separate centres for the young men and women, organization of various activities to keep the refugees occupied for a few hours each day, award of an adequate allowance to cover shopping, and, finally, transfer of 'those who appeared intolerant' of the usual rules to centres with a stricter regime.

Through the Minister for the Interior Fernando Tambroni, a Christian Democrat, the 'precautionary measures' suggested by Scaramucci were shared with the Red Cross, whose president Mario Longhena responded some months later with his reflections on all the centres run by the CRI, not just Marina di Ravenna. Longhena, a former parliamentary deputy for the Italian Democratic Socialist Party and thus representing a party within the coalition government, took an even tougher tone regarding the behaviour of the Hungarian refugees. In his view, because of the kindness and generosity that they had been shown, they had convinced themselves 'that they had rights, rights that are now being forcefully put forward'.[35] He did not share the view that the refugees should be given shopping money, because this would put the costs up too much, but all Scaramucci's other suggestions matched the measures that the CRI had either already adopted or was planning. Managers of the individual centres had been encouraged to organize educational and other activities, and separate accommodation had been established for men and women; now, however, the problem was that the young refugees were unwilling to move in. Longhena was therefore forced to regretfully acknowledge that the Red Cross 'does not have coercive powers, and has had to observe, powerlessly, the angry protests' of the residents who refused to be transferred. Only time, meaning the advent of the long-awaited transatlantic emigration, had the power to resolve all these matters.

Waiting for time to pass, however, was not inherently neutral, as we have seen. As the months went by, policies and practical measures for managing the refugees came into being;

[35] ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Ravenna, Croce Rossa Italiana Presidente Generale, 14 Mar. 1957.

these often drew their impetus from local initiatives taken by prefects, police, or relief officers, but then developed through debate and mediation with the ministries, in constant exchanges between the provinces and the centre. It has often been observed that Italy had no national regulations on asylum until the 1990s. While this is true, the absence of specific legislation did not mean that there was a complete vacuum. A range of provisions and responses, especially in regard to the maintenance of law and order, had previously been developed to assist the state's management of internal migration. Italy's postwar governments did not repeal the Fascist law banning migration to the cities until 1961, for fear of the potentially destabilizing effect of mass arrivals from the countryside. In the absence of any suitable policy for managing the population movements connected to the country's economic transformation, the responsibility once again fell on local authorities and in particular on the prefects, who had to ensure that the laws were applied. Internal migration, as well as foreign refugees, thus became an issue of order and security.[36] As illustrated by the words of the CRI president quoted earlier, action taken by the Italian authorities was informed by a perspective that had little to do with recognition of the rights of asylum seekers, or even ran counter to this. In consequence, the view took shape within the statutory agencies that the refugees were intolerant of rules and inclined to immoral behaviour, and thus a potential threat to local stability.

Once the 'Hungarian emergency' had passed, the management of 'foreign refugees' persisted as an issue for Italy's internal administration, and was debated and addressed by exchanges, often tense, between the local and national authorities. For example, the establishment of a centre for 'foreign refugees' in Gargnano, on Lake Garda, triggered a rapid reaction from local residents, who launched a petition, and from the mayor, the prefect, and

[36] Stefano Gallo, *Senza attraversare le frontiere. Le migrazioni interne dall'Unità a oggi* (Rome–Bari, 2012), 156–82.

the locally elected Christian Democrat senator Francesco Zane, who all contacted the Ministry for the Interior. Zane's personal letter to the Minister noted the 'deepest concerns' that had surfaced in 'local circles' at the idea of 'the very serious threat to tourism brought by the presence of undesirable individuals'.[37] The Ministry responded by reiterating the need to establish accommodation for about 800 'foreign refugees' in Gargnano, but sought to acknowledge some of the points made by 'local circles': assurances were given that supplies for the refugees would be purchased from local traders, and that public order would be protected by only housing people of one specific nationality in the area.[38] In 1960, there were similar developments around the CAPS in Latina, where complaints emerged from local residents about the 'bad behaviour' of the centre's occupants, complemented by reports from the prefect and attempts at involvement by local representatives of the Christian Democrats; the Ministry then issued reassurances, including the assertion that the centre's presence would benefit the local economy.[39]

Chilean refugees and 'boat people': exceptions to the rule

The elements discussed above – tensions managed at the local level, exchanges between provincial locations and the centre over refugee management, diplomatic efforts made by the Italian government to negotiate resettlement in other countries, and the public image projected of Italy as a bridge towards other destinations – all coexisted with the absence of national legislation on asylum and retention of the geographical limitation, without any apparent clash.

[37] ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Brescia, Sen. Francesco Zane, 7 Jan. 1958.

[38] ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Brescia, Gargnano – Istituzione centro sosta stranieri, 20 Jan. 1958. The barracks in Gargnano had previously accommodated Italians expelled from Tunisia, who were classified as 'national refugees'.

[39] ACS, MI, Affari correnti, b. 424, f. Latina.

The government temporarily suspended application of the geographical limitation when faced with new arrivals of refugees from non-European countries, only to subsequently restore it. In 1973, the issue arose over Chilean refugees. After General Pinochet's coup d'état, many supporters of Salvador Allende's ousted coalition government took refuge in international embassies in Santiago, including the Italian embassy. Here, for various reasons, a very particular situation developed. By pure chance, the ambassador himself was not in residence; total responsibility for the refugee issue therefore had to be taken by the chargé d'affaires, who found himself with an unusual amount of room for manoeuvre, not least because of Italy's ambiguous position in relation to Pinochet's military regime, which it did not recognize.[40] An unusually broad spectrum of political forces came together in the Italian condemnation of the coup: not only the entire range of the left, with the Italian Communist Party (PCI) at the forefront, but also important sections within the Christian Democrats (DC).[41] However, there were no repercussions for the substantial amount of trade between Italy and Chile.

The reception of asylum seekers within the confines of the Italian embassy continued until the spring of 1975 and involved about 750 people, whose departure from the country was the subject of complex negotiations with the Chilean authorities. Some remained in Santiago for

[40] Piero De Masi was the chargé d'affaires between the coup and January 1974; he was then replaced by Tomaso de Vergottini. See Piero De Masi, *Santiago 1 febbraio 1973–27 gennaio 1974* (Rome, 2013); Tomaso de Vergottini, *Cile: diario di un diplomatico (1973–1975)* (Rome, 2000).

[41] Maria Rosaria Stabili, 'Exiled Citizens: Chilean Political Leaders in Italy', in Mario Sznajder, Luis Roniger, and Carlos Forment (eds.), *Shifting Frontiers of Citizenship: The Latin American Experience* (Leiden, 2012); Monica Quirico and Valentine Lomellini, 'Italy: The "Chilean Lesson" between the Legacy of the Struggle against Fascism and the Threat of New Authoritarian Shifts', in Kim Christiaens, Idesbald Goddeeris, and Magaly Rodríguez García (eds.), *European Solidarity with Chile, 1970s–1980s* (Bern, 2014).

just a few weeks, others for several months, and almost all of them left for Italy.[42] On arrival, Pinochet's opponents could not be given refugee status because of the continued operation of the geographical limitation; this obstacle could only be removed if specific measures were taken by the government, but it was reluctant to take the initiative. While the number of people affected was actually relatively small, the concession of an exception had the potential to compromise the role of 'transit land' that Italy had fostered.

A range of factors finally persuaded the Italian authorities to grant the right of asylum to the Chilean refugees. On the one hand, the issue had generated an extensive mobilization of civil society. This involved diverse political and cultural circles and was in large part the outcome of the new wave of Italian 'third-worldism', which during the 1970s took on a more marked ideological and political character within both the Catholic movement and the independent left.[43] In this framing, the expression of solidarity with people fleeing Pinochet's dictatorship by 'third-worldist' groups and associations testified to their exemplary internationalism, which was focused on global rejection of the new imperialism rather than the rights of asylum seekers.[44] At the same time, a large number of local and provincial councils controlled by the PCI and the Italian Socialist Party took a stand in support of

[42] Erminio Fonzo provides a detailed analysis of the story of the Chileans who took refuge in the Italian Embassy in Santiago; see Erminio Fonzo, 'Chilean Refugees in Italy: A Forgotten Story', in Erminio Fonzo and Hilary A. Haakenson (eds), *Mediterranean Mosaic: History and Art* (Fisciano, 2019).

[43] See Massimo De Giuseppe, 'I cattolici italiani e l'America latina nei lunghi anni settanta. Tra Terzo mondo e "altro Occidente"', *Italia Contemporanea*, 280 (2016), 40–65; Marica Tolomelli, *L'Italia dei movimenti. Politica e società nella Prima repubblica* (Rome, 2015), pp. 72-95. For a persuasive account of student movements' third-worldism and the increased appeal of humanitarianism, see Eleanor Davey, *Idealism beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1954–1988* (Cambridge, 2015).

[44] See 'La lezione del Cile', special issue, *Terzo Mondo. Rivista trimestrale di studi, ricerche e documentazione sui paesi afro-asiatici e latino-americani*, 23 (1974), especially the opening article by Antonio Carlo, 3–50.

Chilean refugees, offering them hospitality and practical assistance in finding employment.[45] On the other hand, it was necessary to put an end to a unique situation whose origins lay in the way that the Italian embassy had operated in Santiago. Refugee status was in fact only given to the men and women who had arrived through Italy's diplomatic headquarters in Chile, and denied to all those who had reached Italy by other routes.[46]

Italy's suspension of the geographical limitation for the Chilean asylum seekers was thus primarily linked to the resolution of domestic issues and the particular political circumstances at that moment. As a result, the decision retained the nature of a special case. Italy opened its doors to less than a thousand Chilean refugees, but kept them closed to all other non-European asylum seekers, including those from other South American countries that experienced military coups during the same period, such as Uruguay and Argentina.[47]

The Chilean episode fed into the early criticisms of Italy's position on asylum, although these focused more on the absence of comprehensive and coherent national legislation on this issue, and less on the restriction of refugee status to people from European countries. In this regard, we should note the spirit and objectives behind the draft legislation presented to the Senate in March 1976, with Umberto Terracini its principal sponsor.[48] Terracini had been one of the founders of the PCI in 1921, had been hounded and imprisoned by the Fascist regime,

[45] On the specific situation in Modena, see Alfredo Mignini, 'Dalla Moneda a Modena. Per una storia orale dell'esilio cileno e dell'accoglienza in Emilia Romagna', *E-Review. Rivista degli Istituti Storici dell'Emilia Romagna in Rete*, 6 (2018).

[46] Fonzo, 'Chilean Refugees in Italy'.

[47] UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees: A Humanitarian Agenda* (Oxford–New York: 1997), 156–8.

[48] *Norme per garantire agli stranieri ed agli apolidi il diritto di asilo e l'esercizio delle libertà democratiche nel territorio della Repubblica in attuazione dell'articolo 10, terzo comma, della Costituzione*. Umberto Terracini, Generoso Petrella, Giuseppe Branca, Carlo Galante Garrone, and Lelio Basso submitted the bill to the Italian parliament's upper house. Available online: https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/311698.pdf

and had then been one of the founding fathers of the Republic, but by the 1970s was no longer a central figure in the Italian political landscape. The proposal he presented was intended to fill a legislative gap, because of which – as the introduction to the bill stated – 'the political refugee, persecuted in their own country, while in the territory of the [Italian] Republic is subjected to the same judicial regime as any foreigner'.[49] The measures put to the Senate specified a procedure for recognition of the right to asylum, and identified the particular rights that would derive from refugee status: the right to employment and access to social security and welfare provisions, and the right to movement beyond Italy's borders and diplomatic protection.

One stated intention of the bill's authors was 'to fulfil commitments made by Italy at meetings with other nations', especially in its signature of the Geneva Convention and the New York Protocol. The main aim, however, was to honour the commitments made in Article 10 of the Italian constitution. Terracini stressed this point in an interview he gave to the newspaper *La Stampa*, in which he blamed 'the Christian Democrat regime' for the absence of legislation ensuring the legal status of refugees and also, more generally, for 'a broad failure to implement the constitution'.[50] The issue of asylum, taken up by a representative of the leading opposition party, the PCI, to attack the party of government, the DC, thus became a theme within Italy's national political debate. Furthermore, the emphasis was on full realization of the democratic principles fundamental to the Italian Republic, while there was limited reflection on the processes of decolonization and regime change that were pushing people into leaving their own countries. Because of his anti-Fascist past, Terracini was seen by the press as the ideal sponsor for the bill: during the Fascist era he had been sent into

[49] *Norme per garantire agli stranieri ed agli apolidi il diritto di asilo e l'esercizio delle libertà democratiche*, 1.

[50] Lamberto Furno, 'L'arcipelago dei rifugiati', *La Stampa*, 26 Oct. 1975.

political internment, and had thus been an exile within his own country.[51] This same theme was evident in the solidarity shown towards the Chileans, who were fleeing a dictatorship, by the PCI, which was calling for global efforts to combat fascism; meanwhile, refugee status as a political issue in its own right continued to be overlooked.[52]

In the mid 1970s, the Italian political world had still not really acknowledged the global dimension of the refugee phenomenon. The bill of 1976 is best understood in the context of the series of legal reforms around that time whose intention was to reduce the gap between the principles enshrined in the Italian constitution and the legislation actually in operation.[53] Moreover, the initiative sponsored by Terracini and other senators received limited attention, both in the press and in parliament: the bill on asylum was not approved, and in fact was not even debated.[54] The attempt was repeated three years later, but with a similar outcome. The lack of interest in this issue is not surprising when seen in relation to provisions for migration. In the mid 1970s, the government began to acknowledge the increasing number of foreign workers in the country, but instead of drawing up a coherent response to immigration it called on the government agencies and officials who had been managing Italian migration abroad in the preceding period.[55] This failure to initiate a new approach illustrated both the tendency to consider migration as a free-standing bureaucratic issue, disconnected from political, economic and social transformation, and an inability to consider it in the global context.

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Renato Sandri, 'Incontro a Lima con gli esuli cileni', *Rinascita*, 23 November 1973, 17–18.

[53] Foot, *Archipelago*, 141.

[54] Tellingly, *l'Unità*, the PCI's official newspaper, gave no space to discussion of Terracini's bill. The Senate referred its text to the Commissione giustizia (Law Committee) in March 1976; see Senato della Repubblica, VI legislatura, 551ª seduta pubblica, Resoconto stenografico martedì 30 marzo 1976. It was never discussed by the Law Committee.

[55] See Colucci, *Storia dell'immigrazione straniera in Italia. Dal 1945 ai nostri giorni* (Rome, 2018), 54–6.

While the attempts to equip Italy with legislation on asylum were running into the sand, refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and, especially, Vietnam presented a new challenge for the government. The exodus from the Indo-Chinese peninsula had taken on worrying dimensions as early as 1975, with the end of the war in Vietnam and the country's reunification. In the period that followed, the columns of refugees had grown progressively longer, but the Italian authorities did not take any specific position on this phenomenon until 1979. The reasons for a change of approach were many and varied. In part, the government felt the need to respond to the Italian population's notable mobilization on behalf of the refugees from Indo-China. As in the Chilean case, civil engagement had to some extent cut across the customary political and cultural allegiances, even if people's motives and objectives subsequently took on specific traits. The movements and parties of the left, for example, asked the government for the reception of refugees to be accompanied by a programme of economic aid for Vietnam, which had just emerged from the war.[56] Furthermore, Italy's voluntary sector, which expanded its activities in the 1970s, played an important part in the campaign for help for the 'boat people'. The organization Caritas, established in 1971, used open letters and public appeals to urge governmental bodies to intervene, while at the same time calling on Catholic dioceses to marshal the readiness of Italians to provide hospitality and tangible support to the families and individuals who had fled the Indo-Chinese peninsula.[57] The pressure on Italy's

[56] See 'Le iniziative del governo italiano a favore dei profughi dall'Indocina', *l'Unità*, 18 July 1979; Antonello Sembiante, 'L'azione italiana per i profughi vietnamiti', *L'Astrolabio*, 15 July 1979, 13.

[57] *Lettera aperta al Presidente del Consiglio on.le Giulio Andreotti e al Ministro degli Affari Esteri on.le Arnaldo Forlani*, 28 Aprile 1979 https://www.caritas.it/materiali/Area_Riservata/mostra_boat_people/20.pdf (last consulted November 16 2020); Giuseppe Zamberletti, *La missione di soccorso ai profughi dal Viet Nam nel quadro dell'azione italiana in campo umanitario* (Rome, 1979), 9.

authorities was thus complemented by the breadth of popular mobilization, which in this case could count on the extensive network of the Catholic voluntary sector.

In its turn, the Italian government gave the refugee issue increased importance in the field of international relations. In a detailed report presented to the Senate, Foreign Minister Arnaldo Forlani emphasized the active role that Italy had taken within the EEC, pressing it to address the issue of the boat people and launch an international diplomatic initiative.[58] At a meeting about political cooperation in Paris in June 1979, the foreign ministers of the nine member countries in fact approved a declaration in which they 'expressed their grave concern at the increasingly tragic problems presented by the mass exodus of refugees from the Indochinese peninsula'.[59] They also indicated their intention to contact the UNHCR requesting a conference, in order to spur the international community into taking rapid measures. A month later, representatives of the Italian government took part in the conference organized by the UNHCR in Geneva. Many of the sixty-five countries present made specific commitments, either on their availability for refugee resettlement or on funding for relief operations.[60] Italy had already accepted an estimated 1,650 refugees over the previous four years, and undertook to take in a further thousand people: a modest number, but similar to that envisaged for other countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark.[61]

[58] Senato della Repubblica VIII legislatura, 3° Commissione Permanente (Affari esteri), Resoconto stenografico 25 luglio 1979, 16–17; Ministero degli Affari Esteri, *1979. Testi e documenti sulla politica estera dell'Italia* (Rome, 1981), 76–8, 353.

[59] Bulletin of the European Communities, xii/6 (1979), point 2.2.58.

[60] Barry Stein, 'The Geneva Conferences and the Indochinese Refugee Crisis', *International Migration Review*, xiii/4 (1979).

[61] For discussion of the international commitments to refugee resettlement, see Frank Frost, 'Vietnam, ASEAN and The Indochina Refugee Crisis', *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1980), 358.

To comply with the action plan drawn up by the UNHCR in Geneva, the Italian government arranged for three of the Navy's ships to leave for the South-East Asian seas, charged with rescuing the refugees who had set out in makeshift boats.[62] This initiative, which explicitly took its cue from action already taken by France, was given a high public profile, and on television it was presented as the reinterpretation, in a humanitarian vein, of the Italian valour that had previously found expression in wartime heroism.[63] Moreover, two of the ships that sailed through the South China Sea ready to take refugees on board were specially refitted cruisers carrying helicopters.

Refugee status was granted to the families and individuals who had left Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, once again as an exception to the geographical limitation. At this point, however, criticisms of the retention of this limitation started to be voiced, precisely because of the exceptions that the government had been making. When Forlani presented his ministerial report on the matter to the Senate, a representative of the Sinistra Indipendente (Independent Left), Raniero La Valle, asked whether this was the moment, when faced with the presence of 11 million refugees across the world, 'to consider whether the geographical limitation ought to be deleted, and to establish a general criterion whereby Italy should meet the needs of refugees'.[64] Although eleven more years passed before these steps were taken, matters relating to the exodus from Indo-China suggested that change was under way. The refugee

[62] Zamberletti, *La missione di soccorso ai profughi dal Viet Nam*.

[63] See the documentary film *Missione di soccorso nelle acque del Vietnam*, issued by the 8th Naval Group of the Italian Navy, which is available at https://stream24.ilsole24ore.com/video/mondo/missione-vietnam-40-anni-fa-partirono-navi-salvare-boat-people/ACUnuxV. The PCI newspaper *l'Unità* criticized the rescue operation in the South China Sea because of its high costs; see 'Le iniziative del governo italiano', cited earlier. For the French action, see Davey, *Idealism beyond Borders*, 193–200.

[64] Senato della Repubblica VIII legislatura, 3° Commissione Permanente (Affari esteri), Resoconto stenografico 25 luglio 1979, 17–18.

issue started to be understood in its global context, and seen as an area in which Italy could develop its position in the international arena without restricting itself to protecting its own role as a transit country. This shift was part of the launch of a new phase of Italian foreign policy, marked by a greater dynamism and the quest for a more substantial role within the Western alliance, and also reflected the country's increasing commitment to humanitarian aid.[65] Government bodies themselves emphasized that Italy's active involvement in the Geneva Conference, participation in sea rescue operations, and award of asylum to refugees from Indo-China all reflected the country's aspiration to be one of the 'donor countries' of international humanitarian action.[66]

The 1980s saw further developments along these lines. The issue of the geographical limitation periodically re-emerged, both in parliamentary questions, which met with no response, and in statements by figures in the government announcing its imminent cancellation.[67] In June 1982, *Corriere della Sera*, one of Italy's most respected newspapers, reported this as a certainty in the wake of statements by the Foreign Minister, the Christian Democrat Emilio Colombo: when addressing the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Poul Hartling, Colombo had apparently announced Italy's impending 'total adherence to the Geneva Convention of 1950 [sic]'. However, he had added that this measure was problematic, in that as 'a country with particularly open borders' Italy faced great

[65] On Italy's international role, see Antonio Varsori, *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992* (Rome–Bari, 1998), 206–45.

[66] Zamberletti, *La missione di soccorso ai profughi dal Viet Nam*. The Department for International Cooperation was in fact set up within the Italian Foreign Ministry in 1979.

[67] Questions in the Chamber of Deputies regarding abolition of the geographical limitation were formally submitted by Giancarla Codrignani (11 Mar. 1987), Leda Colombini (13 Dec. 1988), and Francesco Rutelli (3 Aug. 1989). On 30 November 1988, its withdrawal was the subject of a motion in the Chamber of Deputies presented by Lorenzo Strik Lievers.

difficulties in making 'the distinction between political refugees and other types of immigrant'. Draft legislation under consideration in the Italian Parliament, the minister said, was intended to regulate the situation of 'foreign workers', thereby 'increasing the opportunity for taking in refugees and asylum seekers'.[68]

In reality, legislation on immigration and foreign workers did not appear for another four years, and although the newspapers continued to report news of the imminent removal of the geographical limitation, the law in question did not deal with political asylum at all.[69] Nevertheless, Colombo's declarations in 1982 are still significant, because they highlight the link that the Italian authorities were at that point establishing between the strengthening of borders against foreign immigration, which had become a substantial phenomenon right across the country, and the reception of refugees from outside Europe.[70] The former process was seen as a necessary precondition for the latter. Essentially, there was a call for the construction of a clear legal distinction between the immigrants who were understood to be 'foreign workers' ('economic migrants', in today's language) and people who were in flight – as set out by the 1951 Convention – 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion'.[71] The demand for this clear distinction came after thirty years of policies that had been based, as noted earlier, on the contrasting demarcation between 'national refugees' and 'foreign refugees', which had meant that the second group, as foreigners, had tended to be

[68] 'Sarà più ospitale l'Italia per i profughi e rifugiati', *Il Corriere della Sera*, 25 June 1982.

[69] 'L'Italia ospiterà profughi Afghani', *La Stampa*, 29 Sept. 1982 (evening edition); Sandra Bonsanti, 'Oggi il governo introdurrà l'anagrafe dello straniero', *La Repubblica*, 29 Nov. 1985. For discussion of Law 943/1986 (known as the 'legge Foschi'), which in large part was not implemented, see Einaudi, *Le politiche dell'immigrazione in Italia*, 124–9.

[70] For immigration trends, see Colucci, *Storia dell'immigrazione straniera in Italia*, 66–77.

[71] UNHCR, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, Article 1.

thrown together with every other type of immigrant. The shift that was evidently under way in the 1980s then found its fulfilment in Italy's abolition of the geographical limitation in 1990.

Refugee history: taking southern Europe into account

As we have seen, a political openness towards the global dimension of the refugee phenomenon only started to develop in Italy at the end of the 1970s. This assertion is significant not only for our insight into the history of the right to asylum in Italy, but also because it draws attention to the mismatch between the Italian trajectory and the usual historiographical understanding of developments at the international level. Italy was in fact not party to the 'global turn' that refugee history has placed at the end of the 1950s, with the United Nations' nomination of 1959–60 as 'World Refugee Year' seen as a clear indicator of the change under way. The significance of the global turn and the part played by the UN initiative are very effectively explained by Matthew Frank and Jessica Reinisch: '[w]hile this event did not bring an end to the existence of refugees by any means, to contemporary observers it did seem to form a turning point from the identification of an apparently European refugee problem to a global one'.[72] Peter Gatrell examines the build-up to this turning point and emphasizes its effects, by means of a detailed reconstruction of the campaigning on refugees in 1959 and 1960 by non-Communist member countries of the United Nations.[73] He focuses on profiles of the various actors who entered the field, with their differing strategies, objectives, and capabilities: national states, looking for new tools to help them manage the transformation triggered by decolonization; non-governmental organizations, ready to expand their international operations; and the United Nations,

[72] Matthew Frank and Jessica Reinisch, 'Refugees and the Nation-State in Europe, 1919–59', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xlix/3 (2014), 478.

[73] Peter Gatrell, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956–1963* (Cambridge, 2011).

struggling with the rapidly increasing number of its member states. While the motives and expectations of each state and organization were complex and diverse, the global campaign for refugees constituted a transnational space in which there could be mediation between the different interests; at the same time, it confirmed the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the routes that refugees were actually taking, which would allow policies on asylum to be thought through in a global perspective.

As Gatrell acknowledges, however, not all national states engaged in this complex process in the same degree. Italy was undoubtedly among the less involved countries; it attempted to use World Refugee Year primarily to highlight the situation faced by its own 'national refugees'. In the late 1950s, the largest group of 'national refugees' were the '*giuliano-dalmati*': the people who had left Venezia Giulia and Dalmatia for Italy after the redrawing of the border with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.[74] The situation of this group had actually started to seem less problematic, thanks to the increased opportunities for social and economic integration created by Italy's rapid growth in the late 1950s and early 1960s (the 'economic miracle').[75] However, they were explicitly mentioned by Carla Gronchi, wife of the Italian president, who had been asked to chair the national steering committee for World Refugee Year. Her radio appeals, reported in the press, emphasized that refugees were not only the foreigners for whom the peninsula represented a country of first asylum: from the Italian perspective, discussion of refugees should instead refer primarily to 'our fellow nationals who, because of wartime and postwar events, have had to abandon the lands where they had

[74] The literature on refugees from Venezia Giulia (now divided between Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia) and Dalmatia (now the southern Croatian coastal regions) has grown substantially in more recent years; for a groundbreaking discussion in English, see Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton, N.J., 2002).

[75] Raoul Pupo, *Il lungo esodo. Istria: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l'esilio* (Milan, 2005), 212–13.

long lived and worked, and now find themselves in Italy, in difficult and distressing conditions'.[76] Such statements illustrate how the official Italian position remained wedded to the distinction between 'national' and 'foreign' refugees established after the war; moreover, attention remained entirely focused on the domestic situation. In the sphere of UN initiatives, Italy was consequently restricted to 'a walk-on part'.[77]

Italy was not, however, the only country to have a marginal role in refugee programmes promoted by the United Nations. According to Gatrell, the involvement of Spain, Portugal, and Greece was similarly minimal. Furthermore, Portugal, like Italy, had retained the geographical limitation, which it did not rescind until 1980, and it was only much later, in 2011, that Greece finally passed legislation covering recognition of the right to asylum. Does this suggest that southern European countries followed similar trajectories in relation to policy on refugees? This idea has tended to be adopted by studies into more recent migratory flows and Europe's capacity to manage them, which have referred, directly or indirectly, to the similar histories of southern European countries: during the Cold War they remained transit zones for asylum seekers, did not set up appropriate reception systems, and in general terms had little interest in the phenomenon of immigration.[78] It has been argued that this shared background partly explains why countries like Italy, Greece, and Spain have not had

[76] 'Un radio messaggio della signora Gronchi per alleviare con sofferenze dei profughi', *La Stampa*, 6 July 1959 (evening edition); 'Messaggio di Carla Gronchi a favore dei rifugiati', *Il Corriere della Sera*, 31 Dec. 1959.

[77] Gatrell, *Free World?*, 110, 137.

[78] Dietrich Thränhardt, 'Where and Why? Comparative Perspectives on Asylum in the OECD World', in Jeroen Doomernik and Hans Knippenberg (eds.), *Migration and Immigrants: Between Policy and Reality: A Volume in Honor of Hans van Amersfoort* (Amsterdam, 2003); Russell King and Daniela De Bono, 'Irregular Migration and the "Southern European Model" of Migration', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, xxii/1 (2013); Martin Baldwin-Edwards, 'The Emerging European Immigration Regime: Some Reflections on Implications for Southern Europe', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, xxxv/4 (1997).

'adequate regulation systems to manage immigration flows', and have shown themselves unable to protect Europe's external border.[79] These observations on the comparative history of the right to asylum in southern European countries have thus been strongly influenced by analyses of the failure to control current migratory flows across European borders, but have not been supported by more in-depth research. As a result, there has been too much generalization and an unwarranted emphasis on similarities between the different countries, to the extent that southern Europe is presented as a homogeneous regional bloc.[80]

It remains the case, however, that Italy does not seem to have been alone in its disconnection from the global turn at the end of the 1950s. It can therefore be argued that what Frank and Reinisch call 'a turning point from the identification of an apparently European refugee problem to a global one' did not, in reality, characterize the perspective of the entire Western bloc. This becomes clear if we take a closer look at World Refugee Year, the event seen as central to the 'turn'. The project took shape in Britain, whose authorities initiated the diplomatic negotiations for its realization; subsequently, the largest allocation of

[79] Claudia Finotelli, 'Southern Europe: Twenty-Five Years of Immigration Control on the Waterfront', in Ariadna Ripoll Servent and Florian Trauner (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Justice and Home Affairs Research* (Abingdon and New York, 2018).

[80] For critiques of the 'Southern European migration model', see Claudia Finotelli and Giuseppe Sciortino, 'The Importance of Being Southern: The Making of Policies of Immigration Control in Italy', *European Journal of Migration and Law*, xi/2 (2009); Martin Baldwin-Edwards, 'The Southern European "Model of Immigration": A Sceptical View', in Marek Okólski (ed.), *European Immigrations: Trends, Structures and Policy Implications* (Amsterdam, 2012); Finotelli, 'Southern Europe'. On the 'Southern European model' see also Baumeister, Martin, Roberto Sala (eds.), *Southern Europe? Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece from the 1950s until the present day* (Frankfurt–New York, 2015).

resources and most active participation were by the northern European and North American countries that had generally been at the forefront of refugee resettlement initiatives.[81]

These reflections on Italy's belated removal of the geographical limitation encourage us to reconsider various historiographical assumptions, and not just in regard to the Italian experience. First of all, we need to question the image of Italy generated by the hitherto limited case studies, as a country that had no direct experience of the management of refugees during the Cold War because it continued to be a transit place for asylum seekers who were then resettled elsewhere. This interpretation gained much support, not least as the result of a generalizing view of Cold War dynamics. Italy's role as a country of first asylum was seen as simply a consequence of the United States plan to counter the Soviet Union in its response to the phenomenon of 'Iron Curtain refugees', an approach that then remained unchanged from the 1950s to the end of the 1980s. From this perspective, the refugee issue was only important to the Italian government in the arena of international politics, and only served to confirm Italy's clear position within the Western bloc.[82]

However, we have seen that while Italy was still a transit land, the refugee issue was of significance at both the local and national level: for governmental bodies, voluntary agencies, and the public. Prior to the comprehensive legislation on asylum that finally materialized in 2007 – the law of 1990 having merely opened the way – the issue was managed through a collection of measures whose primary purpose was the maintenance of law and order, which was seen as crucial for government of the country. During the earlier decades of the Republic

[81] The four countries that took the largest numbers of Hungarian refugees for resettlement, for example, were the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and West Germany; see Marjoleine Zieck, 'The 1956 Hungarian Refugee Emergency, An Early and Instructive Case of Resettlement', *Amsterdam Law Forum*, v/2 (2013), 59.

[82] Christopher Hein, 'Storia del diritto d'asilo in Italia', in Christopher Hein (ed.), *Rifugiati. Vent'anni di storia del diritto d'asilo in Italia* (Rome, 2010), 35.

of Italy's history, the management of 'foreign refugees' was the product of complex interactions between central and local institutions, and developed alongside retention of the geographical limitation. The first signs of a change came with the welcome given to the boat people in the late 1970s. The refugee issue became one of the areas in which Italy attempted to relaunch itself within international organizations, and pressure from civil society helped to make the reception of people fleeing from non-European countries seem like a necessary choice. There was a hiatus during the 1980s, because of the political desire to link the extension of asylum recognition to a curtailment of immigration by constructing two distinct figures in law: the refugee, and the migrant understood as a 'foreign worker'.

The reconstruction presented in this article encourages us to question some of the interpretations that derive from international historiography, for example, as discussed, the identification of a global turn in refugee policy in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Italy was not party to this shift; it only finally embraced it after 1989, at the end of a very slow process of development. A 'missed global turn' therefore seems an apt description, both for Italy and for other southern European countries. However, the relative lack of comparative studies means that we cannot yet have a full debate about the common features, differences, and particularities of the history of the right to asylum in Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Italy. Hopefully, future research will allow this comparative analysis to take place. This will not be just about filling in the gaps by adding missing case studies to the existing literature. A full investigation of the ways that southern European countries applied the Geneva Convention has the potential to generate a new account of the refugee regime since the Second World War. Hitherto, our understanding has largely been based on the experiences of northern European countries and the United States, which have certainly had a central role in determining international policy on refugees but have not, in reality, been the only actors. Furthermore, this new account could give us more insight into Europe's reactions to the

current ‘refugee crisis’. In particular, it could provide us with the tools to go beyond the over-simple image of a ‘southern border’ whose porousness is supposedly the result of negligence and ineffectiveness: an image that is often closely linked to alarm calls for the defence of ‘Fortress Europe’.

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