

# »The Long Line They Must Make in the Night«: Performative Realism in the Italian State's Relations with Outsiders

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Our lives depend on queues. While the wealthy and well-connected living in ›easy pass nation‹<sup>1</sup> may hardly notice a wait, or be able to bypass it,<sup>2</sup> for the poor and disconnected, queues ration their access to precious resources, including citizenship, housing, care, jobs and food.<sup>3</sup> Yet, queues also serve symbolic, in addition to practical functions. To make others wait is to emphasize one's power and the powerlessness of those who wait.<sup>4</sup> Such a phenomenon not only engrains unequal relations deeply into bodily experience but also serves it up as a spectacle to passersby and society at large. In Italy, where queues of immigrants awaiting documentation often stretched for blocks and lasted hours or even days at the office of the Questura, the purported ›disorder‹ of the lines was not attributed to the state which manifested them, but to the immigrants themselves. Hence, the practical and the symbolic, the insiders and the excluded,<sup>5</sup> power and violence were clearly displayed and encapsulated in a common narrative, whereby the clearly suffering masses were blamed for their own misfortune. As one Italian immigration lawyer stated, it was ›hallucinogenic‹.

The spectacle<sup>6</sup> of immigrants suffering in lines documented at embassies and immigration centres

around the world,<sup>7</sup> and the way in which migrants are blamed by the natives for abysmal circumstances foisted upon them by the state,<sup>8</sup> evidences the *performative realism*<sup>9</sup> of the state's relationship with ›others‹.<sup>10</sup> In recent years, many social scientists have turned their attention to how the practices of the state are imbued with affect.<sup>11</sup> A prominent theorist of this turn is Linke, who wrote:

*The nation form, as it were, is brought into being, as a perceptual entity, through bodily practices. As such, it takes on a physiognomic gestalt by assuming what I want to call a performative realism: it becomes a distinct body politic by staging itself ›both on bodies and between bodies‹ (Haroche, 1998: p. 219). In addition, the national state also acquires what I here call a sensual realism by penetrating further into the societal interior, indeed, by entering into ›the citizen's subjective experience of [...] civil life, private life‹ and ›the life of the body itself‹ (Berlant, 1991: p. 20) [...]. In concrete zones of contact, as I argue in the following, the national state asserts its presence, and enters into experience, through a particular kind of visual realism – a simultaneous production of optical facticity and ocular exposure. (p. 210)<sup>12</sup>*

In the emergent literature on this topic that focuses on the lives of migrants, the sensual realism of the state takes centre stage, focussing on migrants' experiences in light of the phantasmagoric visual and performative realism of such features as migrant holding camps<sup>13</sup> and walls.<sup>14</sup> Bozzini and Reeves,<sup>15</sup> for example, built on the work of De Genova<sup>16</sup> and Coutin<sup>17</sup> in showing how the arbitrary and hostile rhetoric and practices of one's homeland, in the first case, or one's country of arrival, in the second, can breed fear in migrants. For Bozzini, migrants from Eritrea fear their home state's efforts to track down military deserters, while Reeves examined how the Russian state's ostensive crackdown on those overstaying their visas, which are expensive and cumbersome to renew, leads to migrants, ›living from the nerves‹. Navaro-Yashin,<sup>18</sup> echoing the sorts of cat and mouse games between migrants and border enforcers depicted by Hellman,<sup>19</sup> explored the paradoxical and sometimes humorous ways migrants from the officially unrecognized country of Cyprus manage their ›make-believe‹ documents in Britain. Cabot<sup>20</sup> examined how applicants for asylum in Greece manage the ambiguity of living in limbo, as depicted through the ›pink card‹, while Graham and Korczyn<sup>21</sup> examined how Swedish welfare workers in the first case, and Israeli border control officers in the second, moved from a more humanistic, sympathetic approach towards newcomers to a harsher, more rule-oriented approach as more migrants arrived from more diverse locales. As Laszczkowski and Reeves<sup>22</sup> pointed out, Gupta<sup>23</sup> argued that ›affect needs to be seen as one of the constitutive conditions of state formation‹, but it has not received sufficient ethnographic attention.

In Italy, as mirrored by the discussion of drawing and quartering Robert-Françoise Damien in Foucault's ›Discipline and Punish‹,<sup>24</sup> the queues were eventually recognized as too grisly, a model for disorder rather than order. Lines stretching around the block, migrants camped out day after day, subject to police abuse and public scorn, were more than adequate to demonstrate the less eligibility<sup>25</sup> and criminality<sup>26</sup> of migrants. Hence, analogously with Foucault's description, the processing of immigrants shifted from the outside, raw spectacle of lines of migrants at the Questura, to the inside, personalized focus on migrants completing and mailing forms at the post office. As

the public spectacle of migration changed, so did the emotional undertones of individuals' contacts with the state.

This article, based on my auto-ethnographic<sup>27</sup> account of waiting in line at the Questura, as well as interviews with Italians and migrants to Italy, contributes to our understanding of bureaucracy and emotions by showing how the performance of the line makes real the state's relationship with outsiders.

## Setting, Methods and Datasets

Italy, historically known for sending immigrants, has become, like the rest of Europe, a destination for migrants from around the world. Not unlike the Italian emigrants of old,<sup>28</sup> the immigrants to the new Europe face myriad difficulties upon entry.<sup>29</sup> What makes the Italian case interesting is the relative recency of the immigration and its dramatic acceleration. Their composition consists of almost 200 nationalities, but the general trend is highlighted by the most dramatically growing immigrant population according to ISTAT (The Italian National Institute of Statistics), Albanians. With only 424 legal residents in 1990, Albanians grew to 168,963 in 2001 and 497,761 in 2013. One of the most substantial increases is in the number of Chinese immigrants, from 62,314 in 2001 to 304,768 in 2013. Although the overall ratio of immigrants in the general population is lower than in other European countries, and much lower than in a traditional receiving country such as the United States, it is the recency of the immigration, which was *growing from 2.34% to 6.77% of the general population from 2001 to 2011*, and the lack of preparation of Italian institutions, which makes Italy so important to study.

Italy experienced a number of decades of immigration before developing its first comprehensive policy in 1998, largely in response to pressure from the European Union.<sup>30</sup> Many of Italy's institutions have been unprepared for large-scale immigration, including the legal and educational systems. Granata, Lanzani and Novak<sup>31</sup> showed that many immigrants have difficulty finding suitable housing, remaining homeless or in substandard conditions.<sup>32</sup> Calavita<sup>33</sup> overviewed the history of immigration law in Italy, showing how many laws meant to protect the rights of workers ended up

pushing immigrants into illegal statuses, and therefore illegal activities. One in three prisoners are immigrants, often confined for crimes due to their irregular status, even though their rate of deviance is lower than in the general population.<sup>34</sup> Currently, no studies exist in Italy to determine whether more immigrants are imprisoned due to police profiling or due to the fact that immigrants commit a disproportionate number of crimes, leaving the debate open to ideological discussions heavily influenced by the media.<sup>35</sup> For instance, even Sampson's<sup>36</sup> discussions of an immigrant ›protective effect‹, well publicized in the United States, are largely unknown in Italy.

To grapple with Italian immigrants' experiences in Italy with respect to Italian immigration law, I conducted 174 days of participant observation at services for immigrants in Tuscany and interviewed 72 immigrants to Italy from 23 countries, 36 men and 36 women, as well as 41 lawyers and other service providers for immigrants, regarding immigrants' experiences with the law. Roughly, two-thirds of interviews with immigrants and all the interviews with service providers were conducted in Italian. I observed 166 cases of immigrants' service encounters with attorneys, over a period of 155 hours in city-sponsored immigration service centres in Florence, Pistoia and Prato, and the CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro-- Italian General Confederation of Labor) trade union in Pistoia. I also attended 11 local, regional and national conferences in Italy lasting a day or more, on such themes as immigration and racism. As in Schuster's (2005, p. 758) study,

*[g]iven the heterogeneity of the migrant population in Italy, there was no intention to interview a representative sample of migrants. Instead, interviews were conducted with as broad a range of people as possible, especially in terms of legal status and length of residence.*<sup>37</sup>

## Waiting in Line

Within 8 days of arriving in Italy, I had to register at the police station to receive my permit to stay, which I was eligible for since I was married to an Italian. After

negotiating my way on the local buses, still jet-lagged at about 10 AM on a warm morning in July of 2006, I found two lines of people in the sun outside the police office: an unruly one on the left and a short, precise one on the right. I chose the shorter line and reached the police officer at the front after a few hours. ›Armi?‹, he asked if I was registering weapons. ›No, ho un visto Americano‹, I told him I had an American Visa. ›Shh‹, he said with disgust, ›Un visto Americano! Vai Li!‹, ›Go there!‹, he said, indicating I join the fray to the left. I smiled with resignation as I had seen others do and joined the line I had tried to avoid.<sup>38</sup>

This gatekeeper was quite a character. About 5'6", average for an Italian male, his hat covered his bald spot. He had a thick accent – perhaps Sicilian. He seemed a study in contradictions: he hates people, he loves people, he smiles and jokes, he gives orders. A short Philipino young man (I could tell his nationality from the passport he carried) in the front of the line on the left, especially captured the gatekeeper's attention. At times blowing smoke in the Philipino man's face, he would ask him a question, sometimes putting an arm on his shoulder, or push his head aside in a teasing way. The Philipino's smile was terse and wary.

Every 20 minutes or so the gatekeeper would come out of his doorway and plead, ›Per courtesia! Fai uno filo!‹ We moved and shuffled to make a line as he had asked, but remained a bunching.

A short woman (slightly more than 5 feet tall), with thin, very blond hair falling straight to her shoulders, with a very nice leather purse and white pants and blouse, exited a cab and approached the guard with a strong, forthright demeanour, belying only slightly a bit of fear with a touch of her fingers to her lips, and a slight gaze downward. A young boy, dressed in a clean, pressed, fashionable t-shirt and khaki pants, followed about a metre behind, slightly taller than the woman, seemingly his mother, but appearing shorter with a cowed, slumped demeanour, his hair in short, gelled spikes. She said something to the guard and then entered immediately and was out in about 10 minutes, looking refreshed as if she had just come from the spa and hailed a taxi. I heard people muttering in line about an appointment, saying that was ›another world‹, and shaking their heads.

A large man, probably about 6'3" – a giant by Italian standards, probably around 240 pounds, with a bit of a belly, but thick arms and chest, short, lightly gelled black hair making a sort of bowl cut, and a deep, commanding voice, demanded to know when he could bring his daughter in for her passport. He paced back and forth, holding the infant lightly in his arms, sometimes transferring her from one arm to the other. His wife (apparently), with blondish red hair, around 5'2" with a baby stroller, stood behind him and never uttered a word. Some near me remarked at what a shame it was he had to be outside with such a small baby. At one point, he asked the crowd, ›Is anyone here to register a baby?‹ When no one answered he addressed the gatekeeper: ›Allora! No one else is here to register a baby. If there were, they could go ahead of me‹. In this way, he finally gained entrance.

After about an hour and a half in this line without going anywhere, listening fruitlessly to conversations in Albanian, the gatekeeper was occupied with something else so I went inside. An illuminated, electric display to indicate the next number served read, ›999‹. I tried one window and showed him my visto (visa). ›Non posso fare niente‹, ›I can't do anything‹, he told me. ›Deve andare al altro sportello‹, ›you must go to the other window‹. I went to the next window, and they told me the same. So then I went to another uniformed officer, this one a younger, gentler, less roughened type who had worked the line a bit earlier. Now he was at a central desk surrounded by a circular window. He told me I could only go to the third window – that is where everyone was going. A woman with papers from Belgium passed me and had the same experience being moved from window to window without explanation. Soon the officer at the central desk told me to wait outside.

Outside, those waiting continued to ask for assistance, but eventually, near 1:00, the officer told them to come back tomorrow. ›I don't want your anger, I don't want anything! You must return tomorrow!‹, the gatekeeper said, and those waiting did as they were told. I walked 2 hours home in the rain, feeling lost and angry, writing that evening that I felt like a piece of trash at the Questura.

The next day I returned at 6 AM with my Italian wife, both of us in professional dress. ›They have to distinguish that you're not the typical everyday

despaired immigrant‹, she said, leading me to stand in the hot sun for hours in a suit. We were far overdressed, and I think the two of us attracted some attention. I wore brown dress shoes, tan socks, brown slacks and a light linen short-sleeved dress shirt with a white and beige checkered pattern. She wore sandals, a pleasant orange and black print skirt and a net shirt with little beads over a white blouse with spaghetti straps. She had on a gold necklace with a wide, elaborate braid pattern, and a nice wooden clasp pulled her hair over her ears. She took out a chapter of her novel to edit and I pulled out Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.

A blonde, stocky woman of about 5'6" came up to us and asked where the line was. Two nearby men said there is nothing official, but some guy at the head of the line is keeping a list. ›That's the line‹, Vale said, and followed the woman. Even though she had arrived after us, we signed the list after she did. I was #31 and my wife #37. As I signed, an argument broke out between a tall (6'3"), thin man in a white t-shirt and sandals, and the short, semi-officious looking, (5'5") young man with curly black hair who was controlling the list. The tall man wanted to know why he was #7 – he had been there a long time. The shorter man told him he and his parents had spent the night there. His father was taller, with a granite-like seriousness and a prominent nose, while his mother was softer with thin red hair, still pretty after hours of waiting. The shorter man told the taller that it was not important – #7 was still a good number, but the taller continued to somewhat aggressively disagree. I also told him #7 was a good number, not to worry about it, and besides the list is not official. They continued to discuss this while we returned to our spot on the rail and continued reading.

I talked with some of the other migrants in line. Beside me, a friendly, tall man from Morocco told me he had been in Italy since 1996 on a work permit which is renewed every 2 years. He was here to get permission for his daughter. He showed me her pictures – very cute. He said he came for a job in a furniture factory. He works on his feet 12 hours a day and he showed me the unsightly bruises and swelling around his ankles from this practice, his blood following gravity. He said that his parents have a house in Morocco and he wants to return, but he wants a house of his own; he is not able to save because the economy has stagnated and prices are

too high; his salary stays the same, at about 2,000 euros a month; 400 goes to house, 300 to the car, and the rest is simply gone by the end of the month. He said that when they converted to the euro, 100,000 lire were supposed to equal 50 euros, but instead, they converted straight over, pricing items at 100 euros, effectively doubling the price of everything. I told him I had noticed this too and talked about how much further my money had gone 1999 when one could still use lire. He said that his wife is always complaining to him to go back, but he convinces her they should stay because his job is good, and he probably would not find one as good back home.

Later I spoke with a young man in a white t-shirt and jeans named Andrei, from Romania, who had been working in Italy for the past 4 years as a general construction worker. He was now at work on a large project on a main boulevard. He talked about how he felt life was better under communism – more equality, more work, but it was not perfect, and it was not the same everywhere. Certainly, life was not so great under Ceausescu, when everyone was afraid. He was young when the tyrant was overthrown, and he remembered innocent people – children, dying in the streets. He talked about how under Gorbachev, things began changing. Russia took over Lithuania, Estonia, etc. and became this huge block, but they were resisted by this little country.

After a few hours, my wife left and I held my spot, which felt like being trapped in a crowded elevator for 7 hours. We jostled up against each other, smelled one another. As the crowd prepared for the officer to come out to collect passports, two friends of the same ethnic group put their arms around each other to provide a strong barrier against me. I tried standing meditation, but neither my nice clothes nor my place on the list led to a police officer taking my passport when he arrived and called for them. As I turned to leave and the line broke up in the afternoon, a kind Italian immigration lawyer passed and commiserated, handing me a list of necessary documents I would need and procedures I should follow.

The next morning I posted myself right at the door at 2:30 AM. No one was around; it was perfectly quiet. I began reading one of the four articles I brought under the bright lights in front of the station when a young man walked by me whom I remembered from prior days in

line. He had short spiky blond hair, a slightly muscular build and sporty way of carrying himself. He passed and smiled slightly. Then, a squat older gentleman in black pants and shirt walked up and asked, ›tirare o lasciare?‹, I shook my head and shrugged. He looked a bit exasperated at my idiocy. ›Tirare‹, and he made a pulling motion, ›o lasciare?‹ and he made a putting motion. ›Voglio una intervista‹, I said, although the proper answer was, ›lasciare‹. He told me I needed to put my name on the list at the bar, because there had been people waiting all night. I got up, happy to stretch a bit from my squat, and signed at post #19 (each day they only take 20 passports), but said I knew it did not signify anything. I sat among them in the darkness. There was the older man in black, the young man who had passed me to my right at tables for this closed bar, and a well-built, tall man in white pants and a white t-shirt with a logo of the number 69 with wings, sitting to my left, who seemed he could barely stay awake. A swarthy man, perhaps in his late twenties, with long stubble, short black hair, of medium build, asked me if I was from Romania, and then if I was from Russia. I said ›no, I'm American‹. He seemed surprised and said he did not think Americans had to go through this. He said America was the richest, most powerful country in the world. I agreed, but said the power is waning. The strong guy in all white got up for a walk, and the kid with spiky blond hair laid belly down atop two tables to my left, one where the strong guy had sat. He asked me, ›how do you say ›bye-bye‹ in English‹ and smiled. ›Bye-bye, I said, ›Ciao‹. Another guy said ›bye-bye‹, and turned to each other to chat in Albanian. I took my cue and returned to squat by the door. By now it was about 4 AM and I appreciated the cool air (a nearby sign indicated it was 22°C). More people arrived, some signing the list, others ignoring it.

Around 7 AM, the police came out and began to badger us. ›Fai una fila!‹, ›Make a line!‹ they said, but of course we could not move. The guys in front asked why they do not follow their list. ›Quella liste Non me Frega Per NienTe‹, he said, accenting each syllable (›I don't care a thing about that list!‹). This was not the smiley cop we had seen earlier (I did not see him for the rest of the day), but a tan, mid-sized guy with short hair, bald on top, with a penetrating glare and a way of looking down even when the person he spoke with

was at eye level. The guys responded to him that they had been waiting all night. ›Why do you wait all night?‹, the officer responded. ›It makes no sense. You can arrive at four, three. Spend the night. Start waiting right now for tomorrow, or for next Thursday. I really don't give a damn. And make all the lists you want. They mean absolutely nothing‹.

The officer took issue with a rough looking, slightly smaller version of himself to my right. He was about 5'6", but stocky with bulky arms, and most of all, his demeanour spoke of experience and a willingness to engage in brawls and bar fights. He had squinty eyes, a jerky, slightly battered face, and the offhand manner of a little juggernaut. After the capo, he would be my first choice in a rugby match, no doubt. He kindly offered the officer a perfectly reasonable suggestion – one I was thinking of myself, of them posting a waiting list.

›What do you think I am, your Sister?!‹ the officer shouted in his face, about an inch separating them, reframing the smaller rugby man's suggestion as a taunt to his masculinity and perhaps cause for a fight. He continued for good minute, moving the shorter rugby player back into the row of the cops' Alfa Romeos before the building, his head in his face. ›If you want to go to Florence, go to Florence! If you want to go to Prato, Go! This is how we do it in here, and if you don't like, we welcome you to leave!‹ His manner remained fierce although the volume diminished, and I could not catch it, although it was obviously an object lesson in respecting the police and seemed to please and ease the capo's nerves a bit and definitely make the smaller rugby-like man diminish in stature. It surely intimidated the hell out of the rest of us. Perhaps he smelled anger and wanted to turn it into fear. I stood my post. Later, when two officers came to take the passports in the centre of the crowd, some of the women were blocked out by men forcing their way to the centre. The police counted out to 20 as we jostled against each other to try to be one of the lucky ones. I managed to catch the officer's eye, and perhaps since he had seen me on a prior occasion and perhaps because he knew I was American, he reached out for my passport as he said, ›Nineteen‹, which was coincidentally also my number on the list I had signed that morning at 2:30. Exhausted, I headed home.

When I interviewed a Palestinian man about his experience in the line, he echoed my experiences (translated from Italian):

*M4: You have to spend 3-4 days and sleep outside the Questura, with the cold, with all the pains, without eating [...]. They approach us with arrogance, superior in respect to the foreigner, because ›you came to us.‹ [...] Obviously there are many Moroccans, Albanians, Romanians. They push back with a communal solidarity. I was like the black sheep, alone. So they take my place with force, telling me, go back. Finally, once you arrive at the window, they tell you to come back tomorrow.*

Another man told me,

*G5: I waited two days for 12 hours each day. But many times the documents that I presented were not sufficient, and they send you away, so you have to stand in line another day always without any order.*

Problems with the police are especially frustrating. As one man (G53) stated, ›Many times I have fought in the Questura, I said I denounce them. But to whom can I denounce them? I can't denounce the police‹. For those who had spent years in Italy and owned a business, the line was humiliating.

*G45: It's a ghetto. I can wait five minutes, but I waited hours [...] I don't find it right. There's the police who perhaps are nervous because they work standing on their feet, and they're stressed because they want to make you understand. We don't understand each other. Thus they have to shout, perhaps. But in a sense it's not tolerable. Stress to them and stress to us. Why must it come to this situation? But a person like me, who grew up here, is just as if you were handed an Italian. By now I think I'm more Italian because I went to all the schools, from elementary to a bit of university. Like if I took an Italian, put them out at the Questura and treated them like a foreigner. It's not like I feel much like a foreigner here because I'm accustomed. To have a person who is habituated, make me stand in line in the middle of the street, ask for my documents. In Italy?*

Many Italians expressed that the line was ›embarrassing and mortifying‹ (M040) and explained the diffidence of migrants resulting from their negative experiences there.

*M021: When the migrant arrives he arrives with all of his doubts and diffidence, above all because it comes out of the Questura, the long line they must make in the night.*

When I interviewed the head of immigration matters at the local police department where I had to wait in line, about the line, she offered the following:

*GP18: It was an ugly thing, seeing people who sleep, who camp out, desperate that they must come in the night for their proper rights. Because if someone is in place, you have to put everything in order by the rules, it's something really very sad and embarrassing also for us Italians. People with small babies because they don't know where to leave them, truly an ugly thing.*

In 2008, Italians began to change procedures, having migrants submit their documents through the post office rather than in person at the Questura. This process became more financially burdensome (costing 70, rather than 14.62 euros for each ›kit‹ submitted, one for each member of the family) and also raised concerns with privacy and ghettoization. The spectacle of migrants struggling to gather, complete and file their documents moved from outside, visible only to passersby in their cars, to inside, where Italians frequently go to pay their bills and take care of other matters. Having to handle migration matters exacerbated Italians' already long wait times at *L'ufficio Postale*. There was also a long wait to have paperwork processed when the practice initiated, leaving many in an illegal status and unable to leave the country until their new documents arrived. When their permits finally came, for many they were nearly expired. In 2009, I asked the police official about the change.

*GP18: I think the change will be good only if the system overcomes still many technical difficulties. Sometimes the paperwork comes out as abnormal*

*and incorrect due to minor errors in the system that we do not manage to change on the computer. Hence, people must wait a long time. We work on the paperwork and then people come, we take their fingerprints electronically, they have to return to take their permit electronically, but the waiting times are long and the procedures still are not working well. But in my opinion it's a correct idea because people don't have to make the line, they're not kicked around like they used to be, there's more transparency. To me it's a good system, but there's still much work for us. As an initial impact, there are thousands and thousands of claims, we are few and we work at a frenetic pace. It's a very stressful job, very hard but we try to do our best.*

## Discussion/Conclusion

This is a story of great privilege. At the risk of solipsistically and overindulgently bemoaning my first-world problems, I have presented my personal experience at the Questura in the effort to capture the sorts of feelings that many have shown are so integral to the performative realism of the Italian state's relationship with immigrants. First-hand accounts of others are helpful, but nothing substitutes for the raw, visceral quality of one's own feelings.

Many migrants were not so fortunate as to have the privilege of suffering before the Questura to hand in documents. Instead, they were relegated to wander the streets as the socially denigrated *vu compra* (the Italian media used African's creolization of the Italian, ›vuoi comprare‹ – do you want to buy – not as a means of eliciting sympathy and recognizing others' humanity, but as a term to label and stigmatize a category who have ostensibly not taken the effort to adequately study Italian)<sup>39</sup> or work in black market labour, or work caring for the elderly, named by the socially derogatory term, ›badante‹. These may well have looked at the lines at the Questura with envy – at least that suffering led to some measure of social inclusion. At the time of these observations, estimates were that at least 700,000 migrants in Italy were without papers.

As difficult as the line at the Questura was for many to bear, they had suffered many other indignities to arrive at that place. The Italian state presents the would-be immigrant with a conundrum: to find work and a place to live they must first demonstrate that they have work and a place to live to get the permit to stay required by the state that all bosses and landlords request. Ideally, the Bossi-Fini law was created with the employer in mind who would secure foreign workers abroad. The more common route for many migrants was to overstay a tourist visa, stay with family and friends, manage somehow to get a job and then return to their country of origin to attempt to enter with the ›flusse‹, a computerized online lottery system with arbitrary country quotas that typically filled within 10 minutes of the system opening.<sup>40</sup> The number ›700,000‹ for the undocumented was derived from the number of those who tried but were over the quota to enter with the flusse. For those fortunate enough to enter, they would then need to visit migration lawyers, consult with friends, see free lawyers in some accommodating cities such as Prato where services were provided by the city, or perhaps visit a trade union such as CGIL or CISL (*Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori*—Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions) for assistance. Only then would the migrant be able to make the visit to the Questura.

I did not confront these obstacles. As someone married to an Italian, I had the Italian version of an EZ Pass, able to go to the Questura for my permit to stay (but not work) for a year, renewable indefinitely, towards procuring a more permanent card of stay (a *carte di soggiorno*, renewable every 5 years) or citizenship. The undocumented dreamed of such a possibility, hoping that through a relationship the barriers to belonging could be surmounted.

Even with all these privileges providing the backdrop of those eligible to wait for days at the Questura, the experience was Hobbesian. The lack of organization of the line was dumbfounding. To fill the lacunae, migrants attempted to impose order themselves, but this inevitably became a scurry for advantage, both frontstage and backstage.<sup>41</sup> Frontstage practices included the use of brute physical force to push others back, locking arms or shoulders with others to exclude those not from one's group, trying to create and enforce

a lists of names, and trying to curry some favour with the police. Migrants also tried to dress in a manner that might bring attention, as women often wore skimpy clothes, men accentuated their rugged, working class appearance, and professionals tried to appear distinguished. Backstage, many migrants interviewed spoke of trying to befriend a police officer and asked their friends and family if any knew the police. If they did, this could be an effective way to circumvent the line.<sup>42</sup> Local trade unions could provide a ›red slip‹ to show the police for circumventing the line.<sup>43</sup>

Clearly, the performative realism of the state's infringement on migrant bodies in the line at the Questura, and the very framing of migration as a problem of public order in the Bossi-Fini law, clearly demonstrated the state's relationship with the foreigner and provided a model for Italians to follow. Although the line at the Questura was discontinued, on 2 July 2009 a new package of ›security laws‹ was officially approved in Italy by a vote in the senate of 157 in favour, 124 against and 3 abstentions. Designed to dramatically increase the surveillance of undocumented immigrants (*clandestini*), it states that any immigrant entering illegally must pay a fine of between 5,000 and 10,000 euros and face expulsion. ›Voluntary associations‹ may be officially enlisted locally to round up *clandestini*.<sup>44</sup> ›Security zones‹ are to be established around public areas such as train stations, banks, post offices, parks, public gardens and bus stops to monitor for *clandestini*. Those who rent or provide services of any kind to *clandestini* are subject to imprisonment for 6 months to 3 years, for a crime known as ›favouring clandestine immigration‹ (*favoreggiamento d'immigrazione clandestina*). Naturally, like the exposure in the line at the Questura, this law provided migrants and those who would assist them with a sense of deep vulnerability, reminding them of their lower status through the ongoing possibility of persecution.<sup>45</sup>

Whether it is the line at the Questura, the security laws, or the disproportionate media depictions of immigrants as criminals, many in Italian institutions normalized a view of migrants as bringing a nasty, brutish, Hobbesian chaos to their tranquil shores, where only those physically larger and more communally organized had a better chance of passing their passports to the police. In actuality, the energy of the migrants

rejuvenates Italy as it does economies around the world. Immigrants were made by public spectacle to appear as flotsam, when their hard work in undesirable economic sectors, tax-paying and social contribution revitalized an ageing and economically moribund peninsula experiencing marked population decline and brain drain.

As the processing of immigrants passed from the chaotic line at the Questura to the expensive, confusing and tedious completion of a ›kit‹ at the post office, so did the Italian migration processing become more hidden and mechanical. Instead of being subject to the public humiliation of the state providing for them all the trappings that would make them appear poor, needy, and desperate, their problems became more hidden and less subject to scorn and pity. With this reduction of the daily immigration spectacle, the narrative around migration became bureaucratized, less dramatized, less storyable, but more disciplined. Shortly thereafter, with the passage of the security laws, the hunting of migrants could begin.

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## Abstract

This article provides a first-hand account of waiting in line to deliver migration documents at an office of the police department known as the Questura in Italy, in 2006. The spectacle of migrants suffering in line day after day, subjected to threats from police and the jostling, complaints and aggression of others in line, provided a stage for the performative realism of the widescale exclusion, criminalization and scapegoating of migrants in Italy at the time. Moreover, migrants' relations to the state and Italians' relations to migrants were embodied and felt through the line, marked on bodies and in memories as visceral marginalization.

## About the Author

Robert Garot is Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice. His book, *Who You Claim: Performing Gang Identity in School and on the Streets*, published by NYU Press in 2010, has been reviewed in *Teacher's College Record* and *Contemporary Sociology*, and it received Honorable Mention for the Robert E. Park Award from the Community and Urban Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association. Between 2007 and 2009, he conducted fieldwork in Tuscany on racialization practices and the experiences of immigrants with the law.