Aspirations and Networks of Italian Migrants to Bogota. A Typology

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Abstract: This paper aims to understand the individual and relational motives supporting migration from Italy to Bogota. Our concern is to achieve a nuanced understanding of how aspirations, on the one hand, and social networks, on the other, shape migratory decisions and structure in broader migration patterns. To do this, we chose a qualitative approach based on narrative interviews with Italians living in Bogota, which were selected through snowball sampling. As a result, we produced a typology of five different migration pathways: *globetrotters* aspiring to international mobility with no mediators supporting their process of continuous migration; *careerists* who accept moving on demand of their company for advancing their career supported by professional mediators; *risk-takers* aspiring to professional independence and supported in their entrepreneurial project by weak ties; *tied migrants* aspiring to better family quality of life and supported by strong familial ties; and *exiled migrants* who find a refuge from the difficulties they encounter in Italy and supported by strong professional ties.

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This paper focuses on a migration flow from Italy to Bogota. The latter is a small flow compared with other migration mass flows. Available data show that the Italian community in Colombia is small, although it has rapidly grown in recent years. According to the Registry of Italians Living Abroad (*Anagrafe degli Italiani Residenti all'Estero*, A.I.R.E[1]), there is an upward trend in the number of Italians who took up residence in Colombia for over 12 months. They have doubled in the post-2008 crisis period (from 10,690 in 2009 to 21,038 in 2020). This figure does not include temporary or circular migration to Colombia (such as the one that often concerns retirees, professionals in smart working conditions, or managers of large companies moving from one location to another) and Italians who, despite having resided abroad for more than a year, avoid registering with A.I.R.E. Therefore, it can be considered underestimated.

The paper aims to understand the forces and pathways through which Italian migration in Bogota occurs and is experienced, narrated, and represented. Our concern is to achieve a nuanced understanding of how aspirations and desires, on the one hand, and social networks, on the other, shape migratory decisions and structure in broader migration patterns.

To do this, we chose a qualitative approach based on hermeneutic interviews with Italians living in Bogota. As a result, we produced a typology of different migration pathways, allowing us to identify

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[1] See: https://www.esteri.it/it/servizi-consolari-e-visti/italiani-all-estero/aire_0/. Retrieved December 12, 2024.

similarities and differences among the aspirations driving migration and the social networks supporting it.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section provides a short overview of the literature on migration as regards individual motivations and social supporting networks. In the following one, we briefly outline the empirical research methodology. After that, we present the classificatory principles of the typology and the different types of migration patterns we identified among the people we interviewed. In the conclusive remarks, we shortly discuss our main findings.

Aspirations and Social Infrastructures as Drivers of Migration

In the field of migration studies, the study of the factors that explain why people leave their country of origin and choose their country of arrival has been based predominantly on neoclassical models of rational choice and utility maximization, well summarized in the so-called push-pull theory (Massey et al. 1993). This model conceives migration as the result of a combination of economic push factors operating in the context of origin (poverty, unemployment, low social status, etc.) and pull factors operating in the country of destination (better wages and job prospects, more efficient welfare systems, etc.). Therefore, economic inequality in the country of origin is the driving force behind migration. This model has recently been reconceptualized by distinguishing between different structural elements that influence the agency of social actors (Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long 2018):

- *Predisposing drivers*, which consist of structural macro disparities between the place of origin and destination (economic, political, environmental, and geographic disparities) that indirectly make migration more likely;

- *Proximal drivers*, which consist of more localized structural contingencies, such as economic crisis, environmental degeneration in the place of origin or economic recovery, and new job opportunities in the place of destination, that may directly influence the decision to migrate;

- *Precipitating drivers*, related to an identifiable adverse push event in the place of origin, such as a factory closure or financial crisis, political persecution, environmental disasters, or an identifiable pull event in the place of destination, such as changing immigration laws;

- *Mediating factors*, including the quality of transportation, communications, information about the destination, and the "culture of migration," may all be seen as the migration infrastructure (Xiang and Lindquist 2014).

However, these structural drivers do not act in a vacuum, and most studies have shown the importance of individual motivations and infrastructure in shaping various mobility regimes (Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2012). Instead, they are socially accepted narratives supporting past, present, and future actions (Gu 2012). Objective factors will be perceived and interpreted differently by different individuals, and these differences in interpretation and identification of opportunities and advantages may explain much variation in individual migration paths (Verwiebe et al. 2010). How people narrate their motivations and the social contexts in

which they are presented and justified sheds light on links to broader social structures, enhancing in-depth understanding and sociological imagination.

Recently, an alternative way of framing migration has emerged, based on individual factors and focusing on the diversity of personal desires, aspirations, cognitions, emotions, and motivations underlying migration pathways (Collins 2017; Carling and Schewel 2018; Meyer 2018; Scheibelhofer 2018).

Under this perspective, individual mobility choices are considered part of a broader aspiration for self-development. Migration is a means to achieve what they aspire for in their life; it is part of a plan for individual becoming. Migration should not be seen as an end in itself but as a means to the end of realizing life aspirations (Carling and Collins 2018).

Within this perspective, the stream of research on lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; 2015; Benson and Osbaldiston 2014; Benson 2015) conceptualizes the choice of migration as one related to how one aspires to live one's life.

Aspirations and desires are socially rooted in shared imaginaries (Salazar 2011; 2014). They are built within individuals' "aspirations window" and adhere to the aspirational norms of the socializing context (Ray 2006). This may shape a "culture of migration" (Timmerman, Hemmerechts, and De Clerck 2014) at the individual level (people who have migrated in the past are more likely to migrate in the future) but also at the community level, thus becoming a normative ideal which affects the individual aspirations to migrate. Another example may be the concept of "mobility fetishism" (Bauder, Hannan, and Lujan 2016) of the academic environment that led to aspire to mobility to strengthen career paths.

Also, infrastructures can be included in the "aspirations windows," playing a significant role in supporting migration processes. These infrastructures may be distinguished as commercial (recruitment intermediaries), regulatory (state procedures for working, licensing, studying, training, etc.), technological (material, architectural, technical, and digital infrastructures of communication and transportation), humanitarian (international organizations), and social (migrant networks) (Xiang and Lindquist 2014; Düvell and Preiss 2022:85). In different mobility regimes, infrastructures may play various roles. Specifically, their role may change according to the destinations. For instance, where physical infrastructures are lacking, as in the migration flow from Italy to Bogota, social infrastructures may have a crucial role in migration processes. They help to overcome transportation (the lack of direct air connections), regulatory difficulties, and the uncertainty deriving from media and people's misrepresentation of the destination.

Both weak and strong ties matter in the migration decision process, acting as complements in the migration choice, but they provide different types of support (Schapendonk 2015; 2018; Giulietti, Wahba, and Zenou 2018).

The attention to the individual, emotional, and relational components of migration helps blur boundaries between different types of migration also when the same places of origin and destination are involved.

Methodology

Our data are mainly based on qualitative research conducted through in-depth interviews. As stated in the literature (Collins 2017; Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz 2018), qualitative research based on migrants' narratives is useful to go beyond normalized scripts of migration and more apt to capture individual dimensions, expressions of aspirations and desires, unpredictable connotations, and the imaginary of migration. Feminist studies have shown the importance of narratives in listening to migrants' interpretive voices as a lens for accessing how migration is represented and understood and how structural factors are mediated to produce particular patterns, meanings, and experiences of migration (Silvey 2004). Therefore, as previous research has shown (Jensen and Pedersen 2007), the analysis of narratives provides a significant basis for understanding the relationship between individuals and structures in migration.

We used hermeneutic interviews, which, by focusing on the central role of participants and their perspectives, can derive interpretations from their narratives about migration experience (Montesperelli 1998). Hermeneutic interviews are based on the Gadamerian tradition, which moves beyond the epistemological emphasis on understanding essences to emphasize an understanding of the person being in the world (Gadamer 1975). The interviews were free-form, the sequence of questions was participant-driven, the interviews resembled everyday conversations, and the questions were open-ended and reflective.

The interviews were conducted on Italians living temporarily or permanently in Bogota at the time of the interviews (January-July 2020), selected through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is particularly appropriate for a population that is hidden, indefinable, or difficult to locate, as migrant communities are. We used several reference chains (particularly thematic Facebook groups and physical communities) to identify initial respondents and avoid social homogeneity. The researcher discusses the research objective (the migration process) with potential participants during the recruitment process. This allows participants to reflect more deeply on their migration experience.

We used an interview guide (Silverman 2015) to keep the conversation focused on four main parts:

1. the life before migration (interviewees' education, career plans, and background information);

2. mediating drivers enabling or constraining migration (the presence and quality of transport, communications, the "culture of migration" in terms of previous experience of mobility and migration, the role of mediators, etc.);

3. their account of migration inception and perpetuation to Bogota;

4. their integration inside and outside Bogota.

The majority of interviews (25 out of 31) were conducted face-to-face; the remaining 6, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were carried out online. Interviews had an average duration of 45 minutes, were audio-taped, and transcribed in full.

In the case of the face-to-face interviews, the setting was chosen jointly to ensure an environment that the participants considered safe and unencumbered so that they could feel comfortable sharing their stories.

We followed the canonical stages of qualitative interviewing: thematizing, designing the interview and the open-ended questions, interviewing, audio recording, fully transcribing, verifying, and reporting (Silverman 2010; 2015). Identifying features were removed.

In this research framework, data analysis is an iterative process that involves continuous interaction between data collection and analysis. Therefore, the texts collected through the interviews were explored inductively without predetermined categories and in search of relevant themes. This involves a reflexive movement between data collection, data coding, analysis, and interpretation, with new categories constantly being added and old ones reread in light of them. Barney Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967) call this process a constant comparative method: a constant coding based on reanalysis of the same categories to capture differences and similarities. Differences allow existing categories to be refined and subcategories or new categories to be created. This process helps move from a descriptive level to a theoretical model, such as through creating typologies.

The total number of participants was 31. This group is quite heterogeneous regarding gender, age, geographical origin, and educational level. There is an almost equal representation of men and women (16 M, 15 F). Regarding age, most participants are between 36 and 45 years old, but younger and older age groups are also represented. The group shows a high level of education, with only 6 having a high school diploma and the rest having higher education (4 bachelor's degrees and 12 master's degrees) and 9 a postgraduate qualification (6 doctoral degrees and 3 international master's degrees) (Table 1).

Table 1. Group demographics (n=31)

Variable	Categories	Count
Gender	M	16
	F	15
Education	High school Diploma	6
	Bachelor and Master Degree	16
	Post-graduate qualification	9
Age	25-35	5
	36-45	17
	46-57	9
Geographical Origin	South of Italy	11
	Centre of Italy	8
	North of Italy	12
Arrival date	Less than 1 year	4
	More than 1, less than 5	7
	More than 5, less than 10	10
	More than 10	10
	Total	31

Source: Self-elaboration.

Aspirations and Social Infrastructures: A Typology

Based on the recent debate on results on the drivers and infrastructure of migration pathways, we have identified two classification principles to identify and sort differences and similarities in

the migration pathways of Italians in Bogota in 2020.

The first is that of aspirations, as defined in the previous section. We distinguish between migration *as a means* of solving some contextual problem and that driven by aspirations for independence, revenge, or career. Contextual problems can take different forms, but the aspiration in this case is to improve one's life situation (with better working conditions, work environment, etc.). Conversely, some see migration *as an end*, a step toward achieving a life ambition that can take different forms (such as a better quality of life or an improved family situation).

The second is the extent and nature of the social infrastructure that supports the migration flow. We distinguish between autonomous migration flows not supported by social ties, migration flows supported by weak ties, and migration flows supported by strong ties.

From the intersection of these two classificatory principles, we derive the typology of Italian migrants in Bogota depicted in Figure 1. Although the 5 typologies identified, globetrotter, cosmopolitan, careerist, exile, and bonded, are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, they do offer an attempt to distinguish migratory patterns.

Figure 1. A typology of Italian immigrants in Bogota
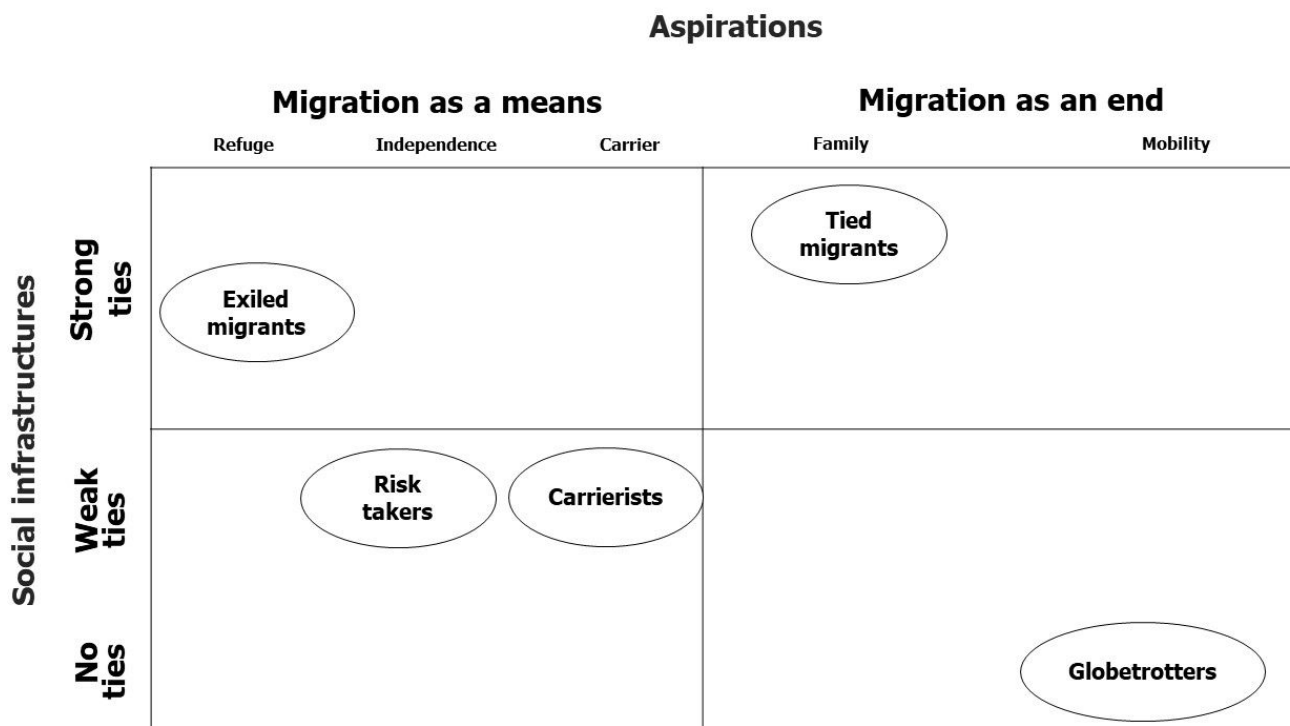
Source: Self-elaboration.

Globetrotters

This group includes five interviewees who share a strong individual "culture of migration" and show an aspiration to international mobility, which does not turn into an attachment toward a specific destination. They are high-skilled travelers who implement a permanent mobility pathway made up of different short-term destinations:

> I have been to Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Burma, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and other places like Indonesia, but not all for work, some for pleasure, to get to know, then Sri Lanka, Australia. So, various places where one could open one's mind a bit and get to know the local people…one always thinks, as Troisi used to say, that one goes to the North from the South to work, but this is not always the case. [04M55]

The migration project of these interviewees is based on an endogenous or proactive choice, aiming at fulfilling an individual aspiration—mobility—considered particularly important for constructing their identity. Driven by an inherent propensity and need to travel and discover the world, they value migration as a life experience. Mobility is their way of life (Urry 2002), their normative ideal (Elliott and Urry 2010), and a defining aspect of their identity (Cohen, Duncan, and Thulemark 2013).

This aspiration seems to be rooted in a "culture of migration" inherited from the family of origin or shared with a foreign partner who makes the experience of international mobility familiar even before the migration choice:

> Dad traveled all the time. Dad worked in a [large company in northern Italy], like Mum, for 40 years of their lives [laughs]. And Dad traveled, he worked in the foreign commercial part, so for a while, he also did, in addition to doing African markets, the Middle East, and South America, he also did Spanish markets. And so he liked to go there, the beaches, the city where we went...My mum loves to travel as well. So there's a family's vocation toward...all four of us have never been stationary as a family. In fact, my brother lives [in a city in Spain]. My mum's dad lived in Argentina for 30 years, then came back to Italy, got married, and had my mum. On Dad's side, Dad lived in Venezuela in the 1980s—early 1980s for four years. So, for my family, it was strange that I stayed in Italy for so long. [31F34]

> And nothing then along the way, over the years, I got married, my husband is [African], and we have two children. We have always traveled more than for tourism, for the family because we used to go to [country in Africa] to visit relatives. [13F47]

They move not because of material needs, as some are already employed in Italy, but because of aspirations to travel, which they pursue through targeted job applications and without the help of mediators:

> and then I wanted to gain experience outside Europe, so, almost for fun at the beginning, I sent four job applications around the world practically. I left, giving up everything: a permanent job, my home, my family, everything, and I've been here four years now. [29F34]

Instead of scaring them, the arrival in a spatially and culturally distant context excites them. Guided by the desire to get to know the local culture, they show a strong integration in the context of arrival. Integration is also favored by the condition of being a foreigner, a culturally privileged condition for a population that shows welcome and hospitality toward foreigners coming from Northern countries:

At first, let's say that, as most Italians do, people in general try to focus on their compatriots. I decided not to make this choice, and so I started to create my own group of Colombian friends. If a person wants to have an experience and wants to move abroad, he has to live the reality and mix with the culture of the people because otherwise, it's not a full experience. [29F34]

Here is an important thing about Colombia that I would like to say. It is very welcoming. We are in an era in which immigration is not always seen as a resource—in a good light, especially perhaps in Europe, even by us. Instead, here, one of the main qualities of Colombians is that there is a great idea of welcome. As soon as they feel you are a foreigner, they open their arms, their doors. [04M55]

They particularly appreciate certain traits of the Colombian culture, such as its widespread optimism and sunny disposition, to such extent to assimilate ways of life that fortify the construction of a Colombian identity without renouncing their Italian-ness:

So the things I miss from Italy are my relatives: family, friends, et cetera. The things I would take from Colombia to Italy are the cheerfulness and the lack of schematism. As Italians, we have a much more organized mental predisposition. Instead, here sometimes I see that they are much more relaxed, something serious happens, something bad happens, well, let's see the good thing...in Italy, I wasn't so much like this, instead, I changed a lot my personality, too, so all this perspective of living for the day I would take it with me. One doesn't feel Colombian, of course, if one isn't, even if here they treat you like God in the sense that you're part of them, but it happened to me, especially the last year that I went home, that I didn't even feel like I belonged anymore to Italy. I don't feel fully ei-

ther Colombian or Italian clearly, in short. I feel a bit divided, let's say in half. [29F34]

People in this group usually do not set limits to their migration pathway, which could either stop in Colombia, move to another destination, or finally end in returning to the homeland. Bogota may be just one step on the long path of continuous mobility sought by this type of migrants.

Risk-Takers

These include eight participants whose migration narratives denote an aspiration to achieve professional independence in the Colombian context. The migratory choice emerges from an aspiration to self-affirmation in the labor field. They aspire to a professional career that fully reflects their abilities and aspirations. For some, the main motivation for their migratory movement is linked precisely to the exploitation of market opportunities spotted in Colombia through the mediating role of third parties, mainly weak ties:

I would have liked to realize my first experience abroad and for a series of coincidences. In a very indirect way, thanks to Facebook, I could say...a family friend of one of my current company partners, very well placed here in Bogota, had found her best friend from university, that is, my friend's mother, through Facebook. She invited my friend on holiday to Bogota. He was convinced that the country had great potential. He managed to convince me and another friend to follow him on this adventure, and that is why I am basically here. Interests and opportunities came together. I decided to come here after a year of studying the country. We realized that the perception of the country to the outside world is quite distorted in the sense that we, Italians in particular,

have a conception that is still very much anchored in the 1990s. [08M37]

These are not people who undertake entrepreneurship out of necessity or survival, but in most cases, entrepreneurship appears to be a life choice. They were not experiencing unemployment or difficulty entering the labor market before departure. In some cases, they had dependent professions that they did not consider suited to their aspirations lacking the professional autonomy and independence they aspired to:

> After university, I entered the labor market at probably the worst time in Western history, in 2007. I had work experience in international logistics and then in a financial consulting company. After these experiences, I realized that salaried work was not for me in terms of attitude. That I felt more...let's say the calling was for autonomous experiences…at the work level, I was not doing well with salaried employment, so let's say it looked like a cycle was ending. There, I started to think seriously about carrying out some kind of entrepreneurial activity. [08M37]

While they are not escaping disadvantaged economic conditions, they are escaping from a context considered unfavorable to economic enterprise due to bureaucratic barriers, technological and social immobility, a generalized distrust and pessimism about the future, and young people:

> The problem of bureaucracy in Italy is very...If you open a restaurant here, you open a restaurant. Then the fire department comes and says, "Fix that. We come in a fortnight." Healthcare comes, "You have to fix this," you fix it. However, you work in the meantime. In Italy, for opening, first, you have to wait for them to come and check on you, you have to fix every-

thing, and if you're not perfect, you can't open. And this penalizes you. Here, let's say it's much easier. You get here, and you open. Here, creating a business is much easier than in Italy. [18M47]

> I think the country [Italy] is dead. I'm sorry to say it so dramatically, but it seems that apart from Milan, the rest of the country is dead. Young Italians tend more and more to go outside, not necessarily to Colombia but to many other countries more dynamic from all points of view: technological, social mobility, economic growth, and even the consideration you have for young people. In Italy, there is really a snobbism toward anyone who presents any proposal, any idea who is under 40 years old, which is, frankly, scandalous…Here, there is a completely different mentality, much more favorable to economic enterprise, to betting on the future, to trusting the future, a trust that in Italy has been totally lost everywhere. In Italy, there is a frightening pessimism that does not exist here. Here, the ability to believe in the future has remained, to believe that one's social and economic position in twenty years will be better than it is now and certainly better than one's parents. A way of relating to the world that we have totally lost in Italy. [08M37]

Integration into the local context is also essential for the success of one's entrepreneurial activity, given that the performance of the enterprise depends on integration into local networks. The role of mediators appears particularly significant for this group. They provide the informational, administrative, and relational support needed to access new markets and represent bridges of social integration and channels for building social capital:

> The initial support, also in terms of introduction into the social context, was by the person I was telling you about who owns the most important cosmetic sur-

gery clinic in the country. You know how important cosmetic surgery is here. So she introduced us, let's say...I don't like the expression so much but in the right social circles. This also allowed us to have a number of opportunities in terms of subsequent clients. We opened the business after a few months because we were waiting for export approvals, and so we mainly did public relations activities in the first six months in Colombia. [08M37]

They recognize difficulties in cultural adaptation due mainly to the diplomatic formalism that shapes relational arrangements and the implicit classism, also clearly visible spatially in the spatial stratification of the city that mirrors that of society. In any case, they seem to have overcome the initial difficulties of integration. Their relational networks appear heterogeneous, composed of both Italians and Colombians, and some appear so integrated that they feel like foreigners when they return home:

 I feel Italian, Colombian, European, Neapolitan, and a citizen of the world. Sometimes, I feel like a foreigner in my country. I mean, in Italy. Sometimes it happens, yes. Because you come back, and you find a reality that has become different from how you left it. We are very American. We are Latino Americans. But, the American presence in our way of doing things is clear. Mixed with our Latinness. In Italy, you are Latinos, and that's it. [12M50]

Carrerists

The *careerist* group includes three migrants. Their migration choice is based on career aspirations. They decide to fulfill an explicit request from their home organizations for reasons related to career advancement. They move because their employer wants them to and because it is good for their career

ambitions. They are similar to the *assigned expatriates* studied in the literature: employees of companies or government organizations who are sent to a foreign country to accomplish some specific goals of the organization (Przytuła 2015).

Therefore, they are not driven by dissatisfaction with the local labor market, job immobility, unemployment conditions, poor working conditions, or inconsistent work positions. Rather, they are a highly spatially mobile category with a high personal and family "migration culture." However, they differ from *globetrotters* in that they do not meet the canons of cosmopolitanism (e.g., openness to cultural differences). In other words, they are not driven by an individual vocation toward cultural diversity or a desire to experience new worlds or destinations (Hannerz 1990; Delanty 2006). For these individuals, international mobility is a professional and economic elevator:

After four years, the company where I worked was not doing well, and I had a proposal from another company. And that's when I started to discover the possibility of living as an expat. After the project, they sent me for eighteen months to Amsterdam. I came back every weekend, and then there was an opportunity to go to Indonesia. We're talking about [what happened] three years ago, and I said at that point, "I'll come as long as I can move with the whole family," and they said OK... Let's say it's a full-fledged detachment, and the company takes care of paying for your house, school for the child, and the car, and they treat you like a king. We lasted a year more or less in Jakarta, after which there was this opportunity in Colombia, and I said, "Yeah, OK, I'll come to Colombia, but you make me leave an expat contract where I'm served and revered, and you should give me an expat contract here, too." And they said OK. [15M46]

To these interviewees, Bogota appears to be a leap in the dark, a little-known destination. The initial integration is made easy through corporate intercession: the company offers a professional mediator, a relocation specialist who administratively and bureaucratically supports the relocation by personally taking care of transportation, legal issues (e.g., visas and related permits), access to healthcare, decent housing on site, language training, an appropriate school for the worker's children (if any), et cetera.

Their priority is to obtain an adequate remuneration package through a specific contract (supplementary to the original one), which is the outcome of a negotiation process:

> I do very particular and problematic projects...so I go and try to solve them. It was the same thing in Holland, it was the same thing in Indonesia, and it is the same thing here. The problematic project was here, if it had been in South Africa, I would have been called to South Africa. Here, there were two, actually, there was a project in Trinidad and Tobago, which is always near here, in the English Caribbean, and I did this interview for this project in Trinidad because I said, "We have to get out of here, and so..." They didn't accept the expat conditions, though. That is, the economic conditions offered were lower, and so I said, "I'm waiting for a new opportunity," and after a while, they called me. [15M46]

Driven by their professional and economic ambitions, they do not seem to celebrate cultural and lifestyle diversity and face difficult cultural adaptation. This results in daily life spent in close and homogeneous networks and international expatriate communities, where they share their leisure time in dedicated institutions (international schools, Italian restaurants, etc.).

It is therefore not surprising that the migration project, which is temporary and related to the completion of a specific project, is experienced as an investment for the future, a temporary sacrifice that allows them to return to Italy with sufficient economic income to lead a comfortable life:

> I mean, it's a situation where you invest now to capitalize as much as possible, to come back home, buy an apartment, so when I come back, I have an income... because then the expectation is to have a pension in line with my current salary. I would define an Italian who, in order to be better off and to be more peaceful, has decided to make a sacrifice now rather than do it later. I don't see it as a nice thing to be outside. I see it more as a sacrifice. It's nice to go to see the game on Sunday at the stadium. I'd like to see my grandchildren grow up, and I can't do that. I'd like to see my father and mother as well. You definitely make a sacrifice to stay out, but it's something you do now because the parents are well, the grandchildren are still small, and we'll go to the stadium when Roma comes back to win! [15M46]

Exiled

This group includes five interviewees who can be classified as *exiled migrants* because they live migration as a difficult response to a state of necessity and not as a choice motivated by a drive for individual self-realization. For them, migration is a way to escape a condition of job insecurity and low income and to pursue a career in line with their expectations and skills, even if at the cost of living far from their homeland. These are mainly high-skilled researchers and teachers who have experienced a condition of unemployment or precariousness in Italy (Armano and Murgia 2014), risking becoming trapped in unstable and fragmented careers (Barbi-

eri and Scherer 2009) that would prevent them from achieving economic independence.

> I graduated from college at twenty-four, finished my doctorate at twenty-six-twenty-seven, and basically a week later, I was already on my first contract—a staggering career in its first steps. The problem is that the first steps lasted practically seven years! The career stopped at the first steps! I had two teaching contracts at the university, which were two core teaching for the political science course. Can I say the contract amount? €500 gross per year precisely, so this is what also explains the need to move away. [24F39]

> I started my Ph.D. in 2003. I finished in 2007. I started doing small teaching contracts in Viterbo. However, these contracts were slightly enough to pay my travel expenses to go to Viterbo. Since 2007, when I had finished my doctorate, there has not been much evolution of this academic collaboration, which, while not allowing me to earn enough money, was also limiting my personal life because I couldn't go and live on my own, I was already thirty-three-thirty-four years old, and I was forced to stay at home with mom and dad. There also comes a point when you need your independence. You want to feel independent from the work point of view because the feeling of being an adult also depends on that. Here, this step was missing—going from a daughter to a person who manages her life. [05F42]

Many *exiled migrants* are in a stage of life in which some fundamental choices can no longer be procrastinated. They are also aware that staying in Italy would have entailed the search for an alternative job, perceived as a fallback opportunity:

> I would not be able to build an identity in academia. So, as the best alternative, I would have had to accept a fallback job somewhere, but it is complicated, especially for our fields and degrees. [24F39]

In other cases, they feel adrift and have no alternative options, especially when they have invested heavily in the academic path in disciplines with little traction in the labor market.

They see their life in Bogota as *revenge*, an opportunity to demonstrate they can do their desired work, and the chance to achieve their economic independence. Such a chance comes thanks to the social capital built in the university, for instance, through mediators—usually university professors with academic ties in Colombian universities—who acted as bridges by inserting them as lecturers first in short-term paths (teaching contracts in master's programs delivered jointly with Italian universities) that then led to the consolidation of academic positions in Colombian universities.

Their daily routine, marked by very tight work rhythms, is fuelled by network relationships with colleagues, especially compatriots who become surrogates for family members across the border. Within such Italian communities, symbolic practices such as the display of iconic Italian products, the enactment of Italian holiday traditions, and mealtime rituals (culinary rituals and traditions, typical dishes associated with traditional festivities, etc.) are used to reinforce Italian-ness:

> I have to tell the truth. We mainly hang out with Italians. It's easier for a foreigner, let's say, to hang out with other foreigners because the other foreigners, like you, don't have other networks of relationships. That is to say, on Sunday we meet because nobody has to go to eat at Mom's and nobody has to go to the cousin's wedding. So it creates a particular situation

where you spend all the holidays together. Instead, Colombian friends, by necessity, spend them with family. And so you create a very close relationship because birthday is always us, Easter is always us, maybe Christmas is not because one goes back to Italy, and so, with one particular Italian friend here, we said to each other, "Friends are the family you choose." Because then in these eight years when a lot of things and traumas have happened, you are just you because there is no family, so in good times, especially in bad times, they are the ones who rush in, who come to the hospital if something happens, who keep your baby if...to say, last year that my father was sick, we had to run away on a Saturday and I had the baby, they come to the hospital, and they take the baby. You create a relationship that has an intensity that even Italian friendships don't have. [O5F42]

At first, these migrants had conceived their migration experience as a temporary phase in a process that was supposed to bring them back home as "returning brains." Most of them seem to manifest cultural resistance and acculturative stress by sometimes showing disapproval for the quality of life and, in particular, for a lifestyle centered on the preponderance of work time that sacrifices other spheres of life by making the home-work axis firm, for the difficulty in urban travel due to city congestion, the lack of security, and its consequences (such as not having the keys to one's home, which are instead on hand to an ever-present doorman).

Here's the other problem with Bogota. It's the hours. It's a city where everything starts very early. So you have to get used to waking up at 5:30 a.m. It's a city where you also have classes very late at night, so I finish class at 10, get home at 11, and then wake up at 5:30. It is very tiring, the quality of life. According to them, the more you work, the more you do in a day.

They have this expression in Colombia, the día terrible. So you have to wake up early because then you do a thousand things. I don't agree with that at all. So there's a lot of quantity at the expense of quality, that's for sure. And so, doing a lot of traffic hours, working sometimes late, starting classes early in the morning, sometimes even on Saturdays. That, yes, there is not this attention to workers. One reads that Nordic countries tend to reduce working hours. Here, they have not yet come to this idea. And it also seems absurd to me that children enter school at 7 in the morning, leave at 4 in the afternoon, and also have homework to do. That's why I say they get used to a super-life from an early age. [05F42]

In many ways, it remains a very closed city, where the home-work axis is very strong. Let's say that I always have, over the years even more, complained about the insecurity and also the ugliness of the city because it is one of the ugliest cities in the world where the quality of life is really horrible because of the pollution and the violence in the streets. I mean, it's like being in the lowlands of Naples almost all the time. [02M55]

Another aspect that struck me a lot and that I will never get used to is that here, in Colombia, nobody has the keys to his door because, for security reasons that are very well known, every building has a guard, and you don't have the key to your door—he is the one who has to open it for you. If he is in the garage, you wait for him to come back. I always wondered, "But if one day my doormen, or even yours, go on strike, what do you do?" You stay home, you can't go out. I've been living here for a year. These people are always working on Christmas and New Year, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. You can come back at any time. It happens to me because having a typical Colombian life, I come home at 4 in the morning. [14M33]

However, as their labor and social integration in the host country increases, the option of returning is often placed in a distant future—a wish that one does not know how and when will ever be realized.

Tied Migrants

Ten participants fall into the category of *tied migrants*. Among them, couple or family relationships—the "strong" ties *par excellence*—serve as a gateway for migration. More specifically, they migrate to Colombia because they are in a relationship and the partner has received a job offer that brings them to the country's capital. In these cases, the "strong" social bond acts as both a driver (Czaika and Reinprecht 2022) and an infrastructure (Düvell and Preiss 2022) of the migration path. The aim is to improve the well-being of the couple or (if there are already children) the family.

> What brought me to Colombia? What brought me to Colombia was an experience I had in a religious community. I came here for religious reasons... Just for that. Then, along the way... I met my current wife, I returned to Italy, I finished my studies, and having to decide where to live—there or here... The most opportune thing we thought of between us, also for work issues, was Colombia. [08M37]

> And then I met my husband there, my Colombian husband...but I had no idea where Colombia was when I met my husband. We got married in ''85. He had come to study there in Italy. And we got married and lived there, in Italy, for ten years. I had my daughters there...Then, my husband came here to visit his family, and they offered him an excellent job here...so he proposed, "Let's go to Colombia." I was so scared because I said..."Colombia, but I don't even know Spanish, what are the people like there"...

> The fact is that we packed our bags and came here... Luckily, let's say, my husband and...they offered him an excellent job, with good pay, so he was able to offer me the most exclusive area of Bogota and everything. [23F57]

Here, migration is a couple's joint choice that needs to be framed as the product of bilateral negotiations between partners rather than an isolated actor's decision. Such negotiations are based on the interaction between considerations related to maximizing family well-being, expectations related to gender roles, and power distribution between the two partners. While the prevailing and most documented pattern (Clerge et al. 2017; Erlinghagen 2021) is that of wives following husbands to improve their husbands' career prospects, there is no lack of men following women. However, in this second case, they are men who do not have much to lose by relocating and being employed in Italy under short and very short-term underpaid contracts without an established or yet-defined professional profile. There are also men with established career paths who negotiate migration to Bogota only under certain conditions, provided they find a more satisfactory professional position in Colombia:

> So I said, "Look, Sara, do you want us to go to Colombia? I work here. I have a permanent contract. What I earn, you know, too...I love and adore your country. However, it's not like it's in my head to go and live there. However, since you are the one insisting that we must go, these are the conditions. If they offer me better over there, I will evaluate." I gave my resume to the father, "He has a college degree, he speaks three languages, including Spanish, and this is what he brings home. What do we do? Find something that is, clearly, even more adequate." And he says, "Yes, you get the proposal." But, from the

Senate of the Republic. My first job here was in the Senate of the Republic, in the UTL, International Affairs. And I couldn't say no. [12M50]

We could hardly consider these husbands as the weak link of the couple or as those who, to satisfy their wives' work ambitions, sacrifice their careers by accepting to worsen their economic or professional status. In the case of husbands following their wives, however, the decision to migrate appears to be guided by the men's job prospects and subordinated to them. We can say that the leading role of women is expressed not so much in improving their employment status but in considerations related more appropriately to the quality of family life through the buffer provided by the family of origin—support in child care and management of everyday life. Even in the case of migration flows following their husbands' professional needs, women maintain their economic independence in Bogota, many finding employment as teachers in Italian schools, others developing entrepreneurial projects, and some holding down multiple jobs:

I started looking for work, but I couldn't find [it]. I reinvented myself by being an Italian teacher because all Argentines have Italian passports and can even vote, but they can't even read guidebooks. But they love Italian, the Italian language, and that's the only job I could do without really speaking Spanish because, being very close anyway, I could just speak Italian, and they could understand me. Then, I started making crocheted puppets I designed. I started a Facebook page, and I was selling them. When we arrived in Colombia, I got pregnant with our first daughter, Gaia. As soon as I gave birth to Gaia, I had an Argentine friend here who has a company, and he asked me to collaborate with him. So when Gaia was three-four months old, I started working with

him from home because he didn't have an office. I worked with him until eight months into my second pregnancy. Then, when Seba was six months old, he came looking for me again because, in the meantime, he had found other clients, bigger ones, and had opened an agency with an office and everything, and was looking for a person with my profile. So I started working with him again. [10F39]

Integration into the host context appears higher in the case of mixed couples and couples with children. In the case of mixed couples, the Colombian partner is an agent of acculturation, allowing them to get to know local culture, traditions, rituals, and practices. With their inclusion in the local community and educational and recreational paths, the children strengthen social capital by opening up networks of more or less strong relationships with Colombians. On the contrary, in the case of Italian couples, some signs of cultural resistance emerge against, for example, the formalism of Colombian culture:

There is an extreme respect for social classes, hierarchies, and foreigners. So, in Argentina and Italy, it is very easy for a person who is at a lower level of the social hierarchy to say no, to contradict you, to say, "I don't agree with this. I would do it a different way." Here, it's impossible, and very often, if someone asks you to do something, they say yes, even though they already know they can't do it. They can't say no, though, and, to me, this thing, culturally, kind of weighs. [10F39]

Such signs of cultural resistance do not seem sufficient to question the permanence of migration, which is a common feature of all members of this group who, for different reasons—some related to the inclusion of their children in the landing con-

text, others to the creation of a Colombian identity, and still others to the standard of living in Colombia—do not consider a return to their homeland to be feasible:

> I wouldn't uproot my children after elementary school so many times in so many places because, in my opinion, as they get older, it's a little bit more difficult to uproot, to uproot in order to then, let's say, replant somewhere else with a different language, a different culture. [10F39]

> So, I live in District Five, which is a district that allows you to have certain comforts. You feel that you live in a world where you can have a car, where you can move around well, and you can take a vacation. In Italy, I see that one has to have a lot of money to afford this. [23F57]

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper was aimed at a typological analysis able to classify migratory profiles based on aspirations and social networks supporting migration inception and stabilization based on the narratives produced by the migrants themselves.

Indeed, migration can be seen as (a) a refuge from the difficulties encountered in Italy; (b) a means to achieve career opportunities; (c) a resource to improve the quality of life of the couple or family; (d) a way to realize the normative ideal of mobility. On the other hand, the migratory path may have been triggered or supported by (i) strong ties, those of a sentimental or family nature; (ii) weak ties, that is, personal contacts matured in the workplace or leisure time; (iii) no ties at all—in this case, the migrant was involved in open recruitment procedures whose information was available in normal job search channels.

Five profiles of migrants emerge who are driven by different aspirations—independence, revenge, career, family, mobility—and supported or not by different types of social ties. The role of mediators appears to be relevant for 4 out of 5 types of migrants, but the nature of such ties ranges from family to friends and professional ties. Instead, the international openness of *globetrotters* allows them to cope autonomously with the physical, cultural, and political distance of Colombia.

The most integrated in the host context, who over time have managed to enter extended and multicultural networks of relationships, appear to be the *tied migrants* supported by the presence of a (Colombian) partner, the *globetrotters*, helped by their multicultural propensity, and the *risk-takers*, supported by their entrepreneurial activity that often allows them to meet many natives.

The study shows how aspirations and social ties can embrace a more multifaceted view of non-standard migration (not from economically deprived world regions). They help to overcome the view of migration as the result of a calculated rational choice and instead view it as an assemblage of aspirations and social infrastructures.

Different mixes of aspirations and social infrastructures move different migration paths with different outcomes. *Globetrotters* aspire to international mobility with no mediators supporting their process of continuous migration; *careerists* accept temporarily moving on demand of their company for advancing their career supported by professional mediators; *risk-takers* are moved by professional independence, supported by weak ties in their permanent migration process; *tied migrants* aspire to better family quality of life and are supported by strong familial ties, which

facilitate high integration and long-term stability; finally, *exiled migrants*, thanks to their strong professional ties, find a temporary refuge from the difficulties they encounter in Italy (see Table 2).

Although different aspirations shaped their migratory moves, all migrants seem to share the ambition for high levels of self-determination and self-realization. Social ties constitute a strong supporting infrastructure in this migration flow, where the lack of physical infrastructures would shape immobility (Maddaloni and Delli Paoli 2023). They help overcome transportation difficulties (the lack of direct air connections), regulatory difficulties (state procedures for working, licensing, studying, training, etc.), and the uncertainty deriving from media misrepresentation of the destination. In this way, they also help to draw positive imaginaries of the destination (Salazar 2014).

From this perspective, aspirations need not be viewed as something people either have or do not have. The conventional view would imply that if aspirations to move are present, actors would move.

Otherwise, they would stay in their place of origin. Indeed, aspirations are blurred and multiple and derive from individual bricolage work in one's biography and life course. Our typology is not without limitations typical of any conceptual classifications, too abstract to catch the ever-changing nature of social reality. Actual individual mobility pathways are in continuous redefinition because the importance of specific aspirations and desires changes over the course of migration, making migration and post-migration difficult to isolate. This challenges the mutual exclusivity of the typology due to the mixture that is realized in the migration path between the motivations at departure and those that take over afterward, in the post-migration phase. Some examples may serve to explain the concept better. *Globetrotters* who aspire to know the new world or *risk-takers* aspiring to their professional independence may meet a Colombian partner and take the traits of *tied migrants*. This is also the case with some tied migrants who, to survive in the host country, decide to implement entrepreneurial projects that take on some characteristics of *risk-takers*.

Table 2. A short description of the 5 types of migrants

	Careerists	Risk-Takers	Tied	Exiled	Globetrotters
N	3	8	10	5	5
Aspirations	Career advancements	Professional independence	Family well-being	Professional revenge	International mobility
Integration	Low	High	High	Medium	High
Network	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous	Heterogeneous	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous
Mediators	*Relocation specialists*	Weak ties	Strong familiar ties	Strong professional ties	No ties
Migratory prospects	Temporary migration	Permanent migration	Permanent migration	Temporary migration	Continuous migration

Source: Self-elaboration.

In conclusion, aspirations cannot be viewed in static terms. They may increase, decrease, or change due to migration because migrants are exposed to new opportunities and lifestyles or fail to realize their life aspirations in their new destination.

The same can be said about the changing role of social networks and ties at different stages of the migrant's journey. For example, strong ties may enable individual mobility from Italy to Colombia but may not be sufficient in the search for a job.

Social researchers should consider the changing nature of these important dimensions of the migrants' lifeworlds to respect the complexity of migration.

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