It is all a matter of trust: Polish women in Italy

Elena Sischarenco
University of Bergamo, elena.siska@libero.it

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyse in depth the relations established by Polish women both in Italy and in Poland, both before and during their experience of migration, with the aim of understanding the importance of these relations and of trust. A survey and qualitative ethnographic methods were employed. With regard to the importance of trust in post-socialist societies, it is important to observe that the informal relations created to search for a job in Italy are first established in Poland. Only in a few exceptional cases do Polish women arrive in Italy without a job. Due to the situation of instability already present in their original society and the post-socialist period, another situation of instability is added: the migratory experience, increasing the general level of mistrust of these women. This mistrust cannot lead to an absence of social relations, especially considering their situation of need. In fact, it brings a particular attention to the relationships they establish and an increase of the importance of the role of trust in every aspect of their life. There is an extensive use of informal relations in every aspect of their working and social experience in Italy, even as far as their approaches to Italian institutions are concerned.

KEYWORDS: trust, informal relations, migration, Poland, Italy, Polish women, home care for elderly

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to analyse in depth the relationships established by Polish women both in Italy and in Poland, both before and during their experience of migration, with the aim of understanding the importance of these relations and of trust. A survey and ethnographic methods were employed in an attempt to analyse the phenomenon in a qualitative way. In the period of study, I registered the experiences of many Polish workers in Italy, centring the interviews on the interest of my research: women working in home help, especially with elderly people.

My interest in this theme derives partly from the growing importance of immigration in my town and in Italy in general, and from the relevant weight that it has assumed in the country, from both economic and social points of view. Moreover, this interest is

strengthened by the importance of the activity of home care for elderly in this society in recent years. Anthropological contributions to the study of the migratory process began to be produced only during the 20th century and, in particular, the relation between gender and migration only began to be studied in recent decades (Brettell 2003). I decided to dedicate my attention to a type of immigration strongly characterised by gender. This characterisation influences the project of migration of the women, the strong links they maintain with the original society and the type of relationships they establish.

The decision to concentrate on the Polish nationality arose because of two main reasons. Firstly, Poland is a recent entry to the European Union. This differentiates it from other post-socialist countries, such as Ukraine, with high rates of immigration to Italy, and it makes the Polish presence become even more invisible and temporary. Secondly, the choice has been influenced by my personal knowledge of Polish women working in the sector, a fact that favoured first contacts with the women of this nationality.

This paper underlines the fundamental use of informal relations and the role of trust in both their experience of migrating and their life in Italy. The concept of trust has been explored by the social sciences only recently, in the previous fifty years. In particular, sociology first approaches the notion in order to study the social relations of our contemporary society. The concept has been applied in the study of post-socialist societies. In the political and economic period following the crash of socialism in central-eastern Europe and the start of democracy and capitalism, a growing importance and use of interpersonal relationships and trust has been registered. This is due to the massive changes and to the consequent uncertainty that the new democracies have faced. Uncertainty is the consequence of a new kind of society, difficult to recognise, with the rising of new social classes, professions and values and the disappearance of the old ones. This period is characterised by general mistrust and doubt because of the disintegration of the previous social networks. Mistrust does not mean the absence of social relations but quite the opposite: there is a particular attention to the establishment of relationships which are sometimes in this case fundamental (Torsello 2004). There is a strengthening of these informal networks, which help people to face the difficulties of the period of transformations and instability. In fact, social networks operate here as an alternative structure that can provide mutual recognition, the exchange of information, help and, more generally, cooperation. These networks are a true social investment, because individuals can increase their capacity of action, and if these relations are extended to all society then the capacity of action of the entire social system is extended. That is why we speak of social capital. Through these relations, if the exchange based on trust is successful, it is possible to produce advantages for all individuals who take part in the exchange (Mutti 1998).

People establish relations from a natural need for cooperation and socialisation, and when this need increases the relationships augment themselves; this is in contrast to when the individuals are less dependent on one another, in which case these relations lose their importance and the social capital decreases. Coleman affirms that the decrease of interpersonal exchanges is due to individual wealth and in particular to the increase of welfare systems and forms of help given by the state. Through these forms of help it is possible to obtain all the advantages it was possible to have with the necessary use of in-

formal social relations (Coleman 1990). Therefore, these informal relations have a strategic importance, when uncertainty is strong and the difficulty in obtaining advantages through formal channels is greater. Consequently, they have a fundamental role in post-socialist societies in which the radical change did not result in such resources.

The study of the construction of social networks and of the role of trust in Poland during the current historical period is essential for understanding the relationships established by Polish women in Italy and how their choices and their behaviour are affected.

In addition, it is proved that in the context of migration social networks become even more important and operate to assist communication flows and to provide assistance to the network members (Wallace 2003).

I will concentrate on the analysis of the creation and use of these networks and will attempt to distinguish both their positive and their negative aspects. In fact, if it is true that the investments in the social networks are essential and the positive effect of these investments has been demonstrated, why is there a continuous renegotiation of trust and many examples of partial trust? I have seen that the way Polish women relate to the others is not always what I would have expected: the instability of their original condition added to the uncertainty of the migratory situation sometimes brings to unexpected situations of mistrust. Although the act of trust and the establishment of social relations are essential for these women, neither is not always certain.

Methodology

The study is based, in addition to written sources, on ethnographic research conducted with interviews and time spent together with the women. The research was carried out between April 2007 and February 2008. For practical reasons, it was done in the town of Bergamo, and also to spend as much time as possible with the women and to observe their lives over time.

When I first started my studies, I did not have a precise idea about the questions to ask the women, but I was attempting to spend as much time as possible with them. They were speaking about their life and family, and I was trying to understand their ways of living. I decided not to base my study on fixed questions or questionnaires, but wanted to go deeper and undertake a qualitative analysis. I tried to continue talking with the same people during the months of the research, because I have found informal speech and prolonged observation more useful than a short set of questions. Moreover, the informal meetings were held in different places, from the homes of the people being assisted to the local shopping centre. My circle of acquaintances became larger with the help of the same women I was already in contact with. In fact, I was following them to the meetings they were having in their free time, usually on Sunday, getting in contact with other Polish people. It was very important to spend time with the women and to gain their trust. This is demonstrated by the fact that some months after the first meetings I had to revise my notes made after these talks because many details, even important ones, changed in the following meetings.

Through these observations and informal talks, I was collecting the personal profiles of the women, their aspirations and motivations, the reason for their choice to

immigrate to Italy and the way they arrived in the country, as well as their working and social experiences both in Italy and in Poland. What have found even more interesting, and have tried to analyse thoroughly, were the relationships established by these women during and before the migratory process.

Furthermore, by conducting the research in this way, I could understand many things even from their actions, that sometimes are much more revealing, and not only from their words, which do not always coincide with reality. Moreover, I interviewed all the people who, because of their role, are often in contact with Polish female immigrants in Italy: from the parish priest to workers in the employment offices or the social service offices of the municipality. The talks and the exchanges of information and material with these people have been frequent and contributed greatly to the material of the study.

Polish immigration in recent years

In recent years, especially since the 1990s, there has been an intense migratory flow from Central and Eastern European countries. This is due to the strong transformations in the post-socialist countries and to the consequent high levels of unemployment, affecting people of all ages.

The reasons for these phenomena have to be researched in the economic and social situations that followed the breakdown of socialism in Poland as well as in the other socialist republics and the consequent change from a state economy to a capitalist economy. This change has created enormous social inequalities and an extreme polarisation of wealth (Mazzacurati 2005; D'Ottavio 2005). The dissolution of a welfare system that guaranteed work, training and healthcare for everybody was accompanied by the incapacity of the new political and economic structures to manage the change and create a good perspective of life for Polish citizens.

In this kind of situation, an increase has been registered in the importance of social relations and the creation of networks for the exchange of food, assistance and information with the purpose of filling the social and economic gaps (Pine 2002).

In the same way, massive emigration is a strategy to manage this growing social and economic insecurity. The remittance of the immigrants contributes to the support of the family at home, to building a house, to providing an education and a future for their children and necessary care for the elderly. Emigration, besides providing for themselves and their family, who usually stay home, serves to realise ambitions and create hope for the future (Pichler 2005).

Even though Poland entered the European Union in 2004, with all the concrete advantages and hopes coming from this event, the flow of Polish citizens who decide to leave Poland to seek their fortune abroad has not yet stopped. One of the first estimates relating to the phenomenon of emigration after Poland's entry to the EU is the report of the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)[1] to the European Parliament in 2005. This report shows that during the first year of membership approximately 500,000 Polish citizens

---

[1] NGO based in Brussels (www.ecas.org).

found a job in another Member State of the Union: the majority are registered in Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Holland and Ireland (D'Angelo 2006). According to estimates from the Polish government, the number of Polish nationals staying temporally in the EU more than doubled to 1.9 million during 2004–2007 (The World Bank 2008).

Women immigrants: Italy as a destination

About a half of the immigrants of the world are women (Carnevale et al. 2007); in contrast to the past, they immigrate not only to be reunited with their families but to find employment. They are increasingly coming by themselves (Campani 2001). At the end of 2005, in Italy, the 49.9% of foreign citizens with permits were women, 46.3% of whom apply for the permit for reasons of work, 44.9% for family reunification and only 2.3% for study (Zucchelli 2007).

Mediterranean countries that have seen recent immigration, such as Italy, Spain and Greece, have received influxes with a prevalence of women, especially if we take into consideration some specific national groups. Amongst these groups is the one my research is focused on: Polish women (Spanò & Zaccaria 2003).

In 1970, there were 144,000 foreign citizens in Italy: in 2007 there were estimated to be 3,700,000, among whom almost 100,000 are Polish: the ninth nationality in prevalence and in first place for the percentage of women (Caritas/Migrantes 2007).

The percentage of women is very high if we take into consideration the group of immigrants from post-socialist countries and the fact that they are normally employed in the services sector, in particular in the private care sector. The quantitative analyses of the phenomenon of domestic care in Bergamo have been made through the data collected by the people in charge of each parish, often through the direct knowledge of the women employed in the families of the area. This is due to the fact that the majority of them are irregularly employed, the parish estimate that the 70–80% of them are in this situation; consequently, their presence is often invisible. The results obtained concern the 37% of the diocesan population and the 33% of the total population of the province of Bergamo. Two thousand immigrant women have been registered, so that it is possible to estimate 6,000 women known in the parish of the town. Moreover, the people in charge of many of the large parishes of Bergamo say they know only a half of the women working in the sector in their area. Therefore, it is possible to estimate the presence of 11,000–12,000 women employed in the private care sector in the town of Bergamo for the year 2006. More than 66% of these women are Eastern European, followed by South American women at 32% (Zucchelli 2007).

The aim of these women is mainly economic, their migration is (at least in their first intentions) of short duration and their aim is to go back home as soon as the economic conditions will allow it. This is especially true regarding Polish women, because the ease of travelling between the two countries favours returning home; however, this return is often only temporary. This is partly because of the poor prospects for work in Poland, which force them to repeat their migration.

This strong characterisation of gender is due to various reasons: one of which is the constant increase in demand for female labour in Italy and often the consequent

decrease of male mobility (Decimo 2005). It is often the case that the work is underpaid, does not require qualifications and is of low social prestige, and therefore is not attractive to local workers.

If we take Italy into consideration, we can observe that the growth of the female employment rate and the consequent transformations of the family have created gaps in the domestic service sector. For domestic service, we include here all the jobs from the care of the children or the elderly to the housework that once were done by the women of the family. These kinds of jobs are now devalued at the social level (Decimo 2005). We have to add the unsuccessful revolution of the traditional gender roles (Morokvasic 1984), the aging of the population and the incapacity of the welfare systems to provide all the social needs of the citizens (Decimo 2005). All of these factors have created a major gap between the labour supply and demand in the field of domestic work and social services that has recently been filled by female immigrants (Di Vico 2004).

Polish is at the fourth place amongst the nationalities in the market of private care sector in Italy, with more than 25,000 women regularly employed (Małek 2006).

Trust, mistrust and the creation of social relations

This research has explored the relationships between Polish women and the people whom they assist, the family of the assisted, the Italians they are in contact with, their country-women, their relatives and friends at home and other foreign workers of the same sector. The analysis has concentrated on the role and importance of trust in the field of interpersonal relationships in general and in these types of relationships in particular, because they are characterized by uncertainty and instability. It is necessary to take into consideration the social and historical context in general to study the individuals and their relationships. In fact, as I have already mentioned, these uncertainties are due to the migratory process itself as well as the working and social conditions of Polish women in Italy and to the social and historical context of origin that influenced and still affects the thoughts and behaviour of these women.

The short stays of Polish women in Italy and the strong connections maintained with their country and their original environment strengthen this thesis. Many of the women interviewed have husbands and sons in Poland; consequently, there are daily contacts with the original country, and for the majority of them there is not a real project of integration in the Italian society ,but the desire of going back as soon as possible.

Anja,[2] like many other women I interviewed, telephoned her family almost daily to and ran the house from abroad, giving orders to her husband. There are weekly exchanges of goods, which the women send to their family members through the many buses that daily connect Poland and Italy. Even the women who are not married or are divorced maintain constant communication and exchanges with their relatives and friends. Because of their strong ties with Poland, it is fundamental to study and understand the starting situation and the regulation of their social life in Poland.

---

[2] All names have been changed to protect the women's privacy.

The post-socialist period, with its uncertainty and voids due to radical political, economic and social changes, also influences the lives of individuals and not only in their choices to emigrate. In fact, this general uncertainty has made interpersonal relationships increasingly necessary. The general uncertainty is not a heritage of the regime but an answer to an unknown new society and country, which is difficult to recognise. This upheaval also includes a major change of roles inside the society, the rise of new social classes and professions, and the appearance of new values. Paradoxically, however, in a period of deep mistrust towards both individuals and institutions in the post-socialist period, the act of trust becomes increasingly essential (Torsello 2004). Trust and mistrust are both at the roots of the preservation of social connections, and both of them grow in importance when we take into consideration particular situations like the migratory one. In this case, trust indeed becomes an essential element simply, because the level of daily uncertainty grows and as a consequence in this kind of situation, trust becomes more important, sometimes fundamental. We can therefore conclude that migration combined with the precarious original social condition increases the situation of risk, which is perceived in the creation of social connections.

Therefore, there is, in the case of Polish women in Italy, a wide and generalised use of informal networks. For example, in Bergamo (where I carried out the research), there is no form of formal association made by Polish women. This can be explained by the instability of their presence in Italy, the desire of the majority of them to go back home, and finally their full time jobs which discourages their engagement in other activities.

The search for the job

The investments in social networks are very important in the new and complex post-socialist society. That is why it is fundamental to analyse the role of these networks and the role of trust in the decision to immigrate to Italy and in the search for work. The migratory process is realised through the use of interpersonal relations. We can speak about social networks, generally composed by other immigrant women, which act as the main support for immigration (Massey 1993). In almost all the cases, the search for a job is helped by the network through word of mouth and the recommendation of friends, relatives and acquaintances. These social networks are informal networks normally composed of people of the same nationality, but sometimes including the families and the few contacts that the immigrants have in Italy (Pichler 2005). Women who decide to immigrate first turn to their personal contacts: in these cases the need for employment calls upon an instrumental type of trust necessary to start the migratory process. The relatively close friends who have been contacted in turn use their acquaintances to find information about possible jobs or to spread the information that somebody is in search of employment. There is always the possibility of a replacement or an alternative. When, for instance, a woman must go back to Poland for any reason, she tries to find a friend or a relative to replace her for the period of absence or sometimes permanently. That friend is introduced to the employer as a trustworthy person (Pichler 2005). The relation carries a high degree of risk, because there is always a possibility that the trust is not repaid and that the newcomer decides to

replace the friend permanently, even when there was a different agreement. That happened to one of the women I interviewed: she was alternating work with another Polish woman every three months but on one occasion she returned to Italy after the three months of rest to discover that the other woman no longer wanted to take turns anymore; the first woman was thus without a job.

However, there are many examples in which the trust is completely repaid. For instance, there is the case of the working experiences of another woman, Anja. In December 2007, she replaced Natasha, who was going back to Poland for a month. The employer decided to dismiss Natasha without notice and ask Anja to stay and continue working for them. She decided to refuse the proposal because of the bad behaviour of the employer, who would have had to speak with Natasha before her departure and inform her. In this way, Natasha would have brought all her things home and she would have tried to find another job before buying the ticket to come back to Italy. Anja could not trust people who at any moment could dismiss her without notice and leave her without a job and, consequently, a place to live.

Sometimes, if the relationship between the employee and the employer is a good one and involves a degree of trust, she can be introduced and recommended to somebody else by the same family she was working for. For example, this can happen in the case of home helpers who are left without work due to the sudden death of the assisted elderly. This happened several times to the women I interviewed.

The network of acquaintances and points of reference the Polish women have in Italy are very important, because they influence their means of arriving and introduction to their new circumstances. The women who arrive and establish themselves in a particular region do so because they are introduced by other women who already live and work in that region. Maria, for example, arrived in Naples in 1997 because of a friend who found her a job there; then she moved to Tuscany with the help of another friend and finally she came to Bergamo to join her cousin, who had already found her a job there.

All the immigrants interviewed, without exception, already knew their destination when they left Poland. They also had already made arrangements for work in Italy for at least a month. This is true not only for the first departure, i.e. the first time they decided to immigrate, but it is also valid for their subsequent departures. Only in very rare occasions was this not the case, always due to unexpected events. Usually women who lose their job upon dismissal or the sudden death of the assisted decide to go back to Poland and search for the new job from there.

In short, it is interesting to note that the informal relations created in order to look for a job in Italy are already established in the society of departure. Therefore, the trust and importance accorded to the informal relations are already pre-existent in Poland. This fact confirms what has been said about the influence of the post-socialist period on interpersonal relationships and about the use of these relations as the only solution to obtain something in a precarious situation.

Furthermore, Polish women apply very rarely to the official Italian bodies in their search for a job, but instead prefer the informal channels; this fact cannot be justified by a lack of information (as could easily be assumed) or a lack of interest due to the short

nature of their migratory project. There are a few cases of Polish women who apply to these bodies, but it is not comparable to other nationalities of even citizens from other Eastern European countries. It is assumed that the use of informal channels is influenced by the tendency of Polish women to use their personal relationships and to invest in direct relations based on trust.

Do I have to trust? Positive and negative aspects

The social networks of countrywomen hold a fundamental role not only during the first phases of the migratory process, i.e. the decision to leave Poland and the search for a job in Italy, but even during their stay abroad. Polish women are accustomed to meeting in the few free hours they have in order to share their free time as well as to discuss their daily problems and to support each other (Ambrosini 2003). For these women, it is obviously easier to make friends with those who speak their own language and to relax with those who share their same culture. The social networks become a support to the preservation of their national identity, in addition to offering mutual emotional and psychological support (Costa 2005). Moreover, many practical problems are solved by their social networks, which often offer hospitality and help. If they need advice, some help, a loan or an accommodation, they always turn to the network of relations, which is a support for every need and is sometimes indispensable. Considering this trust from a purely instrumental point of view, it is possible to get many benefits through the use of these relationships. The unquestionable and enormous positive effect of the social networks has been demonstrated, which allows the individuals to increase their capacity of action and the capacity of the entire system of individuals (Mutti 1998).

However, the network does not always and only have a function of solidarity: sometimes people profit by these relations and make money from the activity of job intermediation. There are people who, for need of a job and without support, try to find a job in Italy; at the same time, there are organisations or individuals well anchored to the area who do not want to gain any other advantage than money from the service they offer. Social networks of a horizontal type can generate trust, putting in contact individuals with the same status and power, but this is not the same for social networks of the vertical type, characterised by hierarchical asymmetrical relations (Putnam 1993). I firmly believe that the phenomenon of job selling does not derive from a general condition of lack of trust but it is a deviance from the normal regulation of Polish women's social relationships in Italy. In fact, the people or organisations who usually commit this type of exploitation have power and support, and they can take the liberty of profiting from people in disadvantaged situations. The violation of law originates from a situation of deep imbalance between the two roles involved.

We have seen that relationships of the horizontal type can generate trust, and this trust can be reciprocated or not; however, this is not always the case, i.e. the trust is sometimes only partial. It is possible to observe this in the behaviour of the many of the women interviewed. For instance, Anja, who has been hosted and helped several times by Maria, does not reveal to her many things about her life, choices and family. Sometimes,

it seemed that I knew more than Maria about Anja's family and projects. I have discovered that the solidarity originates from the common situation of need more than from a real and complete trust. Trust is always renegotiated and there is never a complete and blind trust, even in relationships that had already been established.

The Polish and Italians inside the home

Polish women who come to work in Italy rarely come into contact or make friends with Italians. Their desire to integrate is often non-existent, especially because of the nature of their migration and their desire to return to Poland as soon as possible. Frequently, the only Italians they really come into contact with are the elderly they assist and the families who employ them. This interaction between immigrant women and Italians at home can be defined as a 'forced' relation (Mazzacurati 2005). The cohabitation, often twenty-four hours a day, forces the relationship.

There are three parts: the worker, the assisted elderly person and the family of the elderly; the family is normally constituted by their sons and daughters, who live with them in some cases. The cohabitation with a son or a daughter is very rare; the elderly person usually lives alone, and their family decides to employ a woman to assist him because of his precarious health and the impossibility of their taking care of him. Therefore, it is possible to analyse both the relationship between the elderly and the worker and the relationship between the family of the assisted and the worker. The two types of relationships are usually very different, and while they of course differ from case to case, but there are some similarities.

The relationship between the elderly and the assistant, due to the weakness and lack of preparation of both, is necessarily based on mutual trust. The absence of this trust, even from only one of the roles in question, causes such disequilibrium that cohabitation becomes impossible. This imbalance brings to different results: on one side the exploitation of the worker whose rights are ignored, and on the other maltreatment of the assisted (Mazzacurati 2005). However, often such relationships finish in a few months, proving the absolutely necessity establishing relationships with a high degree of trust.

The women interviewed give prominence to the importance of the human relations established and they emphasis the impossibility of continuation if they are treated like objects.

Signs of mistrust from the elderly or sometimes from the family itself bring also mistrust from the worker. An extreme case is one of the interviewed who hid the presence of her daughter in the town from their employer. The justification of this fact furnished by the worker was the nonexistent trust between them.

If instead the worker is treated with dignity and respect, there is equilibrium based on esteem and trust between the two parties, then sometimes there can be meaningful even affectionate relationships, due to the very informal situation of work and to the closeness and fragility of the parties.

This is true also for the relationship with the family of the assisted person: for example one of the women interviewed confided to me that she is very satisfied with her

current job because the daughter of the couple she assists trusts her, caring about her health and giving her the possibility to handling the money for the shopping and permitting her to host her sister.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the worker and the family of the assisted is more complicated, because it is not a balanced relation. In fact, the family has much more power, especially today when the pool of available foreign women is very high. In this context, it is therefore more difficult to create good and lasting relations.

The relation with the formal bodies: an informal course

To this point, I have described the relationship between the Polish immigrants and their countrywomen and their relations with Italians inside home: the place in which they sometimes spend twenty-four hours a day. However, this is not only this type of relationship: immigrants in search of help or job often resort to formal institutions.

Among these institutions, there is of course the Roman Catholic Church, with its many parishes throughout the country, which is a point of reference for many Catholic immigrants, but also for non-Catholics. It is a very powerful and deep-rooted institution. Another organisation connected with Catholicism is Caritas,[3] which can help many people in trouble with its groups of volunteers; many are the people assisted are from Eastern European countries.

Furthermore, there are employment offices, which are public or run by cooperatives. In Bergamo, I have found two of these agencies with the purpose of connecting supply and demand for domestic work: InformaLavoro[4] and Apicolf[5]. All of these bodies have been taken into consideration as an example of a formal type of relationship because they are the bodies Polish women in Italy more frequently turn to because of their primary need of finding a job.

The Church is the body that contacts and is contacted by these women, who are often invisible to the public institutions. It is estimated that fewer than 20% are working legally. A great number of the elderly are devoutly Catholic and, being frequently ill, they are visited at home by those responsible for each parish. Usually, a nun goes once a week to the houses of the area and serves communion to sick people. In this way, she comes in contact with immigrants working in those homes. Therefore, it is through this individual that the women who find a job in the area through their informal contacts interact for the first time with an institution.

The nun constantly updates the list of names and origins of the workers, but I have recorded cases in which Polish refuse to give her their name. The priest explains this reticence with the high degree of irregularity and with the consequent fear of being reported, but this conclusion is not convincing.

---

[3] Caritas is a non-profit organization of the Roman Catholic Church. Their mission is to work to build a better world, especially for the poor and oppressed.

[4] InformaLavoro is an info point of the Bergamo Province which helps citizens trying to connect supply and demand of labour (www.provincia.bergamo.it).

[5] ApiColf is the Italian professional association for the private care sector workers which also acts as a mediator in the search for a job (www.api-colf.it).

Anja told me about the list and about the fact that she first refused to give her name to the nun. In spite of this refusal, I discovered then that the parish finally got her name. Perhaps it is not only the question of irregular employment but a more general question of trust, quite understandable, towards somebody unknown, even if it is a person representing a religious authority. In fact, Anja was wondering why the people whom she had just met wanted to know her personal data.

The parish priest comes into contact with the immigrant women partly through his visits to the houses, and partly because some women approach him directly asking for some help in finding a job. They usually turn to him on the advice of a friend who has already been in contact with the priest for the same reason. This is remarkable, because it underlines the use of informal channels to get in contact with an institution, such as the church. The contact occurs strictly through the relationship with a person, it does not matter who this person represents. The women who approaches the parish priest do it, not because they are religious, but because it was suggested to them by another trustworthy person, and because he has the potential of helping them. They turn to him because they know that previously he could help some other people. The relationship between the individual and institution follows the informal lines of the interpersonal relationships.

In such contact, the priest can often match the supply of labour with the demand of the families of the neighbourhood, who in their turn ask him for some guarantee of trustworthiness. The priest has the function of mediator in the exchange and sometimes he negotiates a good wage and treatment for the immigrant. Coleman (1990) speaks about the 'mediators of trust', who are trustworthy persons acting as guarantors for the trustworthiness of other people. In this case, we can consider as mediators of trust both the parish priest who connects the offer and demand for a job and the friends who suggest that the immigrant to turn to the priest, because he is a trustworthy person.

It is possible to provide other examples of the role of mediation of the priest and of the importance of a physically present informal referee for these women. For instance, the priest relates the difficulties of some families in obtaining the social financial support they could have from the municipality because of the refusal by some of the immigrants to sign a document which would certify their work. Only the intervention and mediation of the priest can help solve the situation. He reduces the uncertainty by taking the document and explaining to the women the importance of signing it. He is again a mediator of trust between the immigrant and another formal body.

With the employment offices, we can observe the same kind of situation: the immigrants address the agency because they are suggested to do so by other people who act as mediators. Usually they arrive to the office through the suggestion of another Polish woman who has already used the service. Sometimes the friends themselves bring them to the office. It is therefore through the assurance of a person they know, countrywoman or not, that they get to know the service. The women use an institutional service through an informal type of contact.

It is necessary to report the fact that this service is not very useful for the community of women I have studied. Only with a series of interviews and meetings can the offer and the demand be finally matched. However, as already explained, Polish women arrive in Italy with existing arrangements for a job; when they lose it in Italy, they try to find another job, but if it is not possible to do so in few days they simply return to Poland. It is more advantageous to do

things this way, and it is always possible to take the occasion to visit family while waiting for the friends that remain in Italy find a new job. This is possible because of the ease of movement between the two countries, while for women of other nationalities this is simply impossible because of the high expense in doing so and the difficulties in obtaining a visa.

Conclusion

This study of the community of Polish immigrant women working in the private care sector in Italy has highlighted the importance of interpersonal relations and of trust.

Exploring the relationships established by these women inside the house of the assisted person where the majority of Polish women spend twenty-four hours a day, I have highlighted the fundamental role of such relations and of all the relations they can establish outside the house in the places where they spend their free time. Even more, the use of personal connections is already important before they arrive in Italy, because it helps them in their search for a job in the country. As has been emphasised, this search is almost always carried out in Poland through the use of social networks. Furthermore, the connections with their home country continue to be very strong even when they live in Italy. This is in part due to the provisory project of their migration, which they usually undertake alone, often leaving their all family and sometimes children in Poland. Full integration into Italian life is almost never considered and there are daily exchanges of news and goods with Poland.

With regard to the way these relations are established, it is important to observe how the situation of instability already present in their original society (and due to the post-socialist period) has added to another situation of instability: the migratory experience, which increases the general level of mistrust among Polish women. However, this mistrust cannot lead to an absence of social relations, especially considering their situation of need. In fact, it brings into focus the relationships they establish and an increase in the importance of the role of trust in every aspect of their life.

Therefore, there is an extensive use of informal relations in every aspect of the migrants' working and social experience in Italy, even in their interactions with Italian institutions, the proof of which is the relationship that these women have with the institutional bodies, which is always mediated by their personal contacts.

In the hope that this research would be a useful instrument for the comprehension of an often distorted or invisible phenomenon and situation, I have tried to build an objective idea of the presence of Polish women in Italy, particularly in Bergamo. In fact, this reality has been often studied on the surface and from the perspective of the Italian need for workers in the sector. Even when studies were made in an attempt to give attention to the foreign workers, this has been carried out from a less useful angle that does not consider the migrants' real needs, the difference in their origins and consequently of their migratory plans. For instance, through this research I have demonstrated the uselessness of the employment offices for the type of needs Polish women have. This kind of analysis, which of course can be deepened, can serve as an example for future studies and for the comprehension of other communities through the study of social relations.

References

Ambrosini, Maurizio. 2003. *Per uninquadramentoteorico del tema: ilmodelloitalianodiimmigrazione e le fun-zionidelleretietniche.* In: Michele La Rosa & Laura Zanfrini, *Percorsimigratoritraretietniche, istituzioni e mercato del lavoro.* Milano: Franco Angeli, pp. 9–23.

Brettell, Caroline. 2003. *Anthropology and Migration, Essay on Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and Identity.* Oxford: AltaMira Press.

Campani, Giovanna. 2001. *Genere, etnia e classe. Migrazioni al femminiletraesclusione e identità.* Pisa: ETS.

Caritas Italiana. 2006. *Polonia. Nuovopaesedifrontiera.Damigranti a comunitari.* Roma: Centro Studi e Ricer-cheIdos.

Caritas/Migrantes. 2007. *Immigrazione Dossier Statistico 2007.* Roma: Centro Studi e RicercheIdos.

Coleman, James Samuel. 1990. *Foundation of Social Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Colombo Asher&Giuseppe Sciortino. 2002. *Stranieri in Italia, Assimilatiedesclusi.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

Costa, Roberto. 2005. Dall'Ucraina a Rovigo. Vita dabadanti in provincia.*Carta* 16: 38–41.

D'Angelo, Alessio. 2006. *Le migrazionipolacchenell'UnioneEuropeadell'allargamento: flussi e caratteristiche.* In: KarolinaGolemo,KamilaKowalska, Franco Pittau& Antonio Ricci(eds.), *Polonia. Nuovopaesedifrontiera. Damigranti a comunitari.* Roma: IDOS.

Decimo, Francesca. 2005. *Quandoemigrano le donne. Percorsi e retifemminilidellamobilitàtransnazionale.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

Di Vico, Dario. 2004. *Le badanti, ilnuovo welfare privato.* http://www.corriere.it/speciali/2003/Cronache/nuove-italie/. Accessed 10 September 2010.

D'Ottavio, Germana. 2005. "Migrazionifemminilied "agenzienere". Lavoratricidomestichepolacchenellaprovin-ciaitaliana".*StudiImigrazione* 159: 547–560.

Hann, Chris 2002. *Postsocialism, Ideal, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia.* London: Routledge.

La Rosa, Michele; Zanfrini, Laura. 2003. *Percorsimigratoritraretietniche, istituzioni e mercato del lavoro.* Milano: Franco Angeli.

Małek, Agnieszka. 2006. *Le migrazionipendolaridelledonnepolacche in Italia.* In: KarolinaGolemo, Kamila-Kowalska, Franco Pittau& Antonio Ricci (eds.), *Polonia. Nuovopaesedifrontiera.Damigranti a comunitari.* Roma: IDOS.

Massey, Douglas S.,Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino andJ. Edward Taylor. 1993. Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal. *Population and Development Review* 19(3): 431–66.

Mazzacurati, Cristina. 2002. *DalBlatallavendita del lavoro. Come sonocambiatecolf e badantiUcraine e Moldave a Padova.* In: Asher Colombo andGiuseppe Sciortino, *Stranieri in Italia, Assimilatiedesclusi.* Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 145–75.

Morokvasic, Marjana. 1984. Birds of passage are also women. *International Migration Review* 18(4): 886–907.

Mutti, Antonio. 1998. *Capitalesociale e sviluppo.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

Pichler, Ilaria. 2005. Le immigrate moldave e ucrainenelmercato del lavorodicura: ilcasoTrentino. In: StudiZancan (ed.)*, Politiche e serviziallepersone1*, pp. 43–202.

Pine, Frances. 2002. Retreat to the household? Gendered domains in postsocialist Poland. In: Chris Hann, *Post-socialism, Ideal, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia.* London: Routledge, pp. 95–113.

Carnevale, Ellen, D'Vera Cohn, Mary M. Kent, Sara Maki, ZualiMalsawma, Richard Skolnik and Sandra Yin (eds.). 2007. *World Population Highlights. Population Bulletin* 62(3). Washington: population Reference Bureau.

Putnam, Robert. 1993. *La tradizionecivicanelleregioniitaliane.* Milano: Mondadori.

Spanó, AntonellaandAnna Maria Zaccaria. 2003. *Il mercatodellecollaborazionidomestiche a Napoli: ilcasodel-leucraine e dellepolacche.* In: Michele La RosaandLaura Zanfrini, *Percorsimigratoritraretietniche, istituzioni e mercato del lavoro.* Milano: Franco Angeli, pp. 193–224.

The World Bank.2008. *In Focus: An update on Labour Migration from Poland*, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ ECAEXT/Resources/258598-1225385788249/infocuslaboroct08.pdf. Accessed on 10 September 2011.

Torsello, Davide. 2004. *La sfiduciaritrovata, Etnografiadiunvillaggiopostsocialistadella Slovacchiameridionale.* Roma: CISU.

Torsello, Davide and Pappová, Melinda. 2003. *Social Networks in Movement. Time interaction and interethnic spaces in Central Eastern Europe.* Samorin: Forum Minority Research Institute.

Zucchelli, Marco. 2007. *Il fenomenomigratorionellabergamasca e ilserviziodomiciliarealla persona*. Bergamo: Caritas DiocesanaBergamasca.

Wallace, Claire. 2003. *Social networks and social capital*. In: DavideTorsello and Melinda Pappová, *Social Networks in Movement. Time interaction and interethnic spaces in Central Eastern Europe*. Samorin: Forum Minority Research Institute, pp. 15–26.

POVZETEK

Namen raziskave je poglobljena analiza odnosov, ki jih v Italiji in na Poljskem vzpostavljajo poljske ženske pred in med svojimi migracijskimi izkušnjami, z namenom razumevanja pomembnosti teh odnosov in zaupanja. Izvedena je bila raziskava za kvalitativne etnografske metode. Glede na pomen zaupanja v postsocialističnih družbah, je pomembno poudariti, da se neformalni odnosi, ki se vzpostavijo za iskanje zaposlitve v Italiji, najprej vzpostavijo Poljskem. Le v nekaterih izjemnih primerih poljske ženske v Italijo pridejo brez službe. Zaradi nestabilnih razmer v domačem okolju in sploh v post-socialističnem obdobju, nastaja še drugo stanje nestabilnosti: migracijske izkušnje, ki povečujejo splošno nezaupanje do teh žensk. To nezaupanje ne sme privesti do odsotnosti družbenih odnosov, zlasti ob upoštevanju njihovega položaja, v katerem potrebujejo pomoč. To nezaupanje obrača pozornost na odnose, ki jih vzpostavljajo in na pomembnost vloge, ki jo zaupanje igra v vseh vidikih njihovega življenja. V vseh vidikih njihovega delovnega in družbenega izkustva v Italiji – celo pri dostopu do italijanskih institucij – namreč uporabljajo neformalne odnose.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: zaupanje, neformalni odnosi, migracije, Poljska, Italija, poljakinje, nega ostarelih na domu

CORRESPONDENCE: ELENA SISCHARENCO, University of Bergamo, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Piazza Rosate 2,24123 Bergamo, Italy. E-mail: elena.siska@libero.it.