

“They Are as We Once Were”: The Trope of Resemblance in Early Italian Cinema of Immigration (1990–2005)

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Even a stereotype evolves slowly. It is born out of a single image, which then clones itself again and again. In time it ends up in a book, and then in another and another. It becomes a topic of conversation within intellectual circles, thrown around here and there by friends, picked up in hushed voices by waiters, taken to the kitchen, spread around in public housing, intuited by politicians, screamed out loud by demagogues, straddled by newspapers, blown up by the masses.

—Gian Antonio Stella¹

Historically speaking, Italy has long seen itself as a country of perpetual emigration. Italians were thus culturally and politically unprepared for the advent of mass immigration, which transformed their country into the primary receiver of incoming migrants in Europe by the early 1990s.² The lack of a positive cultural matrix of reception, the inaction of the state in creating a legal framework for the introduction of a migrant labor force, and the symbolic mobilization of immigration for political gain by emerging conservative parties in northern Italy led to social tensions and clashes. Rampant discrimination, housing shortages, lack of labor protection, the racialization of the immigration phenomenon, and the sensationalist approach of some media sectors all led to an overall sense of social emergency. The collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and of the Italian First Republic soon afterwards exacerbated an overall sense of crisis, particularly as thousands of Eastern Europeans migrated west.

Out of this sense of social crisis emerged what I refer to as Italian Cinema of Immigration (ICI), a left-leaning cinema committed to exploring the issue of immigration from a serious, politically engaged point of view. In searching for an aesthetic paradigm that would reflect Italy’s social and moral imperatives, ICI films consciously adopted stylistic elements generally understood to be part of the neorealist legacy: social realism, shooting on location, indexical reality of time and space, and the casting of non-professional actors. More importantly, it mobilized a trope that became an interpretative matrix for the new immigrant and the shock of mass immigration—namely, an analogy between the new immigrant from the global south and the Italian emigrant from previous generations. The trope basically asserts that “they are as we once were,” and in so doing, it seeks to explicate to an Italian audience the experiences of Italy’s newest residents from a historical and inclusive perspective. Initially, the analogy was made

¹ Gian Antonio Stella, *L’orda. Quando gli albanesi eravamo noi* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002), 57. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

² Jeffrey Cole, *The New Racism in Europe: A Sicilian Ethnography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4. It is worth noting that immigrants from the global south had been arriving in Italy since the 1960s. See Jacqueline Andall, “Cape Verdean Women on the Move: ‘Immigration Shopping’ in Italy and Europe,” *Modern Italy* 4/2 (1999): 241–57; Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed, *Timira. Romanzo meticcio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012).

explicit in the plot of certain films, but eventually it became a common-sense premise through which one could interpret films about immigration, and by extension, the immigrants themselves.

However, despite the progressive intentions behind the mobilization of this trope in the 1990s and early 2000s, there are major problems with its premise. I argue that the analogy is detrimental to both immigrants and to the memory of Italian emigration, as it is based on a sleight of hand, a misremembering of history. Though on the surface it provides a sympathetic model through which the experiences of immigrants can be interpreted, on another level the trope reinforces negative stereotypes by relying on cinematic representations of Italian migrants that are based on long standing discriminatory hierarchies between the north and the south.

Invoking Neorealism and Its Cultural Legacy

In response to the tumultuous events at the end of the 1980s, a group of film critics in the summer of 1989 openly called for an engaged, realist cinema that would deal directly with the issues assailing the republic, the same way the television media had been doing for the past several years.³ In an article in the newspaper *La Repubblica*, “La voglia c’è ma non si vede ancora,” Ugo Pirro went so far as to ask, “For how long will our television and cinema be afraid of reality?” The question was meant to be provocative, as Pirro had acknowledged Marco Risi’s *Mery per sempre* [*Forever Mary*] (1989) as signaling a new cinematic turn, and had observed the tendency in television programming to engage with social issues.⁴ In fact, since 1987, the state-owned network RAI 3, under the leadership of Angelo Guglielmi, had been airing TV shows that addressed contemporary issues in Italy—shows such as *Telefono giallo*, *Chi l’ha visto?*, *Un giorno in pretura*, *Io confesso*, and *Allarme in città*. While media critics had different views on the value of this type of *TV-verità*, asking if it amounted to genuine exposé or merely spectacle, the general consensus was that Italian cinema was in desperate need of similar social engagement, as American imports and Italian comedies had been dominating Italian screens for years.⁵ According to these critics, Italian cinema, unlike television, had long abandoned the engaged ethics and aesthetics of its neorealist forefathers for the purportedly inadequate mode of comedy. The critics were effectively calling for a “neo-neorealism” that would be similar to, or superior to, what was offered by the programming of RAI 3.⁶ “Neo-neorealism” would not simply reproduce the techniques of neorealism, but would also adapt to the new social realities Italy was facing.

Michele Placido’s *Pummarò* [*Tomato*] (1990) emerged out of this cinematic and social context, tackling head-on the social issue of mass immigration from the global south.⁷ Inspired

³ Anna Maria Mori, “Primattrice la realtà,” *La Repubblica*, 3 June 1989; ead., “Le finzioni dei programmi verità,” *La Repubblica*, 3 June 1989; Ugo Pirro, “La voglia c’è ma non si vede ancora,” *La Repubblica*, 17 June 1989; Natalia Aspesi, “Neo-neorealismo, parte seconda,” *La Repubblica*, 17 June 1989; Angelo Guglielmi, “Bisogna parlare ma in piazza,” *La Repubblica*, 3 June 1989.

⁴ *Mery per sempre*, dir. Marco Risi (1989); Pirro, “La voglia c’è ma non si vede ancora.”

⁵ The debate on the legitimacy of *TV-verità* was born out of an article by Umberto Eco published on 13 May 1989 in *La Repubblica* and the response given by Angelo Guglielmi in the same newspaper on 3 June 1989. Umberto Eco, “Io e lei quando eravamo piccoli...,” *La Repubblica*, 13 May 1989; Guglielmi, “Bisogna parlare ma in piazza,” Umberto Eco, “C’è un rischio. La TV sulla TV,” *La Repubblica*, June 3, 1989.

⁶ The term “neo-neorealismo” was used to speak of realist films in the late 1980s and early 1990s and was a term widely used in the cited *La Repubblica* articles, as well as by scholar Antonio Vitti as late as 1996. However, it seems the term fell out of fashion relatively quickly.

⁷ *Pummarò*, dir. Michele Placido (1990). If English titles already exist for the films discussed in the remainder of this article, those titles will be provided. Otherwise only the original Italian title will appear.

by Pietro Germi's *Il cammino della speranza* [*The Path of Hope*] (1950),⁸ *Pummarò* tells the story of Kwaku, a young man from Ghana who travels the length of Italy searching for his older brother, Giobbe, otherwise known as Pummarò. The older brother had migrated to Italy to raise money for Kwaku's medical training in Canada. However, Pummarò's eventual disappearance prompts Kwaku to follow his brother's footsteps in an attempt to locate him. Most of the film is spent following Kwaku's journey through Italy, from the tomato fields in the south, to the peripheries of Rome, to the industrial heart of the Italian north-east, and finally to a festive but cold Germany, where he finds Pummarò dead on a slab in a morgue.

While *Pummarò* is not the first film to portray migrants in Italy, it does signal a significant shift from previous approaches to the construction of the other.⁹ In the years following World War II, encounters with non-Italians were represented in Italian cinema primarily in two ways, either through exotic/adventure narratives or through comedy. In the first instance, the films would take the audience out of Italy, to a world rife with danger, but where beautiful, scantily clad women were to be found. Representative of this vein are the films featuring Laura Gemser and Zeudi Araya, as well as all of the "Mondo" films inspired by the works of Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi.¹⁰ Similarly, comedies of the 1960s and 1970s mediated the encounter with the Other "out there," beyond the bounds of Italy. However, by the 1980s the Other was undeniably an immigrant on Italian soil, often appearing briefly for the sole purpose of being ridiculed, becoming the butt of a joke between the film and its native Italian audience.¹¹ Placido's *Pummarò*, like subsequent ICI films, reframed the encounter with the Other through the lens of neorealism, shifting the focus of the narrative to the plight of the immigrant, investing ICI films with a different ideological charge.

Neorealism is by far the most well-known contribution Italy has made to the international canon, and to cite it as inspiration is to claim a certain artistic pedigree and access to a privileged distribution network of the film festival circuit.¹² While an exact definition of "neorealism" has been a point of contention for decades, there are certain aspects of neorealism that are commonly recognized as elements of its legacy, both in Italy and abroad.¹³ For example, neorealism is a

⁸ *Il cammino della speranza*, dir. Pietro Germi (1950).

⁹ Pasquale Squitieri's *Il colore dell'odio*, which premiered at the Sorrento Film Festival on October 5, 1989, may in fact be the first film to acknowledge some of the difficulties endured by immigrants in Italy at the time. However, it received very limited distribution.

¹⁰ For more information on the films featuring Zeudi Araya, see Marco Purpura, "Racial Masquerade Italian Style? Whiteface and Blackface in Zeudi Araya's 1970s Comedies," *Italian Studies* 69/3 (October 2014): 394–414.

¹¹ For example: *Will Our Heroes Be Able to Find Their Friend Who Has Mysteriously Disappeared in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 1968), *While There's War There's Hope* (Alberto Sordi, 1974), *Africa Express* (Michele Lupo, 1976), *Mr. Robinson* (Sergio Corbucci, 1976), *Flatfoot in Africa* (Steno, 1978), and *Flatfoot on the Nile* (Steno, 1980). Encounters with foreigners within Italian soil can be seen in *Tesoro mio* (Giulio Paradisi, 1979), *Delitto al ristorante cinese* (Bruno Corbucci, 1981), and *Acqua e sapone* (Mario Verdone, 1985).

¹² Most ICI films in the 1990s and 2000s premiered at the Venice Film Festival or another major film festival. Every major film festival provides cultural capital to the films that premiere there, but as Marijke Valck points out, different festivals provide different forms of cultural capital, and Venice specializes in an aura of artistic legitimacy. See chapter 3, "Venice and the Value-Adding Process," in Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

¹³ According to Mark Shiel, "few moments in the history of cinema have been as hotly debated in their day and by succeeding generations as the moment of Italian neorealism in Italy after World War Two" (Mark Shiel, *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City* [New York: Wallflower Press, 2006], 1–5). Writers and critics like André Bazin, Zavattini, Lizzani, Pierre Sorlin, Lino Micciché, and David Forgacs (among others) have theorized neorealism, providing overlapping definitions, but without reaching a definite consensus: in fact, they do not even agree as to how many films in the postwar era are neorealist, or when neorealism exactly began or ended. Sorlin's

form of filmmaking known for its progressive intentions, or as André Bazin puts it, its “fundamental humanism,” a characteristic intimately tied to its aesthetic element of indexical realism.¹⁴ According to Bill Nichols, indexical realism conveys “a casual, unadorned view of everyday life” by simplifying the language of cinema and minimizing the use of overtly artificial elements. In doing so, it emphasizes “the problems confronting ordinary people in the present moment rather than the historical past or an imagined future.”¹⁵ In the Italian postwar period (1945–53), this style of filmmaking reflected the social and historical circumstances of common folk affected by the war and its aftermath. This association between intention, form, and theme is so strong that the very term “neorealism” reverberates much further within ideological symbolic systems than within any discourse on formal cinematic elements. To this day, to refer to anything as “neorealist” is to recognize in it (or attribute it to) a certain activist and progressive perspective that advocates for the lower social classes, for subaltern subjects, for the victims of society; in other words, to invoke melodramatic structures.

Linda Williams argues that melodrama is not a genre, as has been traditionally defined, but rather a *mode* through which narratives of all sorts attempt to come to terms with the chaos of modernity.¹⁶ Its main objective is to provide moral legibility, to facilitate the recognition of a “good” and “evil” that has been previously obscured. To achieve such an objective, melodrama mobilizes certain qualities, such as suffering, suspense, and a capacity for innocence. It often

count of neorealist films tallies at twenty, Micciché’s tally is around ninety for the period between 1945 and 1953, while Forgacs’ count is 259 for the same period.

¹⁴ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 21. For Shiel, the progressive intentionality of classic neorealist films is what distinguishes neorealism from “realist” films from the fascist era, and even from those realist films that came after, whereas Peter Bondanella identifies the politically engaged films of the 1960s and 1970s as part of neorealism’s legacy in Italian cinema (Shiel, *Italian Neorealism*, 28–29; Peter E. Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema* [New York: Continuum, 2009], 242). Millicent Marcus cites Italian critics who hold that “neorealism is first and foremost a moral statement” (Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986], 23). Fabiana Woodfin echoes that sentiment by focusing on what she calls the “redemptive mission of neorealism” (Fabiana Woodfin, “*Spaesati d’Italia*: Emigration in Italian National Identity Construction from Postwar to Economic Miracle” [Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011], 43–45); Carlo Celli identifies neorealism with a “strong desire to uncover the truth about the widespread suffering in Italy, and to identify with the plight of the victim” (Carlo Celli, *A New Guide to Italian Cinema* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007], 44). Historically speaking, there has been a general tendency to regard neorealism within an ideological framework rather than through its formal elements, with the notable exception of Christopher Wagstaff, *Italian Neorealist Cinema: An Aesthetic Approach* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Bill Nichols actually references neorealism as the example of this style: “The neo-realists eschewed attempts to evoke the quality of *photogénie* through extremes of stylization favored by the French impressionists [...] This sense of an indexical or photographic realism, of revealing what life has to offer when it is filmed simply and truly, is not, in fact, a truth but a style. It is an effect achieved by using specific but unassuming, definite but self-effacing means” (Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001], 133–34).

¹⁶ The seminal works of Peter Brooks and Thomas Elsaesser offer a traditional understanding of melodrama as a genre of pathos and excess; see Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), and Thomas Elsaesser, “Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama,” *Monogram* 4 (1972): 2–15. The works of Ben Singer, Christine Gledhill, and Linda Williams, on the contrary, explicitly place melodrama within the context of modernity; it is Williams, however, who recontextualizes it as a *mode* rather than a genre. See Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Christine Gledhill, “Rethinking Genre,” in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 221–43. Within the Italian context, the work of Louis Bayman revisits neorealism and melodrama, but maintains the notion of melodrama as a genre of pathos and theatricality (Louis Bayman, *The Operatic and the Everyday in Postwar Italian Film Melodrama* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015]).

focuses on a *victim-hero*, whose suffering allows us to recognize their virtue. Such suffering often leads to suspenseful situations involving the dialectic of pathos and action—a give and take of “too late” and “in the nick of time” that orchestrate the moral legibility of the narrative. A suspense, therefore, that performs the alchemy of turning suffering into action that displays the protagonist’s virtue, that allows the distinction between good and bad, praiseworthy and condemnable, acceptable and unacceptable in the world. The component of innocence, whether real or conceptual, provides the support necessary for the belief that a moral good is possible. A happy ending will recuperate this sense of innocence; a sad ending will mourn it.¹⁷

In the immediate aftermath of WWII, neorealism was a cultural phenomenon around which socially transformative forces were galvanized, becoming the redemptive melodrama of a nation.¹⁸ According to Carla Marcantonio, neorealism reconfigures melodrama as a response to a new geopolitical climate, and as such it is “invested in the project—aesthetic, philosophical, and ethical—of rendering the visible world legible.”¹⁹ It does so by focusing “on the suffering of ordinary people at the hands of socioeconomic and/or political injustice,” such as the poor, the partisan, the day-laborer, the farmer, and the migrant.²⁰ By making “the injustice of the world palpable and legible” right after Italy had been both the enemy (Fascist regime) and an ally (partisans) of the “good,” “melodrama provides neorealist films with the allegorical grounding for addressing the state of the nation and for imagining a new nation-state.”²¹

They Are as We Once Were

Placido’s *Pummarò* attempts the same process of making the visible world legible by explicitly drawing a comparison between the suffering of new immigrants and that of ordinary Italians in the postwar era.²² By focusing on their suffering at the hands of socioeconomic and/or political injustice, it attempts to make sense of the new social reality in which immigrants are undeniably part of Italian society, and yet are demonized, abused, and sometimes murdered.²³ According to Placido:

¹⁷ Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); ead., “Mega-Melodrama! Vertical and Horizontal Suspensions of the ‘Classical,’” *Modern Drama* 55/4 (2012): 523–43.

¹⁸ Luisa Rivi argues that neorealist films like Roberto Rossellini’s *Paisà* (1946) served to promote a new national narrative “by coalescing a nation, an ‘imagined community’ around recent constitutive elements—that is around new myths, like the suffering of the common people under the Fascist regime, the role of the Resistance, and the sacrifice of Italians and Allies alike.” Suffering, sacrifice, and absolution for an innocent Italy hidden underneath the historical stain of Fascism point towards the redemptive melodrama of a nation that ended up on the ‘right’ side of history after fighting on the ‘wrong’ side of the war (Luisa Rivi, *European Cinema after 1989: Cultural Identity and Transnational Production* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007], 4).

¹⁹ Carla Marcantonio, *Global Melodrama: Nation, Body, and History in Contemporary Film*, Global Cinema (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 112.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 124.

²² This alignment is facilitated by a deep sense of historical affinity between the end of the Cold War and the end of WWII. For a study on the film industry’s practice of revisiting the post-WWII period as a way to interrogate the political chaos of the 1990s, see “The Dialectic of Landscape in Italian Popular Melodrama,” in Rosalind Galt, *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), and Rivi, *European Cinema after 1989*.

²³ A relevant, and tragic, example is the murder of Jerry Masslo, a South African immigrant who worked as a day laborer in the tomato fields near Villa Literno. He was murdered on 25 August 1989, and his death shocked the country, galvanizing the very first mass demonstrations against racism, with over 200,000 people participating in a

The idea for the film [...] came to me after seeing Germi's *Il cammino della speranza*. In the film, there was a group of southerners traveling northward in Italy, looking for jobs, not unlike what happens to undocumented African migrants today; manual laborers willing to do any job. The impulse to make this film, however, was born out of desire to understand, to learn. While traveling, whether by car or train, I often encountered these dark-skinned workers, with their baskets full of tomatoes, and I asked myself, "How is it that such jobs are no longer held by the peasants I once knew as a boy in Apulia and Lucania?"²⁴

Placido's stated motivation for his cinematic project, the desire to understand, is a sentiment that he repeats in other interviews, even where details of the film's origins are varied.²⁵ The desire to understand the lives of African immigrants, whose faces had become ubiquitous in the Italian peninsula, highlights the problems for those who seek to tell stories from a "positive" and "progressive" perspective at the end of the 1980s: the epistemological gap between the native Italian population and the new migrants. The faces and bodies that are encountered on the streets selling knick-knacks, observed in train stations loitering apparently without purpose, or shown in magazines and newspapers (and on political posters in 1990) as either the object of xenophobic violence or the subject of criminal suspicion, were faces and bodies without an established positive narrative.²⁶ By referencing Germi's *Il cammino della speranza*, Placido invites the audience to see the immigrant tomato pickers as equivalent to the miners of Germi's film.

However, the comparison also sets off a chain of associations that simultaneously makes the new immigrant the reiteration of the neorealist victim-hero and the migrants of later decades. Placido's film recalls an older, better-known neorealist film: Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946). As in Rossellini's film, *Pummarò*'s south-to-north movement is a survey of the social realities of Italy's subaltern subjects at a time when the country was undergoing critical historical shifts. Both films are segmented along the traditional geographical divisions of the peninsula, and occasionally touch upon similar subjects: peasants or migrant field hands in the south, women in the margins of the capital, and a very loose connection between Germany and violence in northern Italy.²⁷ Even their Italian titles echo each other, as *Paisà* and *Pummarò* are each a dialect word used to interpellate southern subjects. As iconic films of their respective cinematic moments, their titles are highly symbolic and signal the type of subject to be treated and discussed, one that had been previously ignored by Italian cinema: marginalized Italian subjects in *Paisà*, and the immigrant from the global south in *Pummarò*.

march in Rome (Anna Morelli, "Marcia della civiltà. A Roma 200.000 contro il razzismo," *L'Unità*, 8 October 1989).

²⁴ Dario Formisano, "Io uomo bianco tra i pummarò," *L'Unità*, 1 September 1990.

²⁵ Matilde Passa, "Applausi a scena aperta per 'Pummarò' di Michele Placido. 'Ho fatto un film per non sentirmi più razzista,'" *L'Unità*, 14 May 1990.

²⁶ Pap Khouma's *Io venditore di elefanti* was the first published narrative told from the perspective of an immigrant in Italy. Written in Italian with the assistance of Khouma's collaborator Oreste Pivetta, the book was recently translated into English. See Pap Khouma, *Io, venditore di elefanti. Una vita per forza tra Dakar, Parigi e Milano* (Milan: CDE, 1990); id., *I Was an Elephant Salesman: Adventures between Dakar, Paris, and Milan*, trans. Rebecca Hopkins (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

²⁷ *Paisà* has other segments that are not mirrored in *Pummarò*, such as the segment in the monastery. However, that does not detract from the similar trajectory and south-to-north movement of the film, although the analogy of location/subject in northern Italy is loose at best.

Apart from neorealism, *Pummarò*'s geographical movement connects it to the narratives of Italian migration. Through its south-to-north narrative, and the invocation of Germi's *Il cammino della speranza*, Placido's film calls to mind films like Francesco Rosi's *I magliari* [*The Magliari*] (1959), Luchino Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* [*Rocco and His Brothers*] (1960), Franco Brusati's *Pane e cioccolata* [*Bread and Chocolate*] (1974), and every other film depicting Italian south-to-north migration in the decades following the war. As can be expected, marginalization and suffering are recurring elements that unify these migrant narratives, in which the threat of death and violence is always imminent, and all too often fulfilled, performing the melodramatic function of "in the nick of time" or "too late." The escape of *Pummarò*'s protagonist (Kwaku) from the southern tomato fields happens just "in the nick of time" to save him from the local mafia, but his arrival in Germany is "too late" for him to see his brother alive.²⁸ Although not employed in a particularly dangerous line of work, *Pummarò* dies on the job, reminding us that migrant lives are precarious in themselves, a theme explored in Sergio Corbucci's *Terra Straniera* (1952) and Luigi Comencini's *Delitto d'amore* [*Somewhere beyond Love*] (1974), where protagonists die because of the working conditions they must endure.

However, the precarious nature of migrants' lives is also mobilized thematically in narratives that do not involve death. Mario Monicelli's *I soliti ignoti* [*Big Deal on Madonna Street*] (1958) shows, for instance, a group of people living on the margins of legality in order to survive, for whom going in and out of jail is just a part of life. While the protagonists are locals for the most part, it is difficult to ignore the presence of a Sicilian thief and his sister, a Neapolitan safe-cracker, and a young servant from Padua, migrants who live in a similarly precarious milieu. Luigi Zampa's *Bello, onesto, emigrato Australia sposerebbe compaesana illibata* [*A Girl in Australia*] (1971) illustrates the loneliness of the migrant men who settle in communities where establishing romantic links locally may not be an option. Ettore Scola's *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* [*Ugly, Dirty, and Bad*] (1976) displays the precarious life of the residents of a shantytown on the periphery of Rome, which despite its unsuitability for habitation, becomes the destination for a group of Sicilian migrants at the end of the film. Rosi's *I magliari* reveals the violence that may erupt between migrant groups when jobs are on the line, and the long reach of Italian organized crime at these levels of society—even in Germany. Echoes of each of these difficulties find ample narrative space in Placido's *Pummarò*, presenting the African migrant as a sympathetic figure, one that can easily evoke the Italian migrants in *Il cammino della speranza* and the peasants that once worked those same tomato fields. It seeks to reinforce, in the most general sense, the idea that the new African immigrants are, in so many ways, just as Italians once were, when they were the ones to pack their bags and go looking for a better life abroad.

A Template to Follow

Pummarò, while not a commercial blockbuster, became a critical success, and over time the acknowledged foundational film engaging immigration from a progressive perspective.²⁹ Its

²⁸ Early in the film we realize that we, as an audience, have arrived "too late" to meet an African immigrant whose name translates to "Finished," who was murdered because he dared to be romantically involved with a local woman. His death, and the condition of living under the threat of death, is also a reference to the murder of Jerry Masslo (see n. 23).

²⁹ The film premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1990. However, it was not launched at the movie theaters until September of that year, at the beginning of the film season. According to an article from *L'Unità*, the film was

interweaving of neorealist intentions, form, and theme created a general template to follow, one where the trope “they are as we once were” is always present, if not in the plot of films, then in the discourse surrounding the films and immigration in general. It became a crucial tool in addressing a social issue that was becoming all the more pressing with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the establishment of a united, borderless Europe through the Maastricht Treaty of 1992/1993 and the enactment of the Schengen Agreement in 1995.³⁰ Mass immigration, whether documented or undocumented, became an undeniable Italian reality, and a galvanizing issue for a country fraught with political instabilities and social anxieties about the fast-paced changes it was undergoing.³¹ Films about immigrants in the 1990s and 2000s engaged those realities through the neorealist discourse established by *Pummarò*, normalizing the melodrama of social (neo)realism as the most “natural” way to address the phenomenon of immigration.

Gianni Amelio’s *Lamerica* (1994), featuring Michele Placido as a protagonist, is the best example of this growing tendency. *Lamerica* addresses the massive exodus of Albanian immigrants into southern Italy after the fall of the communist regime, embracing at both the narrative and discursive level the analogy implied by *Pummarò*’s neorealist trope of resemblance. For example, when the film premiered at the Venice Film Festival, Placido claimed that “Albania is the south of Italy, Lucania above all. In Albania, I have found again the places, landscapes, and faces [of Italy’s south and past].”³² This observation implicitly aligns the lives of Albanians during the communist regime with the lives of Italians living under fascism. In a similar interview, Amelio drew on his own family’s emigration experience to explain his perception of the new Albanian immigration to Italy, claiming “I saw Albania as if it were my father’s Italy, Albanians as if they were Italians from the 1940s. And my father’s dream was the same as theirs: bread.”³³ Elsewhere, he reveals that “today, in Albania, I speak with women and I truly see my mother in them, her needs, her particular way of looking at me, of talking to me.”³⁴ The transition from his own family’s personal experiences to a universalizing historical interpretation is a small one: “As an Italian going to Albania, I see *there what we once used to be*.”³⁵

The analogy between the new immigrants and the “victim-heroes” of Italy’s past structured the film’s promotion and reception as well. The director and the actors interviewed presented the analogy in no uncertain terms, and the critics embraced it as the interpretative matrix for the film

taken out of exhibition after a week, making only 18 million Lit—roughly \$9,000 (Michele Anselmi, “L’Italia è già Kappaò,” *L’Unità*, 23 September 1990).

³⁰ With the expansion of the EU in 2004 and 2007, the line between “inside” and “outside” was problematized further as countries that were a big source of “outsiders” in the 1990s were now part of the European Union. The complication is highlighted by the fact that in the Italian imaginary, the line that marks the inside from the outside is in theory the EU border, for “outsiders” are often referred to as “extracomunitario.” However, eastern Europeans were not treated or perceived any better after their inclusion in the EU.

³¹ Within the span of three years (1989–92), the political structures of the Cold War disintegrated, ushering in a decade of fluidity and change, a period where all sorts of maps had to be renegotiated and redrawn: political, geographical, social, demographic, economic, symbolic, etc. In Italy, the political establishment that had been in place for almost forty-five years was shaken to the core as a series of corruption scandals caused a political implosion, leading to the dissolution of almost every major political party and the end of the First Republic. What followed was a period of political instability that continues to affect Italy to this day.

³² Maria Pia Fusco, “Michele Placido. ‘Ho ritrovato il nostro sud,’” *La Repubblica*, 6 September 1994.

³³ Maria Pia Fusco, “Il mio film ad un alto costo umano,” *La Repubblica*, 6 September 1994.

³⁴ Goffredo Fofi, “Il regista de *Lamerica* ci racconta il suo cinema,” *L’Unità*, 24 October 1994.

³⁵ Matilde Passa, “L’innocenza impossibile” *L’Unità*, 6 September 1994. Italics mine.

and kept it in circulation for a long time.³⁶ The title of a newspaper article released at the time articulates Amelio's point in a very succinct way: "Emigranti, faccendieri, gli albanesi siamo noi" ["Emigrants and Wheeler-Dealers: We are the Albanians"].³⁷ This phrasing was picked up and used by Amelio three days later in another interview when he said, "I didn't look at them from up high, but from inside, as an act of love, to remember that such is the Italy that we have forgotten. We Italians are the Albanians."³⁸ The analogy set up by *Pummarò* gained strength and focus in *Lamerica*, becoming a tight metaphor whereby the "they" are not "just like" us, but rather they *are* us.

Given the complexity and changing nature of the new immigration phenomenon, Italian Cinema of Immigration in the 1990s and 2000s does not always make the analogy at the plot level. However, the comparison between contemporary social realities and the neorealist period continually structure the discussion of ICI films, as the analogy "they are as we once were" becomes commonplace in Italian society. For example, Maurizio Zaccaro, who vehemently stated that he "did not want to make another *Pummarò*," nonetheless described his film *L'articolo 2* [Article 2] (1994) in the following manner: "I focused on a family group: do you know how the Americans saw us when the first Italians landed in New York?"³⁹ When Carlo Mazzacurati released his second film dealing with migration to and from eastern Europe, *Il toro* [The Bull] (1994), he stated that his cinematic gaze was directed towards the east because "those places and those people resemble that which we used to be; it reminds us of our lost values."⁴⁰ Likewise, when his third film, *Vesna va veloce*, premiered two years later, he explicitly compared the young protagonist with the young Italian women at the end of WWII.⁴¹ Towards the end of the 1990s, Matteo Garrone explicitly sets up his films, *Terra di mezzo* [Land in Between] (1996) and *Ospiti* [Guests] (1998), to be read within the framework of social realism when he states that "neorealism" was his primary influence.⁴² All of these films, while foregoing the explicit immigrant-to-emigrant exchange at the plot level, nonetheless mobilize the same

³⁶ Even a year later, American critic Janet Maslin from the New York Times echoes the language used in the Italian articles. Not only does Maslin invoke the analogy between Albanians immigrants and Italian emigrants of the postwar era, but explicitly calls *Lamerica* a neorealist film with an "acute sense of history" (Janet Maslin, "Scheming Italians in Troubled Albania," *New York Times*, 4 October 1995).

³⁷ Irene Bignardi, "Emigranti, faccendieri, gli albanesi siamo noi," *La Repubblica*, 6 September 1994.

³⁸ Maria Pia Fusco, "Vargas Llosa, ti sfido," *La Repubblica*, 9 September 1994.

³⁹ Mariolina Iossa, "Imputato, Sfratti La Seconda Moglie," *Corriere Della Sera*, 17 July 1993.

⁴⁰ While *Il toro* focuses on the odyssey of two unemployed Italians, "animal thieves and not bicycle thieves," who travel to Hungary to sell the stolen bull, Mazzacurati's other two films *Un'altra vita* [Another Life] (1992) and *Vesna va veloce* [Vesna Goes Fast] (1996), focus on the immigration journey of eastern European women into Italy. Giuseppina Manin, "Violenza: ciak sull'Italia del malessere," *Corriere della Sera*, 30 August 1994.

⁴¹ Vesna is a young woman from the Czech Republic, who becomes a prostitute in Italy out of necessity. Speaking of her, Mazzacurati states, "Vesna, and girls like her, resemble the Italian girls who sold their bodies out of desperation after WWII" (Michele Anselmi, "Il Sogno di Vesna una 'lucciola' che viene dall'Est," *L'Unità*, 16 July 1996).

⁴² Discussing his film *Terra di mezzo*, Garrone states explicitly that his inspiration was "neorealism," because the story of the Nigerian prostitute is a story "born and matured within history." It is a sentiment shared by the journalist interviewing him, who states that "after watching this film, if one has a bit of social consciousness, one leaves the theater with a real awareness of those [women] standing by the traffic light" Giovanna Grassi, "La faccia buia di Roma. Solo extracomunitari nel film di Matteo Garrone," *Corriere della Sera*, 31 October 1996. Giovanna Grassi, "Le prostitute nigeriane, i giovani albanesi, il benzinaio egiziano," *Corriere della Sera*, 30 April 1997.

structures of sentiment that depict the immigrant as a victim-hero, rather than the emblem of criminality mobilized by right wing political factions, such as Lega Nord.⁴³

By the turn of the millennium, the tendency to read the new immigrant as analogous to Italian “victim-heroes” of previous decades (particularly migrants of the 1960s and 1970s), as well as the tendency to represent immigration through the stylistic elements of social realism reminiscent of neorealism had become a common practice. This is obvious in films like Vittorio De Seta’s *Lettere dal Sahara* [*Letters from the Sahara*] (2006), which revisits Placido’s *Pummarò* in its geographical movement, plot structure, and formal elements. Or in the matter-of-fact tone in which Marco Tullio Giordana describes his film, *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* [*Once You’re Born You Can No Longer Hide*] (2005), as something that “simply describes our relationship with others, with the foreigners whose life’s drama is to be poor. That’s how it used to be for us in the past, when sixty million of us were forced to emigrate.”⁴⁴ The casual manner in which the analogy is readily deployed, with no further elaboration, underlines the fact that by the 2000s, the comparison had become obvious in Italian culture. While it is beyond the scope of this article to map out the many trajectories the analogy took in Italian society, it is fair to say that it could easily be found not just in mass media, but also in the curricula of *Centri Sociali*, in academic works, as part of Mediterranean Studies and Southern Thought, and in popular songs by groups such as Caparezza and Almamegretta.⁴⁵ However, within the discursive spaces of Italian Cinema of Immigration, the basic analogy between the Italian migrant of old and the new immigrant was an interpretative matrix deployed so that the former could explicate the latter, and in so doing establish an empathic bridge based on common experiences of suffering.⁴⁶

Misremembered History

In order for the Italian migrant from previous generations to explicate the new, and relatively unknown, immigrant from the global south, the Italian migrant must be a known entity. For the statement “they are as we once were” to be applicable, it is necessary to know who is this “we” that “once were.” This is the problem with this particular trope of resemblance, with the process of recognition initiated by these films, because it is not actually based on recognition of the historical record, but its misrecognition. From *Pummarò*, all the way to *Quando sei nato*, the point of reference has not been the Italian migrant as depicted by the statistical data gathered by

⁴³ For more information on this topic, see Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-persone. L’esclusione dei migranti in una società globale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2006).

⁴⁴ Gabriella Gallozzi, “Vite da sbarco,” *L’Unità*, 6 May 2005.

⁴⁵ For more information on the Social Centers, see Patrizia Palumbo and Ashley Dawson, “Hannibal’s Children: Immigration and Antiracist Youth Subcultures in Contemporary Italy,” *Cultural Critique* 59/1 (2005): 165–86. For an example of an academic work that uses the analogy as its basic premise, see Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005). In Mediterranean Studies, the analogy is deployed at a much grander scale. For an example see Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). For Southern Thought, see Franco Cassano, *Il pensiero meridiano* (Rome: Laterza, 2010). For popular music, see Caparezza’s *Vieni a ballare in Puglia* (2008) and Almamegretta’s *Figli di Annibale* (1993).

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that exceptions exist, and some films imagine the trajectories between Italy and the global south differently. Davide Ferrario’s *Figli di Annibale* (1998), and *Mollo Tutto*, dir. José María Sánchez (1995) are good examples.

the Italian state ever since 1876 and published periodically over the years, but rather the stereotype of Italian migration that has established itself over time in the Italian imagination.⁴⁷

According to Italian historians such as Matteo Sanfilippo, Giovanni Pizzorusso, and Pietro Bevilacqua, peninsular migratory patterns in the 1800s and at the turn of the century were rural. They were tied to cyclical agricultural patterns that were centuries old and active over all the peninsula, not just in the south.⁴⁸ After the unification of Italy in the 1860s, patterns started to shift due to multiple reasons, such as a European crisis in the agricultural sector and a high demand for unskilled labor in other European countries and the American continent. These conditions jump-started what has been called “the great Italian migration,” a historical phenomenon that lives in the Italian imaginary as the beginning of a great diaspora.

However, according to Alessandro Nicosia, director of the *Museo Nazionale Emigrazione Italiana*, from 1876 until 1900, “the regions with the highest number of emigrants were the Veneto (879,000), followed by Friuli (803,000), then Piedmont (685,000), and finally Lombardy (497,000).”⁴⁹ Given the North’s contiguity with the rest of the European continent, rural workers there migrated in much larger numbers than those in the south, making Italian emigration at the end of the 1800s a decidedly northern phenomenon. It is true that at the turn of the century, emigration from southern regions became more prominent, but since the north never stopped exporting labor, the total number of emigrants from the north in the period 1876–1913 continued to be higher than that from the south.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the destinations of such migrations were quite varied, ranging from other European countries, to South America, North America, and even Africa. It was a very heterogeneous flow, and before the rise of the Fascist regime it found ample representation in poetry, novels, plays, and films—in standard Italian as well as dialect.⁵¹ One need only think of the works of Edmondo De Amicis, Giovanni Pascoli, and Luigi Pirandello to get a sense of how diverse these narratives were, with no single trajectory overshadowing others.

Though there was a dip in the overall flow of emigration from Italy during the Fascist period, the patterns did not really change. In fact, all the way through the end of the twentieth century, Veneto continued to top the charts as the largest exporter of labor. More importantly, however, is the fact that during the Fascist period the representation of Italian emigration was often manipulated to the regime’s ends.⁵² Heterogeneous, subaltern narratives dealing with the

⁴⁷ Books containing statistical data collected by the government and analysis of it include Gianfausto Rosoli, ed., *Un Secolo di emigrazione italiana, 1876–1976* (Rome: Centro studi emigrazione, 1978); Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina, eds., *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana*, 2 vols (Rome: Donzelli, 2001); Alessandro Nicosia and Lorenzo Prencipe, eds., *Museo Nazionale Emigrazione Italiana* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2009).

⁴⁸ Matteo Sanfilippo, “Tipologie dell’emigrazione di massa,” in *Storia Dell’Emigrazione Italiana*, ed. Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina, 1:77–94, and Piero Bevilacqua, “Società rurale e emigrazione,” in *Storia Dell’Emigrazione Italiana*, ed. Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina, 1:95–112. What both scholars point out repeatedly is that Italian rural society was essentially mobile, and dependent upon seasonal and periodical migrations. As Bevilacqua states: “Emigrating, in the period before Unification (and going far back centuries) was not an escape from misery, but was in itself a vocation, or the vehicle and instrument to practice a vocation” (99).

⁴⁹ Alessandro Nicosia, “Diversità e unitarietà,” in *Museo Nazionale Emigrazione Italiana*, 39.

⁵⁰ The main exporting regions during the Liberal period as a whole are, in descending order, Veneto (1,822,000), Piedmont (1,540,000), Campania (1,475,000), Friuli-Venezia Giulia (1,407,000), Sicilia (1,352,000), and Lombardy (1,342,000). Every other region exported less than a million each (Sanfilippo, “Tipologie dell’emigrazione,” 79).

⁵¹ Sebastiano Martelli, “Dal vecchio mondo al sogno americano. Realtà e immaginario dell’emigrazione nella letteratura italiana,” in *Storia Dell’Emigrazione Italiana*, ed. Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina, 1:433–87.

⁵² Though early narratives (1880s to 1920s) portrayed “emigration as a mournful event, as misfortune, sickness, madness, and death is a strong underlying theme,” they were quite sympathetic towards the migrants themselves on the voyage out (Martelli, “Dal vecchio mondo”). Then, in the 1900s, the emphasis shifts to the “*rientrati*,” or those that came back, and to the possible ramifications. After 1910, nationalist sentiments start to take over and the anti-

hardships of migration were erased, transformed so that migrants were shown to be “valuable representatives of the Italian people, bringing to the world productivity, skills and culture” whereby “world” meant South America and the African colonies.⁵³

The fall of Fascism meant that a myriad of migratory trajectories found expression once again. Italian cinema in the immediate postwar era, in that initial period of creative chaos between the fall of the regime and the entrenchment of the First Republic, reflected multiple migratory trajectories as well: not only do the cinematic migrants come from all parts of Italy, and from different ideological positions, but also from different social classes. Furthermore, they migrate for different reasons, and their promised land is not only across the ocean, but also in Europe, Palestine, and other parts of Italy. For example, it is during this postwar period that Italian cinema is able to tell the story of Giuseppe from Rome, who permanently migrates to Argentina (*Emigrantes*, 1949);⁵⁴ or the story of Professor Taumen, Holocaust survivor, who leaves Italy with his daughter and heads to British Palestine (*Il grido della terra* [*The Earth Cries Out*], 1949);⁵⁵ or the story of 9-year-old musical prodigy Pierino who moves to France to play music (*La grande aurora* [*The Great Dawn*], 1947);⁵⁶ or that of Cristoforo Colombo and Gaetano, two unfortunate fools from Turin who migrate to South America only to return to Italy empty-handed (*Come scopersi l’America* [*How I discovered America*], 1949).⁵⁷ To these stories, we need to add that of the *mondine*, female farm hands in the rice fields of northern Italy, who came from different parts of the peninsula—and even from Italy’s former colonies, unbeknownst to the audience (*Riso amaro* [*Bitter Rice*], 1949).⁵⁸ Last but not least are the stories of Sicilian miners and of a fugitive Fascist along with an unemployed partisan, heading for France (*Il cammino della speranza* and *Fuga in francia* [*Flight into France*], 1948).⁵⁹ At the margin of the neorealist moment, but before the narrative of Italian migration had settled into the now common south-to-north narrative, there was Monicelli’s *I soliti ignoti*, a caper film that off-handedly showcases Rome as a city that attracts people not just from Naples and Sicily, but also from the Veneto.

These films, forgotten or simply excluded from the canon, are representative of traditional migratory patterns, patterns of Italian mobility that were in place until the early 1960s: from rural

American sentiment finds stronger articulation—emigration is seen not as a phenomenon of the masses, but as a *vulnus*, or wound, to the nation (ibid).

⁵³ Catia Monacelli, “L’emigrazione nel cinema italiano,” in *Museo Nazionale Emigrazione Italiana*, 275. For examples of the world as South America and African former colonies, see *Passaporto Rosso*, dir. Guido Brignone (1934); *Il suo destino*, dir. Enrico Guazzoni (1938); *Luciano Serra Pilota*, dir. Goffredo Alessandrini (1938), as well as films with an obvious colonial angle such as *Abuna Messias. Vendetta Africana*, dir. Goffredo Alessandrini (1939); *Il grande appello*, dir. Mario Camerini (1936); *Sotto la croce del sud*, dir. Guido Brignone (1938); *Giarabub*, dir. Goffredo Alessandrini (1942); and *Bengasi*, dir. Augusto Genina (1942). For an in-depth analysis of colonial films under the Fascist regime, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

⁵⁴ *Emigrantes*, dir. Aldo Fabrizi (1949).

⁵⁵ *Il grido della terra*, dir. Duilio Coletti (1949).

⁵⁶ *La grande aurora*, dir. Giuseppe Maria Scotese (1947).

⁵⁷ *Come scopersi l’America*, dir. Carlo Borghesio (1949).

⁵⁸ *Riso amaro*, dir. Giuseppe De Santis (1949). De Santis’ film features a dark skinned *mondina*, Rosa, whose foreignness is never addressed in the film, or by the film scholarship afterwards. Rosa, was played by Somalian-Italian actress Isabella Zennaro, born Isabella Marincola, who later changed her name again to Timira Hassan. The name changes reflect the hybridity of her identity and life experiences, which is aptly performed by her biography that is part fiction, part interviews, part archival records (Ming 2 and Mohamed, *Timira. Romanzo meticcio*).

⁵⁹ *Fuga in francia*, dir. Mario Soldati (1948). It is worth nothing that the heroic partisan in Soldati’s film is played by Pietro Germi.

areas towards urban ones, from mountains to lowlands, from Italy to Europe and the rest of the world.⁶⁰ Although southern migration became dominant in the 1960s and 1970s, the history of Italian migration as a whole is much more dynamic than the linear, south-to-north narrative that has become commonplace in the Italian imaginary.

The overall shift in focus from the heterogeneous narratives of the 1940s and 1950s to the more standardized narratives of Southern Italy to Northern Italy, Europe, or North America owes a great deal to a series of events that overlap and inform each other, the first of which is the great social and political shift brought by the end of the war. The end of the Fascist regime and the rise of former enemies (such as the United States) to a position of global prominence brought about the necessity of readjusting the national narrative in order to better adhere to the political exigencies of the new world order. Cinematically, this meant the melodramatic repudiation of Fascism through the representation of ordinary Italians suffering during and after the war.⁶¹ From a wider cultural perspective, the repudiation of Fascism was accompanied by the glorification of the *Risorgimento* (the unification of Italy into a nation-state in the 1860s) in order to relegate Fascism to a parenthetical position in Italian history. The Resistance was declared a second *Risorgimento*, and the First Republic deemed the continuation of the national project initiated by Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Cavour. This new periodization of Italian history not only necessitated the production of new historical scholarship, but in the 1960s it also deeply influenced the framing of Italian history, particularly with regard to Italian emigration.

According to Matteo Sanfilippo, the periodization of Italian history into Unification, Fascism, and Republic had the effect of erasing the migratory continuities between the early nineteenth century and the twentieth century, and of overemphasizing the creation of a single market as the sole reason behind Italian emigrations:

The great debates on the history and economy of southern Italy stressed the exceptional scope of the new migratory phenomenon, and this awareness motivated new analyses of the past. In particular, the renewed interest in the Southern Question encouraged a reflection on the consequences of unification for all of Italy, and for the south. For liberal historians, the formation of a unified national market in the late 1800s triggered the spontaneous equilibration of labor resources and pushed labor-power towards emigration. For the Marxist historians,

⁶⁰ According to Paul Ginsborg, between 1946 and 1957, “within Italy itself, the industrial triangle exercised only a limited pull in these years, mainly upon the rural populations of Lombardy, Piedmont and the Veneto. All the major cities and town in the peninsula attracted a certain influx of rural labourers seeking work primarily in the building trades” (Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1988* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003], 219). In fact, at the height of the Economic Boom (1958–63), 70% of Milan’s immigrants were from rural areas of Lombardy itself and the Veneto, and only 30% were from the southern regions.

⁶¹ A recent monograph by Karl Schoonover focuses on the centrality of suffering in neorealism as well. Although Schoonover never mentions “melodrama,” he nonetheless recognizes the nation-building aspects of neorealism’s melodrama in his analysis of the execution of Don Pietro in *Roma, città aperta* [*Rome Open City*], dir. Roberto Rossellini (1945). While arguing for the alignment of the spectator’s gaze with that of the boys watching the execution, Schoonover states that “the whistling of these children prompts the firing squad, a group made up of Italians, to question their position as collaborators and eventually to disobey the orders to shoot. In the moment that we realize their bullets have missed Don Pietro, the film redeems all Italians, even those fighting for the fascists” (Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012], 133. I would go one step further by following the logic of his argument and say that it redeems those that are watching as well, since in the recognition of “good” and “evil” in melodrama there is also the articulation of a community.

such a unified market is responsible for the drastic reduction of the necessary labor-power. In both cases, even when changing the complex evaluation of the effects of the market, it is the market nonetheless that is considered as the cause and reason behind the migratory process, as well as for its ensuing development (economic or not), according to an interpretation that has for a long time dominated Italian thought.⁶²

The reduction of complex historical and social processes by both the Left (“Marxist historians”) and the Right (“liberal historians”) into purely economic cause-and-effect mechanisms helped to establish the stereotype of the Italian migrant as a perennial southerner. In fact, if all history is indeed contemporary history, then the scholarship of the early 1960s regarding the Liberal era is obviously overdetermined by the economic landscape created by the *boom economico* and the increased southern migration in the 1960s. From the post-boom perspective, the North is rich and industrialized, and the South is rural and poor.

Furthermore, if the interest in the “exceptional scope of the new [1960s] migratory phenomenon” is motivated by a “renewed interest on the Southern Question,” as Sanfilippo suggests, then the framework of such analysis was biased from the start. By basing any inquiry into “the history and economy of southern Italy” on spikes of southern migration during the Liberal and the post-boom era, historians reduced migratory patterns into a narrative split between north and south, between northern industrialized centers and southern surplus labor. The socio-economic landscape of the boom years provided a lens through which turn-of-the-century migration could be parceled out, while biases against the South inherited from the Liberal era provided a rationalization for the way in which the contemporary socio-economic landscape turned out after the boom. It is a case where old biases are recast in new scholarship so that the same hierarchies can be established, no longer on explicit grounds of civilization and racial taxonomies, but rather on economics.⁶³

This backwards glance and projection of the South over previous migratory patterns, whether pre- or post-Fascism, was further reinforced by its cinematic representation. Alongside the spike of southern migration in the 1960s, the revived debates on the Southern Question, and the economic focus of emerging scholarship on emigration in general, Italian cinema started to focus on southern emigration. In doing so, it started to streamline the heterogeneous narratives of

⁶² Matteo Sanfilippo, *Problemi di storiografia dell'emigrazione italiana*, Sophrosyne 2 (Viterbo: Sette città, 2002), 89.

⁶³ From the moment the Kingdom of Sardinia annexed the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, the south was conceived as backwards and underdeveloped: “This is no Italy! This is Africa. The Bedouins are the flower of civil virtue when compared with these yokels!” (Luigi Carlo Farini to the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia, Camillo Benso di Cavour, upon the annexation of the Naples region, as cited in Indro Montanelli, *L'Italia del Risorgimento (1831–1861)* [Milan: Biblioteca universale Rizzoli, 1998]). For more information on the Positivist hierarchy of race, see Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo bianco e l'uomo di colore. Letture sull'origine e le varietà delle razze umane*, vol. 3 (Padua: F. Sacchetto, 1871), and id., *Criminal Man, According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1911). For more information on the Positivist foundations for the Southern Question, see Pasquale Villari, *Le lettere meridionali ed altri scritti sulla questione sociale in Italia* (Naples: Guida Editori, 1979); *I mali dell'Italia. Scritti su mafia, camorra e brigantaggio* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1995); Alfredo Niceforo, *L'Italia barbara contemporanea. Studi ed appunti* (Milan: Remo Sandron, 1898); id., *Italiani del Nord e Italiani del Sud* (Turin: Bocca fr., 1901); id., *La Delinquenza in Sardegna. Note di sociologia criminale* (Palermo: Sandron, 1897; repr. Cagliari: Edizioni della torre, 1977); Cesare Lombroso and Giuseppe Pelaggi, *In Calabria, 1862–1897. Studi con aggiunti del dr. Giuseppe Pelaggi* (Bologna: A. Forni, 1988).

the immediate post-war years into a more coherent narrative with repetitious and recognizable elements. Let us look at the following list of films from 1960 to 1977:

Film	Year	Director	Destination	Departure
<i>Rocco e i suoi fratelli</i>	1960	Luchino Visconti	Milan	Lucania
<i>Woman in the Window</i>	1961	Luciano Emmer	Holland	Veneto
<i>A due passi dal confine</i>	1961	Gianni Vernuccio	Milano	Sicily
<i>Scorched Skin</i>	1962	Giuseppe Fina	Milan	Puglia
<i>Mafioso</i>	1962	Alberto Lattuada	Milan	Sicily
<i>Uno sguardo dal ponte</i>	1962	Sidney Lumet	N. America	Sicily
<i>The Fiancés</i>	1963	Ermanno Ormi	Sicily	Milan
<i>An Italian in America</i>	1967	Alberto Sordi	N. America	Rome
<i>The Girl with a Pistol</i>	1968	Mario Monicelli	England	Sicily
<i>My Name Is Rocco Papaleo</i>	1971	Ettore Scola	N. America	Sicily
<i>Lady Liberty</i>	1971	Mario Monicelli	N. America	Southern Italy
<i>Bello, onesto, emigrato Australia sposerebbe compaesana illibata</i>	1971	Luigi Zampa	Australia	Southern Italy
<i>The Seduction of Mimi</i>	1972	Lina Wertmüller	Milan	Sicily
<i>Trevico-Torino... Viaggio Fiat-Nam</i>	1973	Ettore Scola	Turin	Campania
<i>Little Funny Guy</i>	1973	Pasquale Campanile	N. America	Naples
<i>Pane e cioccolata</i>	1974	Franco Brusati	Switzerland	Southern Italy
<i>Delitto d'amore</i>	1974	Luigi Comencini	Milan	Sicily
<i>The Last Desperate Hours</i>	1974	Giorgio Stegani	Milan	Calabria
<i>Come Home and Meet My Wife</i>	1975	Mario Monicelli	Milan	Campania
<i>A Virgin Named Mary</i>	1975	Sergio Nasca	Turin	Southern Italy
<i>Pure as a Lily</i>	1976	Franco Rossi	London	Sicily
<i>Brutti, sporchi e cattivi</i>	1976	Ettore Scola	Rome	Puglia, Sicily
<i>Il giorno dell'Assunta</i>	1977	Nino Russo	Rome	Southern Italy
<i>Nel cerchio</i>	1977	Gianni Minello	Venice	Sardinia

Compared to the films from *Fuga in Francia* (1948) to *I soliti ignoti* (1958), we can see that the representation of emigration after 1960 takes certain recognizable patterns, which become retroactively foundational. With the exception of *La ragazza in vetrina* [*Woman in the Window*] and *I fidanzati* [*The Fiancés*], the representation of Italian migration takes a decisively southern profile, as it is motivated almost exclusively by economic concerns, or reasons that are more in

line with stereotypes of the South than realities on the ground. Individually speaking, these films can be (and often are) assessed as performing an act of social criticism, shedding light on problems affecting Italy's subaltern subjects. More often than not, particularly in comedies, they use stereotypes of the South to perform subversive and critical functions. Yet, taken in the aggregate, and in the absence of alternate migratory trajectories in Italian cinema of the period, they reinforce the very stereotypes they seek to use as rhetorical tools. In their consistent and unfailing use of the southerner to criticize the deplorable conditions surrounding Italian migration, the films not only reinforce the *southernization* of the Italian migrant, but often reduce it to nothing more than an amalgam of stereotypes. For example, regarding Mario Monicelli's *La ragazza con la pistola* [*The Girl with a Pistol*], the Director of the Museo Regionale dell'Emigrazione Pietro Conti, Catia Monacelli, states, "It is another grotesque and caricatural comedy that repeats the well-rehearsed game, described by film critic Tullio Kezich, of inserting within an austere and detached society the typical Italian character, stereotyped and perfectly framed within the habits and customs of his little town, which is almost always a southern one."⁶⁴ This film deploys Sicilian stereotypes of the island as a socially backward culture where the tainted honor of a woman needs to be cleansed by shooting the offender. Of course, not all films reduce their characters to such a degree of caricature, but even so they often mobilize well known stereotypes of the south, such as links to the mafia and/or issues of family honor, as in Alberto Lattuada's *Mafioso*, Lina Wertmüller's *Mimi metallurgico ferito nell'onore* [*The Seduction of Mimi*], and Giorgio Segani's *Milano: Il Clan dei Calabresi* [*The Last Desperate Hours*]. What is important to remember, however, is that regardless of how much or how little an individual film avails itself of southern stereotypes, the emigrant is almost always a southerner, thus helping to establish a pattern that becomes a cinematic stereotype. The reductionist tendency of this repetitive representation affects not only the figure of the Italian migrant, but also the southerner as well. Since emigration was discussed and framed as a phenomenon that was motivated primarily by financial deficiencies, the constant use of a southerner in such narratives reduces all forms of southern mobility to instantiations of the South's economic underdevelopment. Even films like *Mafioso*, which focuses so much on stereotypes of southern criminality, is still underwritten by the necessity to emigrate for economic reasons: the stereotype of the South's backwardness is reinforced in the South's inability to economically support its own people.⁶⁵

Comparatively speaking, if one looks at *Il cammino della speranza* within the film's cinematic milieu, one can see that the miners' poverty is not necessarily a function of their Southern provenance, but rather representative of the socio-economic status of the entire peninsula immediately after the war. This is exactly the problem that undermines the neorealist trope of resemblance used in the 1990s and 2000s, for Germi's film is not read or seen within its own postwar milieu, but is rather framed by the long shadow cast retroactively by these post-1960 films. In fact, this shadow covers not only the postwar period, but also the Liberal period. A case in point is Pasquale Festa Campanile's *L'emigrante* [*Little Funny Guy*] (1973), which is

⁶⁴ Monacelli, "L'emigrazione nel cinema italiano," 286–87.

⁶⁵ This reductionist tendency in the representation of southern mobility is underlined explicitly in Massimo Troisi's *Ricomincio da tre* (1981), when the protagonist Gaetano hitches a ride to Florence. After getting in the car, the driver asks Gaetano where he is coming from. Gaetano responds that he comes from Naples. The automatic follow-up by the driver is, "Emigrante?!" Gaetano refutes that interpretation by saying that he has a life and a job in Naples, like everyone else, and that he is traveling just to travel, to see new things. This exchange shows not only that a southerner on the move is automatically seen as an emigrant, but that any sort of southern mobility is seen as motivated by the need to find a job, a fact underlined by Gaetano's response.

an example of the growing tendency to think of the transatlantic voyage simply as the journey from the Italian South to North America, a point further reinforced by films as recent as Emanuele Crialese's *Nuovomondo* [*Golden Door*] (2006).⁶⁶ They are as *they* once were and are.

The history of Italian migration and its representations over the years clearly show a process of erasure and substitution that is at the heart of my argument: in attempting to create a sense of solidarity with the new immigrant from the global south, Italian Cinema of Immigration compounded the immigrants' alienation and estrangement by equating them with a figure that has traditionally inhabited the fringes of the Italian imaginary. In other words, that "we" in the formulation "they are as we once were," was never really at play. The central Italian subject was never meant to explicate the often-maligned immigrant from the global south, putting it in danger of substitution by reciprocity, when its peripheral Other would do a much better job at creating the semblance of empathy while reinforcing existing symbolic hierarchies. If the analogy was meant to explicate the new immigrant by giving them a recognizable value, then the value and valence it received is that of the perennial subaltern in Italian culture, which only reinforces the negative connotations associated with immigrants.

Of course, I am not claiming that Sicilians, Calabrians, or Apulians are not part of the audience, or that they are not Italians and therefore that their story could not be construed as reflecting an aspect of Italian history. The fact that Amelio's father and grandfather migrated from Catanzaro to Argentina serves to remind us otherwise, and to a certain limited degree, to justify the southern angle of his film *Lamerica*. Indeed, Amelio constantly invoked the memory of his father and mother as a way to explain what he saw in Albania. However, the comparison he makes fails to give either migratory narrative any specificity, and relies instead on stereotypes of the South and southern migration, linking contemporary Albania to Italy in the 1940s, and finding similarities between contemporary Albanian migrants and the memory of his impoverished emigrant father: "And my father's dream was the same as theirs: bread."⁶⁷ This rather stereotypical reason for migration is compounded by terms such as "poveracci, affamati, furbachioni professionisti" ["dirt-poor, starving, professional wise guys"] and "disperati" ["desperate people"], which permeated the reviews of the film when it premiered.⁶⁸ Though certainly there was poverty and misery in Italy in the immediate aftermath of WWII (the very stuff of neorealism's melodrama), the narrative constructed in the film (and around it) reflects and reinforces the stereotypes of Italian emigration that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s rather than recount any *particular* story. Thus, it is no coincidence that the boat full of Albanians heading towards Italy at the end of the film is presented, through the diegetic narration of a Sicilian peasant, as the specter of southern Italian emigration to New York City.

Nor am I claiming that filmmakers like Placido, Amelio, or Giordana were willing participants in the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the 1990s and 2000s. After all, from a historical perspective, the comparison between the new immigrant and the Italian migrant of the immediate post-WWII era as victims of historical forces beyond their control would seem quite logical. What better model for the untold stories of migrants from the global south, who were objectified and vilified by right-wing parties, than the chorus of marginal voices that rose out of the ashes of

⁶⁶ The cinematic trope of the Southerner going to the United States is further reinforced at this time by the American film industry, which as far back as the silent era showed Italian immigration as mainly Southern Italian migration. The world-wide success of *The Godfather*, dir. Francis Ford Coppola (1972), consolidated the idea, and made it an easily recognizable trope in world cinema.

⁶⁷ Fusco, "Il mio film ad un alto costo umano."

⁶⁸ Bignardi, "Emigranti, faccendieri, gli albanesi siamo noi."

Fascism to tell their multiple suppressed stories after the war? And given the vilification of the new immigrants by popular media in the late 1980s and early 1990s, what better way to show that they were more likely to be victims than aggressors in this clash of civilizations than by highlighting their subaltern position? However, past the initial point of contestation, the repeated victimization of such constituencies creates different effects from those initially intended, particularly in relation to changing global and historical realities.⁶⁹

In fact, it is my claim that despite the progressive intentions of Italian Cinema of Immigration, its trope of resemblance fails because it got entangled in the re-emergence of certain structures of modernity, binary oppositions deployed to re-assert certain aspects of Italian identity. According to Nicola Mai, “it can be argued that in the 1990s, because of the collapse of the previous political and moral order, and of the pressures exerted by the process of a construction of a European cultural and political identity, Italy re-imagined itself in relation to new others by redeploying the symbolic dichotomies and oppositions that have been shaping its national identity since the very beginning: North/South, Europe/Africa, Christian/Non-Christian, developed/backwards.”⁷⁰

Although Mai’s argument is specific to the representation of Albanian immigration in Italian news media in the 1990s, his observations are applicable to Italian culture at large, and resonate with European responses to immigration from the global south in the 1980s and 1990s.⁷¹ Furthermore, this process is also applicable to the post-WWII era and the period of unification.⁷² The collapse of previous political orders, and the pressure to construct a national identity within the existing symbolic hierarchies of power, is why in the post-WWII era the heterogeneous narratives of Italian migration are replaced with simple narratives of southern migration, and why during the Risorgimento southern Italians are compared with Africans by their own compatriots. In both cases, a “Modern,” European identity for Italy is forged through the

⁶⁹ Though ultimately the normalizing forces of modernity subsumed (or silenced) the voices of Neorealism and the progressive intentionality of ICI, the process was not the same, as the position of the players in question were quite different. In Neorealism, subaltern Italians spoke for themselves and through intellectuals, who, despite their privileged position, shared in the experience of having survived WWII and fascism. Italian Cinema of Immigration, as a cinema made by “native” Italians about immigrants, lacks the internal resistance towards the essentialization of experience, the centrifugal dispersal of energy that springs from a subject who has a personal investment in the story that is being told. That energy belongs to the accented cinema of Ferzan Özpetek, Rachid Benhadj, Marcello Bivona, Mohsen Melliti, Fred Kuwornu, and Dagwawi Yimer (to name a few). For more on accented Italian cinema, see chapter four “Accented Italian Cinema,” in my “Picturing Color in Italian Cinema” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2015). Other helpful texts about migrant filmmakers are Parati, *Migration Italy*; Leonardo De Franceschi, ed., *L’Africa in Italia. Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano*, Studi postcoloniali di cinema e media 1 (Rome: Aracne, 2013). For more on the limits of ICI films, see David Forgacs, “African Immigration on Film: Pumarò and the Limits of Vicarious Representation,” in *Media and Migration: Constructions of Mobility and Difference*, ed. Russell King and Nancy Wood (New York: Routledge, 2001), 71–82; Derek Duncan, “Italy’s Postcolonial Cinema and Its Histories of Representation,” *Italian Studies* 63/2 (Fall 2008): 195–211, doi:10.1179/007516308X344351.

⁷⁰ Nicola Mai, “Myths and Moral Panics: Italian Identity and the Media Representation of Albanian Immigration,” in *The Politics of Recognising Difference: Multiculturalism Italian Style*, ed. R. D. Grillo and Jeff C. Pratt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 88–89.

⁷¹ There is a lot of literature regarding the rise of nationalism in different European countries and the essentialist portrayal of immigrants during the period. For a quick overview of how the Italian response (from both Left and Right) fit within the larger European context, see Cole, *The New Racism in Europe*.

⁷² Nelson Moe’s *The View from Vesuvius* does an excellent job at tracing the intersection of Italy’s changing position in the world order and the rise of the North/South dichotomy as one of the mechanism that structures this new modernity. Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question*, Studies on the History of Society and Culture 46 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 14.

symbolic condemnation of part of itself by labeling it “Southern,” “African,” “non-Christian,” and “backward,” which simultaneously shows that it knows the difference between “Us” and “Them” and acknowledges that there are parts of the national self that are not quite (at least, not yet) up to par. Therefore, to compare the new immigrant to parts of the national self that are stereotyped as not quite up to par is to perpetuate a cycle of victimization.

Furthermore, the continual victimization and *southernization* of the migrant marginalizes the southerner as well; it places both “outside” of the inside: outside of modernity, outside of economic wellness, outside of the national boundaries, outside of all the privileged spaces that are occupied by the Italian/Western subject. It would be easy to project this process as a linear cause and effect projection, where the latest addition to the equation is but its latest result: the Southern Question informs the figure of the Italian migrant which in turn informs the new immigrant. However, the process delineating the inside and outside is best understood as a constant adaptation to maintain its relational value, a cyclical and reciprocal process where each new element not only draws from the process already in motion, but adds to it. To that end, the comparison between the new immigrant and the stereotype of the southern migrant not only compounds the estrangement of the new immigrant, but also that of the southerner and the south itself as the negative connotations associated with the cycle of immigration.

The double estrangement of the migrant and the southerner is made possible by the logic that animates the binary oppositions of modernity, a logic that defines “progress” through a “flattening of every civilization on a single temporal scale” which places North/West as the sole point of reference, and “by positioning the West as the necessary destination of all progress, labels as regressive every alternative to the dominant form of life.”⁷³ This is the reason why, according to philosopher Franco Cassano, the (global) South’s subaltern position has been articulated through different figurations that place it as an eternal “*non-ancora*,” or “not yet,” as existing “solely in the perspective of becoming other, of escaping horrified from itself to imitate the North with a delay of twenty or one hundred years, and thus probably never [to actually become].”⁷⁴ In the specific case of southern Italy, Cassano points out, it is often imagined simultaneously as a “tourists’ paradise and as mafia nightmare,” a figuration that simultaneously places the Italian south outside of the law while the insidious rustic paradise places it outside of modernity.⁷⁵

Even *Pummarò*, a film with strong structural affinities to Rossellini’s *Paisà*, and therefore to a film that predates the stereotypical films of the 1960s and 1970s, shows certain aspects of this logic. As previously described, the film is broken down into three narrative segments that focus on the lives of migrants in the three major parts of Italy: south, center, and north. After arriving in Verona, Kwaku finds work in a factory smelting ore and starts attending Italian classes for immigrants. The topic of discussion of the two lessons is the concept of time, or more specifically how “African time” differs from “European time.” In the first lesson, Kwaku is brought into a classroom where the teacher, Eleonora, is questioning her African students about why people are late for appointments, presumably because some students habitually arrive late to class. After the initial introductions, Eleonora resumes her class by addressing the Italian woman who brought Kwaku to the classroom, stating, “Well Giuseppina, I was discussing the fact that, evidently, we Europeans have a different concept of time from theirs. And since I’m well

⁷³ Franco Cassano, *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean*, ed. Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012). See Prologue, XXXIX, XLI.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, XXXV.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

acquainted with my concept of time, I would like to know yours.” At this point the camera has stopped panning and rests on a medium close-up of Kwaku’s face as he listens to the off-screen conversation between Eleonora and a student who responds, “You are right, I’m sorry for being late.”

While Kwaku is listening, the camera cuts to a short sequence of shots of Kwaku at the factory, learning his new craft and getting habituated to his new work environment. After this, we cut back to the classroom on another day, where an exchange between a student, Eleonora, and Kwaku ensues:

Isidoro: We measure time in mornings, afternoons, and evenings. It is not like here, with its hours, minutes, and seconds.

Eleonora: What you are saying is that your concept of time is more human.

Isidoro: Yes, more human. *He looks at his watch.* Now I have to go because...

Eleonora: Because you have to put your kids to bed. Ciao Isidoro...

Turning to Kwaku Eleonora asks:

Eleonora: Do you feel the same way?

Kwaku: No, it’s not like that—what I mean is that we are here because *down there*, those clocks that only know mornings, afternoons, and evenings, mark the time of the past, the time of our medieval ages, which never ends.

Eleonora: So you like our clocks then?

Kwaku: Not at all, but here, time goes on.

In this exchange, certain positions are being taken by “we Europeans” in relation to the African students, whose diverse origins are superficially acknowledged during the sequence, but not enough to complicate the implied notion of a single “African time.” This dichotomy is further reinforced by the way the film weaves the shots of the classroom with those at the (Northern Italian) factory, juxtaposing the sounds and sights of one against the other. The sequence in the factory is filled mostly with the noise of machinery, of kilns melting metal, of industry, with very little conversation. Its action is that of men working, of pushing and pulling, of physical activity. The sequence of the classroom is one of a small group of people sitting around a table, talking about “African” time while a non-diegetic song plays in the background. The song runs throughout the film as a motif, and it is a piece of music that predominantly features a choir of melancholic voices repeated chanting the same phrase in an unknown (presumably African) language, punctuated with simple drum beats along the chorus. In other words, it is “African music.”⁷⁶ The sequence of interweaving shots sets up a symbolic blind alley, whereby the African migrant exists “in the perspective of becoming” modern, “escaping horrified” the medieval past of Africa, in order to become part of the north through industrial labor (and in the particular case of Kwaku, through a romantic relationship with Eleonora), a transformation never to be successfully achieved.

A comparison with the new immigrants from the global south thus compounds the peripheral position of the South as well, insofar as these immigrants are already perceived as moving, living, and thriving outside of the law, and as subjects that come from a much more

⁷⁶ It is worth noting that the music was originally composed by Lucio Dalla and Mauro Malavasi. For more on the music of *Pummarò*, see Forgacs, “African Immigration on Film.”

“primitive” world where superstition and under-industrialization is the norm. In fact, it is this last point, the “primitive” aspect, that is the most insidious ideological work of the formulation “they are as we once were.” The trope pretends to create a bridge between the Italian audience and the immigrant subject based upon commonly shared experiences of migration, of suffering, but it does so through a temporal displacement of such experiences that make the immigrant a “*non-ancora*” subject. It traps the new immigrant in a historical bubble of Italy’s past every time a director, writer, or critic compares the immigrants with those Italians that left “long ago,” pushing the immigrant to a fixed position in a conceptual orbit that can never occupy the center—or the present.

A great example of this process is found at the end of *Lamerica* through an element that Amelio himself called “il meccanismo del vecchio albanese-italiano” [“the mechanism of the old Albanian-Italian”].⁷⁷ The mechanism refers to the character of Spiro/Michele, a now elderly, senile Sicilian who came to Albania as a young soldier during the Fascist invasion of that country. When Italy withdrew from Albania, Michele was left behind, and in order to escape persecution by the new communist regime, he adopted an Albanian identity which he kept all of his life. At the end of the film, he is seen aboard one of the familiar ships, overcrowded with Albanian refugees, which arrived in Puglia in the early 1990s. However, due to his senility, while he is on the boat he thinks he is still a young soldier at the end of WWII, and that he is aboard a ship full of Italian emigrants heading to New York. Upon seeing Gino, a fellow Sicilian down on his luck, he calls him over and starts talking to him, but given Gino’s lack of verbal or affective response, Spiro/Michele’s words turn into a soliloquy:

Come here. Sit down. I’m so happy you are on board too. We can travel together. How are you? We’ve both been very unlucky, but we have to keep heart. Have you seen all these people? I didn’t think so many would get on board, but America is a big place! Some have brought their families, but Giovanni is too young. The trip would be too much for him. For Rosa too. She’s very delicate. She always has a fever... Paisà, can you speak American? I can hardly speak Italian. Do you think we’ll find jobs anyway?... I’m tired, but I want to be awake when we reach New York.

The soliloquy and the character’s double identity as Italian and Albanian implicitly reinforce the analogy between the voyage of those Albanian refugees and the voyages made by Italians immediately after WWII. He is supposed to be the embodiment of “they are as we once were,” or in Amelio’s words, “Gli albanesi siamo noi, gli italiani” [“We Italians are the Albanians”].⁷⁸ The problem lies in the fact that though Michele is an Italian, he is specifically, and above all else, a southern Italian. If his story is an easily recognizable one, it is because it relies on the stereotype of the southern migrant leaving for the United States: poor, hungry (Spiro/Michele carries bread in his pocket), uneducated, and unable to speak proper Italian, traveling on board a ship bound for New York. His story is meant to be their story, and as the film switches back and forth among Spiro/Michele, Gino, and the Albanian refugees, the visual similarities of their physical and psychological state is established: disheveled, unshaven, tired, but hopeful.

The ship, however, never reaches the shores of Italy/New York. Instead, the image fades to white and the title of the film, *Lamerica*, appears on the screen in blue. It is as if, for the

⁷⁷ Fusco, “Vargas Llosa, ti sfido.”

⁷⁸ Fusco, *Ibid.*

immigrant and the Southerner, “Lamerica” exists only in dreams, only *in potentia*, never to be achieved. This position is implicitly espoused by Italian Cinema of Immigration in the 1990s and in the first decade of the new millennium, as it insists on presenting all phenomena of migration as a perennial contact zone where migrants of all types are in a constant state of arriving without actually getting there. This formulation allows the central Italian subject to disavow the associations that come with the word “migrant” by removing himself completely from the analogy. The trope does not claim that “you are as I am now,” but rather shifts all the things that the “migrant” could be on to the southerner, and into the past. This move may be deemed necessary not only because the word “migrant” evokes notions of victimization or victimhood, of neediness, unemployment, deprivation, and poverty, but also, more importantly, because it is antithetical to the modernity envisioned by post-industrialized states. The very proximity of this object/subject is a point of anxiety for a country that has not forgotten its previous status as “*l’italietta*.” In the postcolonial, capitalistic, economic landscape of globalization, the free movement of capital and merchandise is highly desired, but not manual labor; and the direction in which capital, merchandise, and manual labor flow through a nation’s borders determines the nation’s position within the existing economic world order.

Therefore, Italian Cinema of Immigration of the 1990s and early 2000s, which employed the tropes of neorealism to secure its claims, did not, despite its intentions, provide a progressive and inclusive narrative for the new immigrants from the global south. Instead, these films were based on (and in turn promoted) a recurrent nightmare in Italian culture, one that insists upon a symbolic hierarchy between the North and the South, between Europe and the “underdeveloped” world. Perhaps in its first instantiation, the trope could be considered useful as it created a symbolic meeting place, a *spazio d’incontro*, between immigrants and Italians, but its continual repetition in Italian cinema without any real elaboration, without further complication, reduced it to nothing more than a cliché at best and a reiteration of the Southern Question at worst.

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Chi l'ha visto?

Il colore dell'odio. Directed by Pasquale Squitieri. 1989.

Come Home and Meet My Wife. Directed by Mario Monicelli. 1975.

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Delitto al ristorante cinese. Directed by Bruno Corbucci. 1981.

Delitto d'amore. Directed by Luigi Comencini. 1974.

A due passi dal confine. Directed by Gianni Vernuccio. 1961.

Emigrantes. Directed by Aldo Fabrizi. 1949.

The Fiancés. Directed by Ermanno Ormi. 1963.

Figli di Annibale. Directed by Davide Ferrario. 1998.

Flatfoot in Africa. Directed by Steno. 1978.

Flatfoot on the Nile. Directed by Steno. 1980.

Fuga in francia. Directed by Mario Soldati. 1948.

Giarabub. Directed by Goffredo Alessandrini. 1942.

Il giorno dell'Assunta. Directed by Nino Russo. 1977.

Un giorno in pretura.

The Girl with a Pistol. Directed by Mario Monicelli. 1968.

The Godfather. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola 1972.

Golden Door. Directed by Emanuele Crialese. 2006.

La grande aurora. Directed by Giuseppe Maria Scotese. 1947.

Il grande appello. Directed by Mario Camerini. 1936.

Il grido della terra. Directed by Duilio Coletti. 1949.

I magliari. Directed by Francesco Rosi. 1959.

I soliti ignoti. Directed by Mario Monicelli. 1958.

Io confesso.

An Italian in America. Directed by Alberto Sordi. 1967.

Lady Liberty. Directed by Mario Monicelli. 1971.

Lamerica. Directed by Gianni Amelio. 1994.

The Last Desperate Hours. Directed by Giorgio Stegani. 1974.

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Little Funny Guy. Directed by Pasquale Campanile. 1973.

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My Name is Rocco Papaleo. Directed by Ettore Scola. 1971.

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Pane e cioccolata. Directed by Franco Brusati. 1974.

Passaporto Rosso. Directed by Guido Brignone. 1934.
Pummarò. Directed by Michele Placido. 1990.
Pure as a Lily. Directed by Franco Rossi. 1976.
Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti. Directed by Marco Tullio Giordana. 2005.
Ricomincio da tre. Directed by Massimo Troisi. 1981.
Riso amaro. Directed by Giuseppe De Santis. 1949.
Rocco e i suoi fratelli. Directed by Luchino Visconti. 1960.
Rome Open City. Directed by Roberto Rossellini. 1945.
Scorched Skin. Directed by Giuseppe Fina. 1962.
The Seduction of Mimi. Directed by Lina Wertmüller. 1972.
Uno sguardo dal ponte. Directed by Sidney Lumet. 1962.
Sotto la croce del sud. Directed by Guido Brignone. 1938.
Il suo destino. Directed by Enrico Guazzoni. 1938.
Telefono giallo.
Terra di mezzo. Directed by Matteo Garrone. 1996.
Terra Straniera. Directed by Sergio Corbucci. 1952.
Tesoro mio. Directed by Giulio Paradisi. 1979.
Il toro. Directed by Carlo Mazzacurati. 1994.
Trevico-Torino... Viaggio Fiat-Nam. Directed by Ettore Scola. 1973.
Vesna va veloce. Directed by Carlo Mazzacurati. 1996.
A Virgin Named Mary. Directed by Sergio Nasca. 1975.
While There's War There's Hope. Directed by Alberto Sordi. 1974.
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Songs

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