

Introduction

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This collection of articles explores one of the most interesting social changes evident in Italy during the last two decades of the twentieth century. After a long history as a country of mass emigration, Italy has now become a country of significant immigration and is taking its first steps towards being a multicultural society. Although there is still much uncertainty over the question of numbers, Italy certainly has in excess of 1 million immigrants. They originate from an extraordinary diversity of countries in all parts of the world: from rich countries such as the USA, Germany and Britain; and, in much larger numbers, from poor countries of the developing world such as Morocco, Senegal and the Philippines, and from several East European countries struggling with rapid economic transition, political disruption and war. Such a diversity of source countries makes the formulation of a coherent immigration policy almost impossible—even if Italy were to have the political will to try to do this. Instead, Italy is seen by its EU partners as a weak link in 'Fortress Europe', dangerously open to the entry of 'third-country' immigrants, particularly along its southern shores where the authorities play a daily (and nightly) round of cat and mouse with an increasingly professionalized (and criminalized) business of migrant trafficking.

The articles that follow analyse various dimensions of the 'new immigration' to Italy. They concentrate on immigrant groups and flows from the less developed world, on the life and work experiences of the immigrants in various parts of Italy and on the sometimes disturbing reaction of Italian society towards people who are still seen largely as 'outsiders'. The groups investigated include Tunisians, Senegalese, Cape Verdeans and Rom refugees from the former Yugoslavia; and the articles also exemplify a range of geographical settings within Italy—Milan, Modena, Palermo, Bologna, Rimini and Rome. The articles cannot claim to represent a full survey of the kaleidoscopic immigration scene in Italy today, but they do offer a significant contribution to the literature on the topic, not least because, with the exception of the first, which presents a general overview, each article is based on detailed ethnographic study or field research.

Most of the articles have been presented and discussed at workshops convened by the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, notably those on 'Immigration, racism and multiculturalism in Italy' (7 May 1997) and 'Italy as a country of immigration: steps towards a multicultural society' (24 February 1999). I am grateful to the contributors for making the workshops such informative events and for agreeing to shape their contributions into the final versions that appear here.