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Picturing Color in Italian Cinema

By

Luis Avy Valladares

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Committee in charge:

Professor Barbara Spackman, Chair

Professor Mia Fuller

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Abstract

Picturing Color in Italian Cinema

by

Luis Avy Valladares

Doctor of Philosophy in Italian Studies

Designated Emphasis in Film Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Barbara Spackman, Chair

This dissertation examines the engagement of post-1989 Italian cinema with (im)migration from the global south and multiculturalism in Italy within Europe. Focusing on a selection of films from 1990 to 2010, I argue that Italian cinema of immigration is constructed and maintained through constant erasures of Italian histories and desires. As films of social engagement, cinema of immigration is about the “here” and the “now,” namely Italian problems after the end of the Cold War. However, it also operates within older and broader frameworks, engaging different aspects of Italian/European society, history and culture. This dissertation unfolds those aspects and articulates connections between Italian cinema of immigration, Italy’s misremembered colonial past, neorealism, Europe’s project of supra-national integrations, and economic networks of exchange.

Despite the fact that the cinema of immigration has become one of the most recognizable ‘sub-genres’ of Italian cinema since Michele Placido’s *Pummarò* (1990), scholarship on this subject is relatively recent and still taking shape. For that reason, the first half of my dissertation examines the history of Italian cinema, and engages the points of contact between the mobility of people and the moving image. In my introductory chapter, I historicize the representation of racialized others by focusing on certain key moments of interplay between the spectacular and the real, scenes that demonstrate the endurance of Italian orientalist ideologies. I then focus on the rhetorical move of equating immigrants from the global south with Italian migrants from the postwar era, and argue that even though the analogy was mobilized to create a sense of empathy, those representations are actually based on pre-existing models of alienation and discrimination. The second half of my research looks to Europe and beyond, and situates Italian cinema of immigration within synchronic networks. For example, my third chapter looks at the global circulation of the cinema of migration, and shows that seeming peripheral networks of distribution are, in fact, central to its existence. My final chapter compares English, French and German accented cinemas, which is the production of first and second-generation immigrant filmmakers, in order to postulate the existence of an Italian accented cinema and delineate its possible, though constantly changing, and contours.

A MIS MADRES:

ALTAGRACIA GARCIA RIVERA

JOSEFINA VALLADARES GARCIA

IRMA FLORES PINEDA

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xiii
CHAPTER 1: SPECTACULAR REALITIES, REALISTIC SPECTACLES	1
Historical Epics	3
Spectacular Realities	8
Spectacle, Spectacle, Spectacle	15
Reframing the Historical Epic	16
Exceptional <i>Faccette</i> and <i>Facce</i>	24
Conclusion	27
CHAPTER 2: “THEY ARE AS WE ONCE WERE”?	31
<i>Il colore dell’odio</i> and <i>Tomato</i>	33
Invoking Neorealism and Its Cultural Legacy	35
They Are As We Once Were	39
A Template to Follow	48
Misremembered History	55
They Are As <i>They</i> Once Were	67
Filmography	71
CHAPTER 3: FROM CINEMA OF IMMIGRATION TO MIGRANT CINEMA	73
Evolving Topographies and Cultural Capital	74
Italian Markets: Perennial Struggle	87
Landscape of Films on Immigration	91
Voyage through the Festival Circuit	96
Epilogue: Beyond the Festival, Digital Media	111
CHAPTER 4: ACCENTED ITALIAN CINEMA	117
Accented Cinema	118
Cinema of Duty	120
Black British, Beur and Turkish German Cinema	123
Italian Cinema of Immigration	128
Accented Italian Cinema	133
Marcello Bivona: Layering Here and There	134
Rachid Benhadj: Performing Cosmopolitanism	138
Mohsen Melliti: Relocating the Sites of Struggle	143
Ferzan Özpetek: Autobiographical Inscription	146
Epilogue: The Return of Cinema of Duty?	155
BIBLIOGRAPHY	159



## INTRODUCTION

I never wanted to be an Italian professor, or get a PhD in Italian. What I always wanted was to become an English professor, and teach at some fancy liberal arts college in the North East, with an office full of mahogany or oak furniture and bookcases, even though I really did not know why those particular types of wood were the “appropriate” kind to have. I dreamed of teaching Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Frost while wearing a blazer with elbow patches. It was a good dream.

Somewhere along the line, though, I made some turns that made me face certain truths about my social reality that I had been avoiding, which in turn led me to where I am today. I am sure that this process happened gradually, but a particular event comes to mind that surely steered me into this path. While I was pursuing an English degree as an undergraduate at UCLA, I decided to do an Italian minor. After studying in England for one summer, I took advantage of my Italian minor and signed up to do a full year abroad in Italy, my last year as an undergraduate. As part of the program, students were required to complete a summer of intensive language courses in Siena. I was an advanced student, and placed accordingly in the tiered system of courses. I remember that one day, another student said something to me that upset deeply: “Avy, your Italian has a very strong Spanish accent.” I felt insulted, and I was furious. Later that day I met with Cinzia, an Italian friend I had made soon after my arrival to Siena, and asked her if a Spanish accent was an ugly accent in Italian. She laughed, and assured me that to her Mediterranean ears, my Italian sounded accented, but “normal,” and preferable to any Anglo-Saxon accent.

For years I had worked on my “normal American” accent, attempting to erase any traces of Spanish. Part of my English professor fantasy, I believe, was a function of my anxieties as a second-generation immigrant to the United States. To be an English professor, to speak fluidly the language of Shakespeare and Wordsworth, was to master that sense of not belonging. At that point in my life, I felt that I had succeeded in fitting in, in not standing out as a foreigner in my American home. My brown skin was not an issue in Southern California, where the heterogeneity of the population made it so that the accent with which one spoke English, more so than skin color, determined who was an American D.O.C and who was a FOBO. In hindsight, I realize that my peer’s comment was not offensive, or meant to be for that matter, but it did help me understand that the configuration of the race/ethnic politics of the United States did not transferred to Italy, or other countries for that matter. It also reminded me that no matter where I was, my Mexican heritage was always going to be with me.

That year in Italy was highly instructive for me. I shared university housing with Italians from different regions of the peninsula, with international students from Ghana and Albania, and Albanian students who had grown up in Italy. My roommate while in Italy was one of the later, and as I got to know him better over the course of that year I started to see aspects of my life in his. What he had to put up with growing up in Italy resonated with my own experiences as a second generation Mexican American, and though it was upsetting at times, the distance between myself, and his experiences in Italy, made it possible for me to hear and see with a certain amount of objectivity. I never intended back then to study the representation of immigrants in Italian cinema, but within the Italian context, I found a forum in which to investigate many of the questions about identity, nation formation, immigration, language, etcetera, that I had not



allowed myself to pursue within my own cultural context. I am well aware that our experiences are not exchangeable, that the specific power relations my friend negotiated in Italy are not the same as the ones I negotiated in Southern California, but there are enough commonalities to make me feel that as I learned about him, I was learning about myself.

This dissertation is, in a way, an oblique response to my own feelings of alienation.

More specifically, this dissertation explores the post-Cold War cinematic production that engages with the social phenomenon of immigration and multiculturalism in Italy. I take as a point of departure films whose main focus at the thematic level is immigration into Italy from the global south, and follow up on certain questions that emerge as I study them: how are the immigrants represented? Are there any antecedents? How are such films marketed? Who is making them? I then bring into the discussion films that by all customary criteria are considered “Italian” productions, but are directed by an immigrant from the global south – that is someone who resides permanently in Italy but whose birth or cultural formation generated from outside the Italian national borders. The purpose of this exploration is to discern what constellation of relationships this body of films engenders around the bi-focal points of the nation and the other, a constellation that includes Italy’s misremembered colonial past, Neorealism, Europe’s project of a supra-national belonging, and the role of film as an economic product.

Within the larger European context, this project is by no means new. As a matter of fact, in France, Great Britain and Germany the discourse surrounding film and the legacy of post-World War II immigration has had time not just to create categories and genres, but to challenge them as well in the pursuit of ever-more complex relationships that escape essentialization and discursive ghettos. These complex categories, like *Beur* within the French context, are often born out of the second or subsequent generations of immigrants, and usually serve as a sharp spade to forcefully break out of anonymity and claim one’s imposed difference, as a space from which to speak. And yet no sooner has the invisible become visible, the unheard become audible, that the relational structure that governed their interaction changes, and the very tools that opened up the silence have to be discarded, lest they too prove to be mechanisms of erasure. Therefore, in the process of mapping the ever-changing and fluid relationships between the immigrant and mainstream society it is important to take into account the *formation* as well as the *disuse* of categories such as *Beur*, Black-British and Turkish-German cinema, and to regard them as provisional and always specific to certain historical discursive practices.

Unfortunately, in the case of Italy, as Alessandro Dal Lago points out, there has been a discursive delay.<sup>1</sup> This is due in part to the comparatively late arrival of mass immigration into Italy and the manner in which it has taken place. As part of the reconstruction efforts after World War II and the following economic boom, the governments of France and Germany actively recruited workers from other European countries like Italy, Portugal, Turkey and Greece. France also recruited from its former colonies as well like Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Even though the initial demographics of this work force was made up primarily of single male workers recruited on a temporary basis for unskilled labor, over time and as a result of changes in governmental policy they became the bedrock of today’s large ethnic minorities in Germany and France. This was possible because, first of all, the mass recruitment of workers from a limited number of countries allowed the formation of large blocks of relatively homogeneous

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<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-persone: L’esclusione dei migranti in una società globale*, Nuova ed (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2006).

communities. Second of all, over time state policies favored integration over continual immigration and thus encouraged family reunification, such as the *regroupement familial* of 1974 in France. I do not intend to claim that the guest worker programs were the absolute origin, or even the only immigration path that explains the existence of all the “ethnic” communities in France and Germany, but I do contend that the existence of state sanctioned mass immigration to those countries allowed not just the formation of permanent, legal and recognized migrant communities, but also the emergence of discursive practices associated with multiculturalism decades before it occurred in Italy.

Italy, on the other hand, did not receive any discernable number of immigrants from the global south until the late 1960s, and it never experienced any systematic and sanctioned mass immigration in the same scale. With plenty of southern labor to meet the needs of its northern industry, Italy did not engage in official guest worker agreements with any country, and thus the number of immigrants coming into Italy in the 1960s and 1970 was relatively small. Furthermore, Jacqueline Andall’s work shows that a great percentage of the immigrants coming into Italy at that point were women, often recruited from Catholic countries like Cape Verde and the Philippines through the Catholic Church in order to work as domestic servants.<sup>2</sup> Since they were few in number and believed to be filling a crucial role in the family as Italian women joined the work force in mass, and since they were Catholic and enclosed in the private sphere of the home, they were not considered a social threat. Overall, given its low rate as well as its predominantly domestic and gendered nature, immigration was not an issue of wide social and political concern during the 1960s and 1970s.

The economic crisis of the 1980s and the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union triggered an overall shift in the immigration pattern into Europe, particularly in Italy. It was at this time that Italy became a receiving country for increasing numbers of unsolicited male migrants from Africa as well as from Eastern Europe. Their geographical position and the creation of a unified European border through the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 and the Schengen Treaty of 1995 made the Italian eastern and southern shores a continual “contact zone” between Europe and Europe-bound migrants. While the number of immigrants who decided to stay in Italy is comparatively low, the iconographic valence of the “Italian immigrant” became quite charged, particularly after the 1991 exodus of Albanians into Apulia. Needless to say, the perception of the immigrant in Italy went from a benign, if barely visible entity, to a malignant threat by the late 1980s. By then, immigration moved from the invisibility of the margins to the center of political discourse in a manner perhaps disproportionate to the actual influx of immigration or the actual size of the immigrant community in Italy.

The aforementioned discursive delay is even more salient when it comes to film. Symbolically speaking, 1990 marks the year in which mass immigration from the global south emerged as a discourse in Italy. It was that year in which Italy passed the Martelli law, the first comprehensive immigration and refugee law that addressed the current flows of immigration, and aimed to bring Italy into compliance with European standards. In some ways, this marked the official entrance of the topic of immigration into political and social discourse. Newspapers and political rhetoric were perhaps the first symbolic networks in which this topic circulated. The social sciences followed soon after, producing the first academic studies of the phenomenon,

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<sup>2</sup> Jacqueline Andall, “Cape Verdean Women on the Move: ‘Immigration Shopping’ in Italy and Europe,” *Modern Italy* 4, no. 2 (1999): 241–57, doi:10.1080/13532949908454832.

such as Donald Carter's *States of Grace* and Jeffrey Cole's *The New Racism in Europe*.<sup>3</sup> Within the Italian context, Maria Immacolata Maciotti and Enrico Pugliese are some of the earliest social scientists to study the new phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> Around the same time in the late 1990s, the first academic works on the literary production of persons of color emerged as well. As early as 1998, Armando Gnisci, Professor of Comparative Literature at La Sapienza University, engaged critically the emerging works of Italy's newest residents.<sup>5</sup> Scholarship on Italian cinema of immigration emerged in the 1990s as well, but in the form of articles. This trend continued into the new millennium, where sometimes chapters of texts were dedicated to the topic, but not monographs.<sup>6</sup> Finally, in the summer of 2009 a full monograph on cinema of immigration was announced. I was in Italy at the time, and I bought a copy as soon as it was on sale at the bookstores. Unfortunately, Cincinelli's *I migranti nel cinema italiano* has no academic rigor and is nothing more than the accumulation of film summaries and reviews from newspapers.<sup>7</sup> The first monograph on the representation of persons of color that I know of is Shelleen Greene's *Equivocal Subjects*, soon followed by Leonardo De Franceschi's *L'Africa in Italia*.<sup>8</sup> May this dissertation be the third one.

In 1990, Michele Placido's *Pummarò* screened at the Cannes Film Festival, thus initiating a new phase of the Italian cinematic representation of the racialized other. Even though the Parondi family in *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* were called "africani" when they arrived with all of their possessions on a two wheel cart at the Milanese projects, it was obvious that it is meant symbolically and within the unresolved discourse of the Southern Question. Yet the use of "africani" already shows that the black body is the symbol *par excellence* of unquestionable foreignness. Scenes in films like Lattuada's *Anna* (1951)<sup>9</sup> or Antonioni's *L'eclisse* (1962)<sup>10</sup> mobilize black bodies and artifacts associated with Africa as a spectacle to be viewed, as some folkloric evidence of lands and people that are far, far away from the Italian everyday experience. Over time, as these racialized bodies start to inhabit the national territory their

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Martin Carter, *States of Grace: Senegalese in Italy and the New European Immigration* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Jeffrey Cole, *The New Racism in Europe: A Sicilian Ethnography*, 107 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Articles on the topic emerged much earlier, such as Jacqueline Andall, "Women Migrant Workers in Italy," *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 15, no. 1 (1992): 41–48. However, Carter's and Cole's are two of the earliest monographs I know of.

<sup>4</sup> Enrico Pugliese, *Diario dell'immigrazione* (Rome: Edizioni associate, 1997); M. Immacolata Maciotti and Enrico Pugliese, *Gli immigrati in Italia*, 5 edizione (Rome: Laterza, 1998); Enrico Pugliese, *L'Italia Tra Migrazioni Internazionali E Migrazioni Interne*, 2. ed (Bologna: Il mulino, 2006); M. Immacolata Maciotti and Enrico Pugliese, *L'esperienza migratoria. Immigrati e rifugiati in Italia* (Roma: Laterza, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Armando Gnisci, *La Letteratura Italiana Della Migrazione* (Rome: Lilith, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*, Toronto Italian Studies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Sonia Cincinelli, *I Migranti Nel Cinema Italiano* (Rome: Kappa, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects: Between Italy and Africa -- Constructions of Racial and National Identity in the Italian Cinema* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012); Leonardo De Franceschi, ed., *L'Africa in Italia: Per Una Controistoria Postcoloniale Del Cinema Italiano*, 1. ed, Studi Postcoloniali Di Cinema E Media 1 (Roma: Aracne, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Silvia Mangano dancing to El Negro Zumbon as a Latin American/Caribbean band plays and dances with her. Moretti uses this particular scene in his film *Caro Diario* as he watches it on the TV screen and imitates Mangano's dance. Tellingly, Moretti said the following about the film: "quello era un film strano – c'era la Mangano che prima suona e poi balla in mezzo a..." without ever finishing the sentence, erasing the black bodies from his description of that scene.

<sup>10</sup> Monica Vitti performance at the apartment of an Englishwoman and after seeing a number of African artifacts, pictures and souvenirs on the wall. In a surreal scene, Vitti all of the sudden appears in black face dressed as a "native" African and dances around in a manner reminiscent of a Masai warrior.

representation changes, and they go from being evidence of something completely external to Italy to something that is within it, but not in any significant or disturbing way, and more often than not as a source of comedy, the butt of the joke. Verdone's *Acqua e sapone* (1983) is a good example of this unacknowledged and ignored development in the representation of racialized bodies, particularly as its plotline deals mainly with a type of foreignness that Italian cinema and its public has had a long history of engagement; the American tourist.

Placido's *Pummarò* puts the immigrant at the center of the narrative, as a social issue to be dealt with, and in a manner that is reminiscent of neorealist films. If the Parondi were called "africani" in 1962, in 1990 the African Kwaku is being likened to the southern migrant in his voyage that takes him from the south of Italy, to Rome, Turin, and ultimately Germany. Imbricating aspects of the southern question, Neorealism and the new immigrant from the global south soon becomes a common practice, not just on the production end, but on the reception one as well. Italian films in the 1990s, after the great success of *Cinema Paradiso* (1989) were infused with a nostalgic gaze towards the immediate post World War II era and the aesthetics of Neorealism, as demonstrated by films like *Mediterraneo*, *Il postino*, *L'uomo delle stelle*, *La vita è bella* and *Malèna*. Therefore, the neorealist bent of the early cinema of immigration can easily be understood within this context, and Amelio's *Lamerica* (1994) is a clear example of a film that willingly situates itself within this practice. And yet Italian immigration cinema carries this relationship much further and for a longer time than the rest of the industry. Tullio Giordana's much awaited film, *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* of 2005 may or may not have intentionally tried to evoke neorealist films like *Paisà*, or even *Pummarò*, but the reviews it received did not fail to read it in such a way. The analogies that are clearly found in *Pummarò* (1990), *Lamerica* (1994), *Articolo 2* (1994) and *Terra di mezzo* (1996) are readily accepted by the critics and propagated until it becomes a full discourse that sees its theoretical culmination in Graziella Parati's *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (2005). Parati's work takes the analogy of immigration from the global south and Italy's history of internal and external migration, and conceptualizes it into what she calls "relational identity", thus mooring the identity of the immigrant as well as the native Italian in the production of a reciprocal gaze.

This dissertation disentangles some of the entwining of these discourses and denaturalizes their relationship in such a way as to establish the rules that govern it and the ideological currents that underpin it, without losing sight of the multiple and contradictory effects it produces. For example, to speak of Neorealism in relation to these films is to speak of a 'realist' aesthetic that accompanies most of these films, particularly those of the 1990s. Now, the questions I pursue are these: why use 'realist aesthetics' when dealing with immigrants? What is gained and what is lost? When does this practice start to be discontinued and why? Speaking in the most general terms, there is a cinematic tradition that proclaims a natural link between the 'real' and the image, one that promises that the train you see pulling into the station is indeed a real train, the proof of which is the very indexicality of the image you are seeing. Of course, that very same film of 50 seconds also shows a lot about the manipulation of the image, thus pointing as well to the other side of the coin and to another discursive vein in the history of cinema, one that shows that every cinematic image is constructed, manipulated and thus 'un-realist'

For example, the claim to indexical reality of early cinema is couched within certain cultural practices that are heavily invested in the spectacularization of reality. Combined with larger structures of Orientalism, this practice of continually chasing after spectacular realities to capture and project lead to some of the first representation of persons of color in cinema. The

Lumière start the trend, but it would not end there, as travel/exploration films became its own genre. Within the emerging Italian film industry, the pioneer Roberto Omegna would capture and project some the first cinematic representation of Black people, providing a bridge between broad European representation practices and historical epics of the 1910s.

If the broader mimetic tradition in cinema makes it an ‘obviousness’ to use realist aesthetics to portray the social phenomenon of immigration, the tradition of Neorealism within Italian cinema further reinforces this choice. According to Carlo Celli’s *New Guide to Italian Cinema* (2007), more than by any single stylistic element, Neorealism is best described as an *attitude*, an attitude that “includes a strong desire to uncover the truth about the widespread suffering in Italy, and to identify with the plight of the victims” (44). To think of Neorealism in those terms means to consider it not only as a cinematic aesthetic that is realist, minimalistic, with amateur actors and shot on location, but one that is inextricable from social engagement on the side of the marginalized. It is to create an irresistible model for the first Italian directors who wanted, out of a liberal/humanitarian impulse, to ‘uncover the truth’ about immigration in Italy in a way that identifies with the plight of the immigrant. From a purely cinematic perspective, this idea of *revealing* and *uncovering* fits quite well with Benjamin’s notion of the ‘optical unconscious’, as well as Shlovsky’s notion that the cinematic image has the power to remove an object from ‘the sphere of automatized perception’ and ‘lead us to a “vision” of this object rather than mere “recognition”’ of it (Schlovsky, 1918) .

But what is gained from this new “vision” of the previously unseen migrant, particularly as it relates to Neorealism? There are many answers to this question, but one in particular has been explored by directors as well as by critics and scholars who have worked on the subject. Mainly, it allows for an analogy to be built between Italy’s own past of e/migration and today’s Italian immigrants. For the most part this analogy has been developed and pursued towards positive ends as it seeks to expose commonalities of experience between the new immigrant and the Italians of yesterday. In the most positive light, this move tries to fight what is perceived as essentialized difference and as a way to cut off the fuel that motivates racist discourses. As mentioned earlier, Parati goes as far as inextricably linking the subjectivity of the Italian spectator with that of the immigrant protagonist through a structure of reciprocal gazes. However, I can’t help but wonder what is lost by comparing the immigrant to the southern migrant. I am not denying that a connection or a commonality of experience exist between the two, or that it should not be established. As a matter of fact, I find Iain Chambers’ attempt to completely resituate Italy within a different set of spatio-temporal coordinates that bring to light Italy’s erased connection with the Mediterranean basin, very impressive. However, there are a few issues that arise out of entwining Neorealism, immigration and Italy’s marginalized population, particularly as they relates to the southern question.

One of the questions I am interested in is the possibility and/or impossibility of belonging if by analogy we cast the immigrant in the role of the Southerner, of the (so-called) “Terrone”. Even if in practice the southern regions of Italy were to become as prosperous as the northern ones, symbolically the southerner has been type-casted in the perennial role of the marginalized, of the outsider. While at the political level the influx of immigrant from the global south has served to fold the *Mezzogiorno* further into Italy, and to move Italy itself closer to Europe, on the silver screen the south still has a negative valence. If Celli’s interpretation of Neorealism as the cinema of all the marginalized people of Italy in the post-war period is correct, it is also true that over time the southern Italian has become its most iconic figure, thus allowing a slippage between the two. So if realist aesthetics, through the filter of Neorealism, is always focusing on

the margins of society, and if the southerner/immigrant is always there, then can they ever belong to the nation? And if they ever cross the event horizon that separates the nation from the margins, do they get swallowed up by the black hole of the nation's imperative to erase all difference? Perhaps the southern migrant, after a couple generations, can blend seamlessly – but what about the immigrant with his/her foreign tongue, foreign name and colored skin? How can belonging be structured cinematically without ignoring the embodied difference of the immigrant?

One way that has been adopted is to decentralize the issue of immigration and move the immigrant away from the socio-economic margins so that the issue of difference and identity can be accessed at different levels, as Mazzacurati's *La giusta distanza* (2007) and Archibugi's *Lezioni di volo* (2007) do. Mazzacurati's film imagines a long-time resident mechanic of Tunisian origins in a small northern town, while Archibugi's film imagines a Roman teenage boy who was adopted from India by a well to do family. Both characters have important supporting roles in the films, but are not the main protagonists, and the narrative of the films does not revolve around their ethnicity or the issue of immigration *per se*. The effect this creates, however imperfect, is that their status as racialized other is neither erased nor treated as the main problem to be dealt with. However, that is not to say that their specifically marked ethnic foreignness has no influence on the film's narrative. Curry's Indian birth in *Lezioni di volo* is what motivates the voyage to India, thus setting the entire narrative in motion, and Hassan's Tunisian background looms invisibly as a possible (if only partial) explanation for his odd behavior. Thus both films try very hard to locate these racialized others in social relations that go beyond the contact zone, that attempt to imagine different configurations of identity markers but without forgetting the specificity of being an ethnic minority.

But is that enough?

All the early films of immigration cinema of 1990s, and some in the new millennium as well, centralize immigration in their plot as a social issue to be engaged. In doing so, these films perpetuate the image of the immigrant as being perennially in the first phase of immigration, continually caught in the “contact zone” between north and south, between Italian and foreigner. Over time the theme of immigration crosses over into other genres and into other aesthetic codes, at times decentralizing the act of immigration while still maintaining *the immigrant* in a central role as I just pointed out. For example, *La giusta distanza* is a mystery-thriller, *Lezioni di volo* is a coming of age film, *Lezioni di Cioccolato* (2007) and *Bianco e nero* (2008) are comedies and *La sconosciuta* (2006) is a film-noir. Yet there is still one thing in common between the older realist films that create an analogy between the foreign immigrant and Italian migrant, and the newer films that attempt to engage the immigrant on a new plane: mainly the subject position of the imagined audience.

The great majority of Italy's emerging cinema of immigration is “overwhelmingly the creating of Italian writers and directors rather than that of immigrant artists. Hence a decidedly Italian perspective marks the overall vision of the nation's changing demographic landscape that emerges in these films.”<sup>11</sup> The result of this fact is that the imagined audience in all of these films is (in the first case!) always an Italian audience, which is what undermines Parati's argument of relational identities. In its attempt to forge common ground between the immigrant and the Italian, the subjectivity of the immigrant becomes contingent on the gaze of the spectator. The danger of recognition as a pre-requisite for subjectivity looms in Parati's text, as a

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<sup>11</sup> Aine O'Healy, “Mediterranean Passages: Abjection and Belonging in Contemporary Italian Cinema,” *California Italian Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2010).

ghost in the background. Some of the films that actively engage with realist aesthetics and the discourse of Neorealism do not even hide this condition, but turn it into a caveat: both Amelio and Giordana openly stated that their films are about Italy since it would be impossible for them to appropriate the point of view of the immigrant subject. Thus the analogy created in Amelio's *Lamerica* between the Albanian migrants of 1991 and the Italian emigrants of the post war era, is really about the Italian cinematic heritage of Neorealism, the conditions of Italian emigrants in the past, and the Italian problem of immigration into Italy in the 1990s<sup>12</sup>. Perhaps Alessandro Dal Lago puts it best when he says, "when we speak of immigrants we really speak of ourselves in relation to immigrants."<sup>13</sup> This dynamic holds true even for films that don't mobilize an obvious analogy between immigrant and Italian, films like Munzi's *Saimir* (2004) where the protagonist is a second generation Albanian teenager trying to fit in – but even then the audience's gaze is never meant to align with his but with society at large that is relieved to see all the problems solved "neatly" at the end.

The issue of spectatorship that I have been tentatively approaching opens up questions of address within these films, questions mentioned by Derek Duncan but elaborated by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in their book *Unthinking Eurocentrism*: "Who is speaking through a film? Who is *imagined* as listening? Who is *actually* listening? And who is looking?"<sup>14</sup> If it is true that the imagined audience of Italian cinema of immigration is an Italian audience and not the immigrant community of Italy, it is also true that these films are rarely seen by a large percentage of the Italian population. The Italian box office has been dominated by foreign films and Italian comedies for the last three decades. In practice, this means that in any given year, the *cinapanettone* of the Christmas season will be viewed by more people, over a longer period of time, and across more platforms, than most films of *cinema d'impegno*, among which we find most films on immigration. Given the *a priori* anemic performance of most *film d'auteur*, if they are lucky enough to be exhibited in the first place, a lot of them premiere in the international film festival circuit in the hope of garnering enough cultural added value to be viable products in the national market.

Why these films are able to move at the film festival circuit and how they do so raises questions of Italy's place in the history of cinema, as well as questions concerning the expectations that are in place about its cinematic production. The prominence of Neorealism in the rather short history of cinema has given Italy both a claim to cinematic distinction as well as the burden of carrying forth such a legacy, a legacy that includes social engagement and realist aesthetics, among other attributes that constitute "proper" Italian cinema. One only needs to look at the program of any Italian film festival or Italian film series to see a bill filled with Neorealist/canonical films, or contemporary films that recall such legacy. These circumstances often benefit films about immigration, which more often than not meet the thematic and stylistic criteria set forth by Neorealism and its legacy, so that paradoxically the very films that are ignored at home are often taken as the quintessence of Italian cinema abroad. Thus, questions of market value, cinematic expectations, Neorealist aesthetics and the international film festival circuit meet to complicate any simple reading of Italian cinema of immigration. They force us to

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<sup>12</sup> Derek Duncan says of the Albanians in this film: "They are not there on their own account, or on their own terms, but are at best the trigger to collective memory" in "The Sight and Sound of Albanian Migration in Contemporary Italian Cinema", 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Dal Lago, *Non-Persone*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Ella Shohat, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Sightlines (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994).

engage the films at a level beyond the diegetic world of its narrative and compel us to think of films as mobile bodies that bear the traces of economic, historical and industry forces that are often ignored in film analysis.



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## Chapter 1: Spectacular Realities and Realistic Spectacles

“What Louis Lumière had in mind, was to bring the world to the world”  
- Bertrand Tavernier

Most studies of the visual representation of persons of color in Italian media, focus on the 1990s and the new millennium, for reasons that are quite easy to understand.<sup>1</sup> The effects of the long process of decolonization, and the end of the Cold War, led to massive immigration from Africa and Eastern Europe, changing the Italian social landscape in irrevocable ways. For the first time in its national history, and in spite of the fact that people had come to/through Italy for decades, the *Bel Paese* had to face the fact that it was not *only* a country of emigrants, but of immigrants as well.<sup>2</sup> What ensued is a symbolic war of images and narratives regarding the newcomers (“new Italians or invaders?”) and *italianità* itself, a war that is far from being over.

Of the many visual topoi that developed in the media regarding the new influx of immigrants, the perilous Mediterranean passage on the infamous “*carrete del mare*” became emblematic of this new Italian reality.<sup>3</sup> One of the earliest and most spectacular images of the 1990s, the “*carrete del mare*” became a common image in mass media outlets for at least a couple of reasons. On the one hand, the Mediterranean passage continued (and continues) to be

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<sup>1</sup> The terms subalterns use to call themselves, and the ones used by the mainstream to address its subalterns, are site of contestation and change over time. Currently, the preferred nomenclature in American scholarship is “persons of color,” a term I used to refer to the many immigrants from the global south that have come to Italy to live. It is a useful term given that Italy’s immigrant population, which has produced a second generation (and perhaps even a third), is extremely heterogeneous. However, early 1900s mobilized notions of “race” rather than ethnicity or culture, and so I will switch from “persons of color” to “racial others” whenever it is appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> Like most European countries, Italy engaged in the “scramble for Africa” at the end of the 1800s, establishing a military presence in the Horn of Africa in 1885. However, unlike other colonial powers, Italian colonial forces engaged in what is called “*madamismo*,” a colonial adaptation of pre-existing forms of contractual marriages, or concubinage, taking effect between a local woman and an Italian officer. Though *madamismo* is a complex issue, suffice it to note that Italo-Eritrean children often resulted from these unions, children that were at times recognized as Italian citizens due to the patrilineal nature of both Italian and Eritrean culture. Some of these children were brought back to Italy to live, their stories almost forgotten, until recently. Immigration not related to Italy’s colonial past started in the 1970s in small numbers. Please see Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds., *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed, *Timira. Romanzo meticcio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012); Jacqueline Andall, “Women Migrant Workers in Italy,” *Women’s Studies Int. Forum* 15, no. 1 (1992): 41–48.

<sup>3</sup> The “*carrette*” are impossibly overcrowded, and dangerously inadequate, boats used to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Sometimes these boats are abandoned to drift in the Mediterranean by unscrupulous traffickers, so that the Italian coast guard can save them as required by law. One of the earliest and best known films depicting the infamous “*carrette del mare*” is Gianni Amelio’s *Lamerica* (1994), a film that engages with the massive influx of Albanian immigrants into Italy after the collapse of the communist regime, echoing the arrival of the ship Vlora to Bari on August 8 1991, with over 20,000 Albanian refugees. The film explicitly recalls the annexation of Albania to the Kingdom of Italy during the Fascist era, and likens the Albanians refugees of the 1990s to the Italian emigrants who left for “*lamerica*” after WWII. The shock of so many refugees arriving at one time on the Vlora, plus the continual arrival of immigrants from the African coast on boats over the next two decades, has made the image of the “*carrette del mare*” a recurring trope in films dealing with immigration into Italy in the 1990s and the new millennium.

The scholarship that touches on the Mediterranean passing while discussing immigration into Italy is too numerous to cite. A good example of one that focuses on the trope of the “*carrette*” is Aine O’Healy, “Mediterranean Passages: Abjection and Belonging in Contemporary Italian Cinema,” *California Italian Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2010).

one of the many ways in which immigrants came to Italy, and on the other hand, the spectacular image of the crowded “carrette” is so symbolically saturated that it could be used and mobilized for multiple purposes. For scholars, the image has been a fruitful point of entry for various types of inquiries, exposing connections between immigration from the global south, fascism, Italian colonialism, the southern question, Italian emigration and *mediterraneità*. In turn, these historical linkages have prompted research into the representational practices of previous decades, from the silent era of historical epics, to the sexploitation films of the 1970s, with a particular emphasis on the fascist/colonial period.<sup>4</sup> What is slowly developing is a history of the representation of persons of color in Italian media, a history that still has many gaps as the focus tends to gravitate to the post-Cold War era and the *Ventennio nero* of the fascist regime.

In this chapter of my dissertation, I will fill in one of those gaps by focusing on the earliest period of Italian cinema, expanding the analytical reach of current scholarship on the silent era. Until now, when an article investigates the representation of persons of color in Italian silent films (of which there is only a handful), the inquiry typically begins with the historical epics, particularly Pastrone’s 1914 *Cabiria*. These studies tend to focus on the figure of Maciste, Pastrone’s Numidian slave, which they read in relation to a growing sense of nationalism at the turn of the century, and ultimately to the rise of fascism.<sup>5</sup> This approach is in line with Italian film historiography in general, which reads historical epics within very specific parameters of time and space, namely the history of Italian cinema and the socio-political space of nation-formation. This interpretative matrix renders historical epics (the figure of Maciste in particular) as simple precursors to (and function of) fascism, dismissing not only the films’ broader European milieu, but also the cinematic interconnectivity between them and other forms of filmmaking. I intend to revisit the historical epics, and contextualize them within the aforementioned European milieu and cinematic interconnectivity to highlight a crucial process in the representation of racial others in Italian cinema, a process that informs future representation practices, including the “*carrette del mare*.”

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<sup>4</sup> Some examples of this historical inquiries are: Marco Purpura, “Racial Masquerade Italian Style? Whiteface and Blackface in Zeudi Araya’s 1970s Comedies,” *Italian Studies* 69, no. 3 (October 22, 2014): 394–414; Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects: Between Italy and Africa -- Constructions of Racial and National Identity in the Italian Cinema* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); David Ward, “‘Italy’ in Italy: Old Metaphors and New Racisms in the 1990s,” in *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*, by Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 81–97; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “The Italian Colonial Cinema: Agendas and Audiences,” in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ben-Ghiat, Ruth and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 179–92; Karen Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising under Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Jacqueline Reich, “The Metamorphosis of Maciste in Italian Silent Cinema,” *Film History: An International Journal* 25, no. 3 (2013): 32–56; Giorgio Bertellini, “Colonial Autism: Whitened Heroes, Auditory Rhetoric, and National Identity in Interwar Italian Cinema,” in *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 255–78; Maria Coletti, “Fantasmi d’Africa, dal muto al sonoro. Facce, faccette, e blackface,” in *L’Africa in Italia: Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano*, ed. Leonardo De Franceschi (Rome: Aracne, 2013), 75–92.

<sup>5</sup> Bertellini, “Colonial Autism”; Reich, “The Metamorphosis of Maciste in Italian Silent Cinema”; Greene, *Equivocal Subjects*; Coletti, “Fantasmi d’Africa.” The practice of reading Bartolomeo Pagano’s embodiment of Maciste as a proto-Mussolini figure has become so prevalent as to be considered a trope at this point.

## Historical Epics

There are multiple reasons why anyone investigating the representations of people of color in Italian silent cinema would begin with the historical epics, particularly *Cabiria*. First of all, there is the issue of visibility and accessibility. Despite the fact that “early silent cinema in Italy was never completely dominated by the historical epic,” without a doubt, they “represented the industry’s most profitable and popular products.”<sup>6</sup> Their interaction with international markets allowed them to enter the international cinematic canon, and more importantly, to be preserved. It is a known fact that, comparatively speaking, of the total number of films made in the silent era, very few titles remain. The international fame of the historical epics meant that multiple copies were made and shipped all over the world, allowing for a relatively high number of copies to survive over time.<sup>7</sup> In other words, when it comes to the cinematic representation of persons of color, historical epics are not only the most famous examples from the silent era, but also the most accessible to us today.

A second reason regards the themes of these films, which lend themselves to the analysis of the representation of persons of color (particularly African persons), and provide a tie-in to discourses of nation-formation. Films like *Cabiria* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*, are built on narratives that pit ancient Rome against North Africa. Even films like *The Last Days of Pompeii* (in its multiple versions), which takes place solely in the Italian peninsula, still pits agents of Greek and Roman civilizations against those of ancient Egypt. *Cabiria* presents a particularly attractive starting point for not only is it the most famous historical epic, but it positions Rome clearly against the North African city of Carthage, and features prominently a “Black” character in its narrative.<sup>8</sup> These points are particularly salient when considering that Italy had recently waged a war against the Ottoman Empire (1911-1912), and won control of Libya, adding another African territory to its colonial holdings. Furthermore, the close thematic connections between historical epics and the recent war in North Africa, tends to pull these films into lines of inquiry regarding the articulation of an Italian nation. The internal tensions, real and imagined, formed in the bringing together a very heterogeneous population under one state in the late 1800s, has been a constant concern in Italian culture. The fact that historical epics are read, at the time and in the present, as actively engaging in the articulation of an Italian identity vis-à-vis a racial “other,” makes these films extremely attractive to scholars researching the representation of persons of color in Italian cinema.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Peter E. Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 5. More importantly, and thanks to independent distributor George Kleine, Italian historical epics made significant inroads in the American market, influencing American filmmaking. No history of Italian silent cinema fails ever to mention how Pastrone’s *Cabiria* influenced Griffith’s *Intolerance*, a practice that reveals more about the historical importance of American cinema, than that of Italian historical epics.

<sup>7</sup> For example, according to the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), as reported in the catalogue for the 2011 Pordenone Silent Film Festival (*Le giornate del cinema muto*), there are print copies of *Cabiria* in 21 FIAF affiliated archives worldwide.

<sup>8</sup> Citing a note from Pastrone to D’Annunzio, Shelleen Greene points out that the character of Maciste was meant to be a mulatto, not necessarily a Black character. This racial ambiguity is the focus of her investigation of Maciste vis-à-vis nation formation. Greene, *Equivocal Subjects*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> John David Rhodes, “‘Our Beautiful and Glorious Art Lives’: The Rhetoric of Nationalism in Early Italian Film Periodicals,” *Film History* 12, no. 3 (January 1, 2000): 308–21. On the somewhat arbitrary nature of Italian unification, Hobsbawm provides some quick insights, E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). On the continual preoccupation with the articulation of an Italian identity, there is an interminable amount of scholarship, particularly as it relates to

However, the very reasons that make historical epics an understandable point of inquiry, also create certain blind spots. For example, the privileged position they have in the history of Italian cinema tends to limit the field of inquiry to that genre alone, prompting researchers to downplay the importance of contemporaneous forms of representations. In justifying the scope of his research, Giorgio Bertellini states the following:

At the time of the war with Libya, apart from the ‘scientific documentaries’ shot by Luca Comerio, Italian films did not concern themselves with the political and social problems of North Africa. Instead they often displayed their solipsistic refusal to directly engage with the ‘colonial subject’ by framing the whole colonial experience within the rhetoric of ‘antique’ epic, and adventurous narratives, advancing such values as honor, sacrifice, and physical perfection. From its beginning in 1905 to the rise of feature films in the early 1910s, Italian cinema showed a special fondness for historical re-enactments...<sup>10</sup>

First of all, the engagement of the Italian film industry with North Africa during the Italo-Turkish War far exceeded the “scientific documentaries” by Comerio, which Bertellini puts in quotation marks as if to imply that they were a parenthetical cinematic practice. On the contrary, Comerio’s films were part of a much larger enterprise that sought to articulate a victorious narrative regarding Italy’s renewed colonial aspirations.<sup>11</sup> In fact, during the Italo-Turkish War, multiple studios such as Cines, Ambrosio, Milano, Dora, Helio, Pasquali, Aquila and Vesuvio produced multiple films about the war, which included not just actualities and newsreels, but dramas and comedies as well.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Bertellini himself mentions in his 2010 book, *Italy in Early American Cinema*, that “Cines produced two different series on the subject, of fourteen and nine episodes respectively” highlighting the fact that the engagement of the film industry with North Africa during the war entailed more than just some “scientific documentaries.”<sup>13</sup>

The blind spots are not just synchronic, but diachronic as well. In reading Bertellini, Reich, and Greene, one may get the sense that before the Italo-Turkish War, and historical epics, there were no cinematic engagement with persons of color in Italian cinema. At the very least, one gets the impression that there were no cinematic representation of Black subjects, since that

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the “Southern Question.” I suggest the following text, Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy’s “Southern Question”: Orientalism in One Country* (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Bertellini, “Colonial Autism,” 258.

<sup>11</sup> Luca Comerio is the founder of what later became Milano Films. By 1911, Comerio had been ousted by the company’s board, and operated a second studio he founded, the Comerio Films. During the Italo-Turkish War he moved almost his entire troupe to north Africa and was heavily invested in producing films of the war, some of which blur the line between non-fiction and fiction by recreating scenes of battles that were never recorded live. During WWI, he was the only filmmaker allowed to film the war for the Italian government.

<sup>12</sup> These are some examples of the films produced during and soon after the Italo-Turkish War: *A Colonial Romance* (1911, Cines), *The Searchlight (An Episode of the Italo-Turkish War)* (1911, Cines), *Italo-Turkish War between Neapolitan Street Urchins\** (1912 Films Dora), *Kelly Goes to War* (1912 Milano Films), *In The Land of the... Star and Crescent\** (1912, Helio Film), *Polidor returns to Tripoli\** (1912, Pasquali Films), *Pik Nik Hates the Turk\** (1912, Aquila), *Pik Nik wants to go to Tripoli\** (1912, Aquila), *Bidoni’s Medals\** (1912, Cines), *Heroism of a Military Aviator\** (1912, Dora Films), *Struck Twice in the Heart\** (1912, Vesuvio Films), *The Heroine of Derna* (1912, Vesuvio Films), *Iron Fist (Bianco contro negro)* (1913, Pasquali), *Bidoni and the Negress* (1914, Cines), *Bloomer in Africa* (1914, Cines), *Bloomer’s Return* (1914, Cines). Whenever possible, the international or official English title of a film is given, except when a title is the same in both Italian and English such as *Cabiria*. For Italian titles that lack an official English title, the translation of the title is my own and marked by an asterisk.

<sup>13</sup> These series were *Guerra in Tripolitania* (Italo-Turkish War, 1911), and *Corrispondenza cinematografica dal teatro della Guerra italo-turca* (Scenes of the Italo-Turkish War, 1911). Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape, and the Picturesque* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 257.

is the focus of all of their work.<sup>14</sup> However, the filmographies of Maria Adriana Prolo and Aldo Bernardini-Vittorio Martinelli show that before the Italo-Turkish War there were plenty of films – comedies, dramas, non-fiction – dealing with persons of color.<sup>15</sup> For example, there were such films as *Cocò Turns Black for Love\** (1910, Cines), *A Night in Arabia* (1910, Cines), *Drama in Morocco\** (1909, Rossi e C.), *Theft at the Mosque\** (1908, Aquila Films), *Lynching of a Negro\** (1908, Comerio), and *The Grateful Negro\** (1908, Rossi e Co.). It is important to note that these fiction films were being made as far back as 1908, which is not only the same year in which Ambrosio shot the very first historical epic, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, but also a key moment in the history of cinema. It is roughly at this time, between 1907 and 1909, when the predominant form of filmmaking started to shift from actualities to what Miriam Hansen calls “the classical mode of narration and address,” which basically means narrative cinema.<sup>16</sup> Indeed the films that engage some form of racial or national other before 1908 were all films “*dal vero*,” or to be more specific, films of explorations, such as *A Russian History\** (1906, Ambrosio), *Japanese Juggler\** (1906, Ambrosio), *The Iguazu Falls of Argentina\** (1907, Ambrosio), *Indians\** (1907, Ambrosio), *Japanese Scenes\** (Ambrosio, 1908), and *Leopard Hunting in Abyssinia* (1908, Ambrosio).<sup>17</sup> Of course, one should not assume that a shift in predominance means that short exploration films ceased to exist in 1908, for in fact this particular form of film making coexist with historical epics and narrative cinema until 1912 or so.

Finally, it is important to note that the privileging of historical epics tends to limit the investigation of the representation of people of color to Black subjects. The concentration on the representation of Black Africans, particularly on Maciste’s ambiguous “blackness”, is understandable, as the European “scramble for Africa” of the late 1800s ensured the *incontro-scontro* between both continents. In the years following the Italo-Turkish War, Italy’s colonialist involvement with Africa, particularly in the Horn, would only increase, culminating in the second Italo-Ethiopian War of 1936. Though the film industry would increasingly represent these involvements with both Arab and Black Africa, the focus of today’s scholarship tends to favor Black subjects – even when they are not Black.<sup>18</sup> The emphasis can be explained in part, as Karen Pinkus points out, by the fact that Italian media in the interwar period represented

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<sup>14</sup> Bertellini, “Colonial Autism”; Reich, “The Metamorphosis of Maciste in Italian Silent Cinema”; Greene, *Equivocal Subjects*.

<sup>15</sup> Maria Adriana Prolo, *Storia del cinema muto italiano*. (Milan: Poligono, 1951). The film index is derived from the 21 volumes of the series, *Il cinema muto italiano 1905-1931* published by the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* and *Nuova Eri* over the course of five years, from 1991 to 1996. The filmography was drawn from all 21 volumes by Baldo Vallero for the non-profit *Associazione Italiana per le Ricerche di Storia del Cinema*, and can be accessed at <http://airscnew.it/index?pid=41> (accessed May 11, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 23. Hansen draws her periodization from the works of Kristin Thompson, Charles Musser, Eileen Bowser, John L. Fell, Barry Salt, Paolo Cherchi Usai and other academic experts on the silent period.

<sup>17</sup> The term *dal vero* literally means “from reality,” and so the term could be translated as *actualities*. The term, however, as used in the trade journals in the silent era and in Italian scholarship, is best understood as *non-fiction*, as it includes “exotic” films, travel films, newsreels and other forms of filmmaking whose principal referent is “reality,” or the real world.

<sup>18</sup> The second film Bertellini analyses in his article is *Lo squadrone bianco* (1936, Genina). In referencing certain sequences of the film, he notes the following: “Repeatedly we see scenes in which appear long rows of black soldiers, dressed entirely in white and riding white dromedaries.” Beside the fact that when the native soldiers are riding the camels they are not wearing white (that is from an earlier scene when they are listening to a speech), is the more important fact that such soldiers are for the most part *not* Black. They are North Africans, and in the case of El Fennek (Cesare Polacco), Italians in blackface attempting to pass for Arab. Bertellini, “Colonial Autism,” 265.

Libyans as less problematically foreign than Black Africans.<sup>19</sup> Another issue to consider is the fact that Bertellini, Reich and Greene were looking back to the historical epics from the new millennium, when mass immigration from Sub-Sahara Africa into Italy was (and is) an unavoidable reality.

Regardless of the reasons, current scholarship gives the impression that early cinema's representation of persons of color starts with the Black characters in historical epics and that it is a function of the colonialist politics of the Italian state. Furthermore, it locates these film practices solely in relation to future ones, as if there were no previous cinematic examples, nor connections to different representational practices in earlier cinema. However, the films I have cited above demonstrate that the Italian film industry not only had produced films engaging persons of color (Black or otherwise) before the historical epics of the *anni d'oro* (1911-1914), but that engagement with some form of racial or national other began with films of exploration and actualities.<sup>20</sup> I will show in this chapter that as far as the representation of persons of color is concerned, the historical epic's fantasy of a Roman past are cinematically connected to the realistic spectacles of previous forms of cinematic representation in the West. Of particular relevance are the "exotic" films of Roberto Omegna, who as early as 1907 traveled to South America, and then to the Italian colonies in the Horn of Africa, shooting various films "dal vero," which include *Leopard Hunting in Abyssinia*, *Abyssinian Funeral\**, *How One Travels in Africa\**, *To Massawa\**, *From Massawa to Keren\**, *Marriage Custom in Abyssinia*, *Our Ascari Soldiers\**, *Abyssinian Habits and Customs\**. The problem, of course, is that very few of these films are available today.<sup>21</sup>

This situation poses a methodological problem, but not an impossible one to overcome. To begin with, we must look at the film culture of Italy at the turn of the century rather than just the titles produced by Italian studios after 1905, in order to understand the material and symbolic contexts within which these films were operating.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, before there were studios, there was already a vibrant, haphazard and transnational film community and culture in the peninsula. The industrial revolution in the 1800s had encouraged innovation in multiple technological fields

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<sup>19</sup> According to Pinkus, "Racial propaganda and fascist science portrayed the Libyans as further evolved (possibly because they were farther north, in the Mediterranean basin) than blacks in East Africa." This is corroborated by Mia Fuller, who notes that "the single most powerful image in the discourse of Italian colonization in Libya was that of prior possession, and the notion that Italians were 'returning' to North Africa" which made Libya an *a priori* part of Italy in the national imaginary, and therefore not so foreign. Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes*, 63; Mia Fuller, "Preservation and Self-Absorption: Italian Colonization and the Walled City of Tripoli, Libya," in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 137.

<sup>20</sup> From 1991 to 1996, the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinema* published a book series on Italian silent cinema, *Il cinema muto italiano 1905-1931*, in 21 volumes. The volumes covering 1911 through 1914 were entitled "*I film degli anni d'oro*" since that period covers not only the historical epics that exceed 1000 meters in length, but also those that attained international success, such as *Quo Vadis?* and *Cabiria*.

<sup>21</sup> Original titles are: *Caccia al leopardo*, *Funerale Abissino*, *Come si viaggia in Africa*, *A Massaua*, *Da Massaua a Keren*, *Matrimonio Abissino*, *I nostri ascari*, *Usi e costume Abissini*. Titles with an asterisk are my own translation of originals. Titles without an asterisk are the official English titles.

<sup>22</sup> This is basically Andrew Higson's argument in his seminal essay, "The Concept of National Cinema" where he shows that traditional arguments for a concept of pure national cinema do not hold once they are examined closely. The four basic and distinct approaches commonly used to justify a national cinema tend to actually contradict and undo each other if allowed to intersect: economic-based, consumption-based, text-based, and criticism-based approaches are parts of a puzzle that inevitably points to the transnational nature of the cinematic network. Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema," *Screen* 30, no. 4 (September 21, 1989): 36-47; Andrew Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema," in *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (New York: Routledge, 2006), 15-25.

within an environment of open competition and exchange. Through world fairs and scientific magazines, pioneers in visual technologies, such as Edison, Muybridge, Marey, Anschütz and the Lumière brothers, maintained a ‘community’ of sorts across North America and Europe. It is not surprising, thus, to discover that as early as 1895, and only a few months after the Lumière’s *Cinématographe* was invented, Filoteo Alberini patented his own cinematic device, the *Kinetografo*, and created the first actuality in Italy. Other pioneers soon followed, such as Italo Pacchioni and Leopoldo Fregoli, contributing to the transnational cinematic community.<sup>23</sup>

However, due to its technical superiority, the Lumière’s *Cinématographe* soon kindled the field of visual technologies and started the fire that we now know as cinema. Historical affinities between France and Italy, as well as geographical contiguity, meant that Italy was one of the first places where the fire spread. Only months after their first Parisian exhibition at the *Salon Indien*, the Lumière brother organized private and public screenings in Milan, Rome and Naples in 1896. In a matter of months, according to Aldo Bernardini, “there were throughout Italy several active operators who were at once managers of traveling companies or owners of traveling booths that held shows both in large cities and in little towns.”<sup>24</sup> All across the peninsula, movies were being shown, and movies were being made. When the Lumière operators first arrived in Italy, they disseminated the practice of taking preliminary shots of crowded streets in the towns and cities they had selected for their screenings, and advertised that fact in local newspapers to induce people to come to the show in the hopes of catching a glimpse of themselves or their friends and family. This practice soon became common with local operators so that between 1896 and 1905, “on any given day, someone was shooting a film on some street or on some piazza of some Italian city.”<sup>25</sup> Before the end of the century, dedicated film exhibition venues had opened in all major cities of Italy as well.

These events and developments, along with many others, demonstrate that Italian cinema was not born in 1905, but that it *became*, that it evolved to form part of an emerging international film culture. The Italian film industry did not appear *ad ovo*, or in direct imitation of something that was seen from a distance, but was the result of increasingly organized local practices spearheaded by pioneers who had been active in the field. For the sake of convenience, Italian film history designates *The Capture of Rome* (1905, Alberini e Santoni) as the first Italian film “a soggetto” (fiction), and yet Alberini had been making films since the 1890s. Even to say that *The Capture of Rome* is the first Italian *fiction* film is a highly questionable endeavor.<sup>26</sup> To do so

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<sup>23</sup> Italo Pacchioni tried to acquire a Lumière *Cinématographe*, but unable to do so, created his own machine in 1896 and started to make short films. Likewise, Leopoldo Fregoli, a quick-change artist, constructed his Fregoligraph, which was basically a clone of Lumière *Cinématographe*, and shot short films that he incorporated into his ambulant acts all over Italy, Europe, North America, South America and North Africa.

<sup>24</sup> Aldo Bernardini, “Non-Fiction Productions,” in *Italian Silent Cinema: A Reader*, ed. Giorgio Bertellini (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing, 2013), 154. Translation mine.

<sup>25</sup> Aldo Bernardini, *Cinema muto italiano: I film “dal vero” 1895-1914* (Gemona: Cineteca del Friuli, 2002), 8. Over the course of those ten years, the Lumière lost their interest in cinema, and other French studios (Pathé and Gaumont) took their place, though always with the involvement of Italian operators and exhibitors. One of the most prominent examples of Italian participation in the emerging film culture of Italy is Vittorio Calcina, who was the official representative for the Lumière brothers in Italy, and became the official cinematographer for the royal Savoy family. He was also the first to commercially exhibit films in Italy, and the first to record a Pope (Leo XIII). He also opened one of the earliest movie theaters in Italy.

<sup>26</sup> Whether *La presa di Roma* is considered a film *a soggetto* or *dal vero* depends on when the question is being asked. For the sake of establishing a history of Italian cinema, Alberini’s film is considered today the first fiction film, in so far that (A.) it was qualitative different from the many actualities produced in Italy up to that point, and (B.) it was produced by an Italian studio, and therefore part of an Italian film industry. However, if we consider the



speaks more to our need of having an origin, a place from which to start counting, than to the film's standing in relation to contemporaneous filmmaking and distribution practices. To re-contextualize the emergence of the Italian film industry as part of larger cinematic phenomenon changes the way we look at the history of the representations of persons of color, of racial "others," in Italian cinema. It allows a discursive triangulation that identifies the films produced in the first years of the Italian industry as key intersection points between broader European cinematic representational practices of racial others, and specific practices found in the Italian historical epic.

### Spectacular Realities

Early cinema's strongest attraction was its ability to bring together notions of reality and spectacle. The Lumière brothers realized that, and one of the first things they did once they went public with their new technology was to send camera operators to every corner of the globe, to record and project actualities to local audiences before sending the films back to their headquarters in Lyon. According to Bertrand Tavernier, president of the Lumière Institute, what Louis Lumière had in mind was "to bring the world to the world."<sup>27</sup> However, the world the Lumière crews were able to capture and reproduce was one that already existed in the Western imaginary. Images of the Mexican vaqueros, Japanese swordsmen, the Sphinx, a Muslim man performing his prayers, a military parade in Turkey, the hoisting of cattle by the horns to a ship in French Indochina, and Asian men chasing the dragon in an opium den made it back to Europe and were enjoyed by European audiences.<sup>28</sup> These films mesmerized and thrilled by presenting something that was simultaneously new and yet recognizable, they enthralled, in Tom Gunning's words, by "the cinematic gesture of presenting for view, of displaying," a confirmation that the world existed exactly as the audience had imagined it for the longest time.<sup>29</sup>

This process of rendering reality as a spectacle references the larger mechanisms of Orientalism when applied to the points of contact between the West and the global south, but it also reflects specific intersections between the new technology of cinema and cultural trends in

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nascent Italian industry as an extension of the transnational film culture, then historical reconstructions were not necessarily considered "fiction". As Richard Abel notes regarding the Pathé's practice of grouping the two under the same category, "the referential differences mattered more than differences in modes of representation" – as long as the film referenced something that really happened, regardless of how far back in the past, it was considered an *actualité*. The term *dal vero* provides additional semantic flexibility, for unlike the term "actuality," reality is its only referent, regardless of temporality. Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema, 1896-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 92.

<sup>27</sup> Bertrand Tavernier provided the voice over to a 2003 DVD release of Lumière films for Kino films. He says at minute 40, while analyzing an actuality in Jerusalem, "The Lumière sent operators to China, Japan, Argentina, and a lot of them went to what was called Palestine. I mean the idea of Louis Lumière was to bring the world to the word, which is a great concept." *The Lumière Brothers' First Films*, NTSC (Kino International, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> It should be obvious by these description that these actualities are part of the larger system described by Said as Orientalism, and indeed film scholars have recognized it as such. Richard Abel points out that the Lumière *actualité* were extremely popular and therefore immediately imitated by Méliès, Gaumont and Pathé. Furthermore, he says that "the genre's success was due in part to the prior popularity of such topical subjects in photographs and postcards as well as in the new illustrated magazines such as *Le Petit Journal Illustré* and *L'Illustration*. For *actualités* participated in the industrial production of images associated with travel and tourism, as Gunning argues, in which 'appropriating the world' through a technological extension of seeing had become a thoroughly 'modern' source of pleasure." Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town*, 91.

<sup>29</sup> Tom Gunning, "'Now You See It, Now You Don't': The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions," in *The Silent Cinema Reader*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer (New York: Routledge, 2004), 42.

the West at the turn of the century. According to Vanessa Schwartz, at the end of the nineteenth century, there was a general cultural climate “that demanded ‘the real’ as a spectacle:” mass press, the morgue, panoramas, dioramas and wax museums were all part of visual culture that continually demanded higher levels of verisimilitude, of immediacy, of realism in order to create a greater effect of spectacle.<sup>30</sup> Actualities themselves, and not just the ones representing foreign subjects, were part of this culture, and “built on certain repertoire [sic] in which people were accustomed to a mediated and spectacularized version of reality.”<sup>31</sup> Actualities were therefore not just fifty-second films showing a random clip of everyday life, but films that showed life as already constituted in newspapers or, as in the case of “exotic” films, in a common imaginary. For all the discourse regarding the realism and indexicality of early cinema, it must be acknowledged that it was also, according to Schwartz, “part of a late nineteenth-century trope in which real life was packaged, labeled as ‘current events’ and narrated and incessantly represented in a variety of forms, including film”.<sup>32</sup> The very technology that promised access to an empirical and indexical reality, made such “reality” into a referent, discernable only through a system of representation across different media platforms that informed each other through tropes and visual codes.

Though Schwartz’ work focuses primarily on Paris, the work of Ben Singer points to similar forms of spectacularization of urban life in North America and large European cities at the turn of the century.<sup>33</sup> Italy is no different, and as early as 1951, Maria Adriana Prolo notes that the nascent Italian film industry did not follow the fantastic footsteps of Méliès, but rather “dedicated [itself] to shoot films on plots taken from everything agreeable that was printed in periodicals and popular magazines.”<sup>34</sup> Brunetta goes one-step further, and regarding films *dal vero* he claims that “these films convey certain information, without producing knowledge: in general, they rely on the viewing’s uniqueness while offering images that journalism had already disclosed. Therefore, in fulfilling expectations, they presume a level of literacy of the public and the possibility of a direct recognition.”<sup>35</sup> A quick glance at Bernardini’s list of film *dal vero* from 1895 to 1914 confirms this fact as it lists films on coronations, processions, funerals of famous people, automobile races, the Palio, military exercises, launching of ships, the aftermath of the Messina Straights earthquakes of 1905 and 1907, the train disaster of Castel Giubileo – events that were the stuff of mass press.<sup>36</sup>

It is within this context that we should think of Roberto Omegna’s *dal vero* films from his trips to South America, the Horn of Africa and South East Asia. As one of the co-founders of Ambrosio Films, Omegna is one of the pioneers in Italian cinema, and *the* pioneer of “Italian scientific films.”<sup>37</sup> As a photographer, he brought his technical skills to his partnership with Arturo Ambrosio, and in the early days of Ambrosio Film, he was the studio’s factotum: director, camera operator, developer, printer, editor, and etcetera. In time, and as the studio grew and hired more technical help, he became the artistic director and “managed the entire

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<sup>30</sup> Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 178.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>33</sup> Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, Film and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Prolo, *Storia del cinema muto italiano.*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano*, vol. 1 (Rome: Editori riuniti, 1993), 10.

<sup>36</sup> Bernardini, *Cinema muto italiano*.

<sup>37</sup> Virgilio Tosi, “Il pioniere Roberto Omegna (1876-1948),” *Bianco e Nero* 40, no. 3 (June 1979): 4.

cinematographic division.”<sup>38</sup> However, from a very young age, his interests lay on the side of empirical sciences: technology, photography and entomology.<sup>39</sup> Those interests are the reason why he favored films *dal vero*, and as part of management, he was able to indulge his passions.

In 1907, Omegna went to South America for personal reasons, but finding himself in such an exotic place, he took the opportunity to shoot some films. This is how he described that trip and those films in 1948:

In 1906 I had to go to South America for family reasons (after the death of my uncle), and I took the opportunity to shoot a film on the Gran Chaco. I believe that was the very first exotic film. I even introduced Europeans to Buenos Aires. No one wanted me to go to the Gran Chaco. “No one ever returns,” they used to tell me. I went anyways, and I obtained a film 600 meters long. It was the first feature length documentary.<sup>40</sup>

When he says that he “introduced Europeans to Buenos Aires,” one can hear the didactic echoes of the Lumière-attributed tagline, “to bring the world to the world.” At the base of that didactic spirit, is the tenet that what the film camera brings is real and true, in the broadest sense. It promises that when you see these films, you are indeed seeing the Gran Chaco plains and the waterfalls of Iguazu.<sup>41</sup> However, Omegna is not selling you the typical, sleepy, PBS documentary. Even forty years after the fact, Omegna entices by describing his films *dal vero* with a language of danger and excitement, promising spectacular images of a wild and exotic place. The waterfalls of Iguazu, at the current border between Brazil and Argentina, are a perfect symbol for the untamed and lush Amazon forest, and the contrasting dry plains of the Gran Chaco builds a “heaven/hell” dynamic of what lies at the margins of the world. If that were not enough, a still image of Omegna himself from that trip encapsulates the spectacular nature of the reality these films are attempting to convey: with a sombrero, an open “poncho” displaying a revolver at his waist, and a rifle on his right hand. The image of Omegna as a gaucho pulls double duty as it represents, on the one hand, the wild, gun-slinging “West” of the Pampas, and on the other hand, it reminds the viewer of a young Italian revolutionary who once called this continent his home, Giuseppe Garibaldi [*figure 1*].

If the spectacle of South America is its nature, and to a certain degree, the echoes of Italian emigration embodied in the memory of Garibaldi, the same cannot be said of the Horn of Africa. As an Italian colony, a visit to Abyssinia (as it was called then) called for a closer inspection of an almost ethnographic quality, which can be inferred by the titles: *Leopard Hunting in Abyssinia*, *An Abyssinian Funeral\**, *How One Travels in Africa\**, *To Massawa\**, *From Massawa to Keren\**, *Marriage Custom in Abyssinia*, *Our Ascari Soldiers\**, *Abyssinian Habits and Customs\**. Like those of the South American films, these titles echo the didactic, almost scientific function some people expected of cinema.<sup>42</sup> However, the focus has obviously shifted from natural wonders to an analysis of culture, indicating a deep desire to know the

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<sup>38</sup> Claudia Gianetto and Giorgio Bertellini, “The Giant Ambrosio, or Italy’s Most Prolific Silent Film Company,” *Film History* 12, no. 3 (January 1, 2000): 240. He also mentions in the interview with Mario Verdone that in 1909 he became the director of the entire studio.

<sup>39</sup> Mario Verdone, “L’ultima intervista con Omegna,” *Cinema* 1, no. 4 (December 15, 1948): 111.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Un viaggio al Chaco*, (Ambrosio, 1907), 170 meters. *Le cascate dell’Ignazù*, (Ambrosio, 1908), 135 meters. Data from Bernardini, *Cinema muto italiano*. According to Bernardini, a copy of *Un viaggio* can be found at the Luce Institute in Rome.

<sup>42</sup> “There is no doubt that once the novelty wears off, this admirable instrument will return to the scientific community for which it was developed.” Ferdinando Ridolfi, “Il cinematografo” in *Rivista di fisica, matematica e scienze naturali*. Pavia, 1901. Cited in Prolo, *Storia del cinema muto italiano*, 20.

colonies in their embodied forms – animal, geographical and human. However, despite the constant advertising of these films as being *dal vero*, this form of cinematic representation was not necessarily perceived, nor presented, as an objective, purely scientific endeavor of discovery.<sup>43</sup> That mode of address was increasingly the domain of “legitimate” institutions of knowledge (and power), such as the *Società Geografica Italiana*, who in the mid-1800s sent scientific expeditions to the parts of Africa the Italian ruling elite was considering for colonial expansion.<sup>44</sup> These film’s claim to knowledge is deeply embedded in its form of engagement, in the fascination of the realistic spectacle, in the process (and pleasure) of recognizing things known yet previously unseen.<sup>45</sup> In the case of Omegna’s African films, the colony is recognized as a primitive, inferior, tribal culture: *hic sunt barbari*. In that recognition, the colonial subject is re-articulated as being *Other*, though a circular process that departs and returns to the conclusion/premise that Europeans are moderns and Abyssinians are not, a circular process in which the cinematic apparatus is medium and proof.



Figure 1: Omegna as a Gaucho, with hat, poncho, rifle and pistol.

<sup>43</sup> “The cinematograph, amusement to the eyes and to the spirit, provides to those that do not have the opportunity to travel the advantage of admiring faraway places, events that happened at an immense distances, unbelievable situations, exhilarating anecdotes, enjoyable fantastical scenes...” From the *Bulletino della Società Fotografica di Firenze*, 1906, as cited in *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>44</sup> *Società Geografica Italiana* was founded in 1867. According to David Atkinson when it became clear that Italy’s African interests laid in the Horn, expeditions were sent there to collect data, and “by doing so, they transformed unknown spaces into more legible territories, with resources, topographies, and populations recorded and archived in Rome.” SGI was essentially an arm of the colonial lobby. David Atkinson, “Constructing Italian Africa: Geography and Geopolitics,” in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ben-Ghiat, Ruth and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 17.

<sup>45</sup> Previously “unseen” from the point of a view of film camera, which projects moving pictures. Obviously, there has been a long tradition of Orientalism and exoticism in the West, which had produced narratives, drawings, paintings, photographs – among other forms of depictions – of these locations.

Only the year before Omegna's trip to the Horn of Africa, Fratelli Treves published *Nella colonia Eritrea* by Renato Paoli, and Cogliati published in 1901 *Tre anni in Eritrea* by Rosalia Pianavia Vivaldi.<sup>46</sup> Both were first-person, autobiographical accounts of traveling to, residing in, and ultimately leaving the Eritrean colony by people associated with the Italian army. Omegna's films mirror, in a lot of ways, these previously published narratives, from the travelogue aspect that focuses on the traversing (and therefore conquering) of spaces, to the hunt of big cats, and ultimately to the focus on certain local customs that "demonstrate" the cultural/temporal difference between a primitive colonial subject and a modern European. Vivaldi's book has a chapter on marriage and another one on funerals customs, while Renati's book has a section on the "indigenous city" which focuses on the different forms of "fantasia" or native dancing/singing that accompany different social events (including the hunt of a lion and a funeral).

As the early Lumière actualities, Omegna's African films provide nothing new at the level of the narrative, displaying scenes either belonging to an already-constituted Western imaginary, or to an emerging Italian colonial one. What these films provide is excitement in the very act of viewing, of really seeing (and seeing real) leopard hunting in Abyssinia, or really seeing black natives wearing their often-mentioned white tribal garments, performing a "fantasia" through yelling, screaming and jumping in the air.<sup>47</sup> Here are some reviews of *Leopard Hunting in Abyssinia* that speak to this element of attraction:

[At the World Cinematography Contest of Milan], if the scenes of Nero amazed by their grandeur, the scenes of the leopard hunt? taken from life ... have aroused a great interest for their truth and novelty not separated from the perfection compatible with scenes taken in extremely difficult conditions.

I have never witnessed a film as exciting as *Leopard Hunting*, where the artist [Omegna], with a recklessness that is truly admirable, puts himself a few meters away from the beast, with no other defense than a gun, and no other shelter than his small camera, behind which he filmed unfazed. Omegna was able to depict such a lively scene, throbbing with emotion and truth. Therefore, on that topic, it is my duty to dispel the suggestion that this is a trick film, a suggestion that many had previously advanced.<sup>48</sup>

Both reviews speak to two forms of realism, an indexical and an emotional one. Indeed, what you see is what was there in front of the camera, but more importantly is the fact that the camera was there to capture it all, and that you, as an audience, get to view and participate. The subject matter is interesting (Africa, hunting big cats, local customs), but a strong element of the attraction lies not in the capturing of reality, but the spectacular representation of a well-chosen "reality." In the case of this film –from the promotional material [figure 2], to its Italian and American reviews, to the interview Omegna gave in 1948 – the spectacle of the cinematic apparatus is coded through the language of danger, hidden in the repeated fact that Omegna (and

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<sup>46</sup> Rosalia Pianavia Vivaldi, *Tre anni in Eritrea* (Milan: Cogliati, 1901); Renato Paoli, *Nella colonia Eritrea* (Milan: Treves, 1908).

<sup>47</sup> Both Vivaldi and Paoli give a lot of attention to these items, which become part of the visual language of Italian colonialism as Pinkus demonstrates.

<sup>48</sup> Riccardo Namias, in *Il Progresso Fotografico*, Milano, No.10, October 1909, P.317; Carlo Casella, *La Vita Cinematografica*, Turin No.1, January 5 1911, P.2 Both cited in Bernardini, *Cinema muto italiano*, 119. Translation mine.

## CACCIA AL LEOPARDO.

Gli episodi di questa caccia si svolgono in territorio della Colonia Eritrea, e mentre se ne ammirano le diverse fasi assai suggestive e si resta trepidanti ad osservare i vigorosi sbalzi del felino in assoluta libertà, la mente dello spettatore non potrà fare a meno di restare colpita, pensando all'impareggiabile sangue freddo dimostrato dal nostro operatore, che dovette mantenersi per un tempo lunghissimo in presenza del leopardo alla distanza di soli tre metri, per cinematografarlo. Questa film fa parte della serie da noi presentata al Concorso Mondiale di Cinematografia di Milano, meritando alla nostra Società il *primo premio*; ogni altra raccomandazione sarebbe quindi superflua.



Lunghezza metri 10      Colorazione L. 19      Affino 100 x 116 L. 0,70

Designazione Telegrafica: LEOPARDO.  
Telegrammi: AMBROS - TORINO.

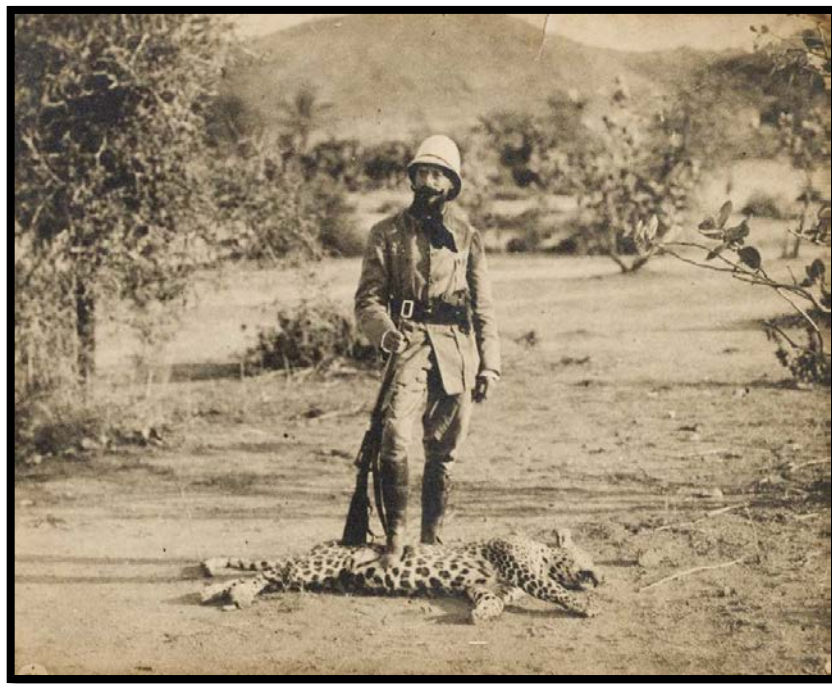


Figure 2: Promotional material for Leopard Hunting in Abyssinia. Courtesy of Museo Nazionale del Cinema.

the camera) was only three meters away from the leopard as he/it recorded.<sup>49</sup>

Unfortunately, very little remains from the rest of Omegna's African series. The titles of the films allows us to see a correlation between the meta-narrative of these films and an emerging Italian colonialist imaginary found in certain literary works. A narrative breakdown of *Marriage Custom in Abyssinia* provided by Aldo Bernardini further supports this correlation:

List of frames (of the copy): Departure of the nuptial party – Arrival of the bride to the village – A warrior's "fantasia" – The groom in front of the bride's *tucul* – The bride, surrounded in veils, leaves with the groom's best friend – The bride arrives at the best friend's *tucul*, where she will remain for forty days – Nocturnal singing and dancing.<sup>50</sup>

There are some differences between the storyline of this film and Vivaldi's account of an Abyssinian wedding, but there are also many similarities as well. More importantly, however, is the fact that some of these items are already recognizable in 1909 to an Italian audience after twenty-plus years of Italian presence in the Horn of Africa, and are well on their way to become standard symbols of the colonies: the *tuculs*, the indigenous white garments, a continuous emphasis on the "fantasia" (in later years associated more specifically with the *ascari*), as well as other forms of dancing and singing – all of which signal the Abyssinian as tribal and primitive [figure 3].

Furthermore, from what little information we have available, we can glean that these other films were received with a similar enthusiasm for their spectacular realism. According to a British film journal from 1909, *Marriage Custom in Abyssinia*:

...is another of those *vivid pictures of life* in the far East [sic], contained in the Cape to Cairo series, which *shows us in all its wild barbarity* the marriage customs in Abyssinia. As an education aid, it is impossible to imagine anything more likely to impress than this series of pictures. Everything is *so real and interesting*, the action so well sustained and the photographic quality of such a high standard that the 'marriage custom in Abyssinia' should prove *a solid attraction* wherever shown.<sup>51</sup>

Once again we see how the film's realism is foregrounded in the long list of praises ("vivid picture of life"), only to give way to the thrill of viewing, to the spectacle of the medium which "shows us" what we already knew, the "wild barbarity" found in primitive, African cultures. The tension between the accepted register of "realism" this film purports, and its obvious cinematic attraction, is sustained throughout the review, and it is this tension that helps to articulate and sustain the colonial narrative of European modernity and African primitiveness.



Figure 3: Photo stills from *Marriage Custom in Abyssinia*.

<sup>49</sup> According to Virgilio Tosi, though this film had been cited extensively as the first instance of an Italian "exotic" film, the only material available for a long time was the picture of Omegna standing next to the dead leopard. It was in the mid-1970s, in preparation for an interview with Tosi that Omegna's son found footage of the film in the attic of his house. Tosi, "Il pioniere Roberto Omegna (1876-1948)," 14.

<sup>50</sup> Bernardini, *Cinema muto italiano*, 135.

<sup>51</sup> The Bioscope, London, December 16 1909, p. 57. Cited in *Ibid.* Emphasis is mine.

## Spectacle, Spectacle, and Spectacle

So far I have been using the term “spectacular” in two different, but associated ways. The first one explicitly comes from Vanessa Schwartz’s work, in which the idea of “spectacular,” or “spectacle,” refers to a cultural trend or practice of sensationalizing real events, or aspects of everyday life. This mode of understanding “spectacular” is a useful one for it ties early cinema with other forms of visual representation, and provides a cultural context that resonates at different levels, from urban modernity to Orientalism. The second way I have been using “spectacular” is a medium specific one, and it originates from Tom Gunning’s concept of *cinema of attractions*. When I said that early cinema enthralled by “the cinematic gesture of presenting for view, of displaying” I was citing Gunning’s notion, but now I must elaborate.

Until the 1970s, film history viewed early cinema as simply the “preparatory period for later films styles and practices,” as the technological foundation for the eventual rise of cinema proper, i.e. classical Hollywood. It basically saw early cinema as a primitive prequel to narrative cinema. In order to counter such assumptions, Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault introduced the notion of “cinema of attractions” in the early 1980s, which valorized early cinema in its own terms:

This context includes the first modes of exhibition, the tradition of turn-of-the-century visual entertainments, and a basic aesthetic of early cinema I have called ‘the cinema of attractions,’ which envisioned cinema as a series of visual shocks. Restored to its proper historical context, the projection of the first moving images stands at the climax of a period of intense development in visual entertainments, a tradition in which realism was valued largely for its uncanny effects.<sup>52</sup>

This form of spectularity focuses on the unique viewing experience the cinematic medium is able to provide, on the cinematic hailing of the audience with direct visual stimulation. The root of this form of spectularity lies in the “attraction” the technology itself can generate, in what the camera and lens and the entire cinematic apparatus is able to do in the *process* of representation. However, the cinema of attractions can be misconstrued as focusing simply on the novelty of the medium, which ignores completely the content, rather than the continual impact different forms of cinematic representation have on the content (and its reception).<sup>53</sup> The Cinema of attractions is not a historical phase so much as an element of cinema itself, a “desire to display” that is in constant interaction with “the desire to tell a story.” It is the continual way in which the cinematic apparatus makes itself visible against a narrative tendency that seeks to make the medium as invisible as possible.<sup>54</sup>

The “desire to display” was dominant in the era of the actualities, which is until 1907-1909, at which point dominance was transferred to the “desire to tell a story.” Though Omega’s films straddle this transitional period, their designation of *dal vero* subjects them to these two forms of spectularity, *sensational* and *attractions*, albeit not in equal measure. Schwartz’s concept applies readily, and Gunning’s notion can be discerned in the very exhibitionist aspects of these films, in their gestures of presenting for view animals and people so intimately, so closely, and therefore in a manner that only a film camera was capable of capturing and reproducing. It is obvious that elements of attractions are still at play.

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<sup>52</sup> Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator,” *Art and Text* 34 (Spring 1989): 33.

<sup>53</sup> This is exactly the charge Vanessa Schwartz lays against the concept of cinema of attractions.

<sup>54</sup> Gunning, “Now You See It, Now You Don’t”: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions,” 43.



As we move past Omegna's *dal vero* films, we must consider a third form of spectacle that is very specific to narrative films, which function at the level of the *mise en scène*. I would call it a *profilmic spectacle*, and it is probably the most traditional form of spectacularity as it relies on the sheer grandiosity of the story and the sets before our eyes, and not on the sensationalizing of reality, nor on the fascination of what the camera is able to do in order to sensationalize (though elements of such are not absent). This form of spectacle is exactly what made the historical epics famous, and what is often discussed in the literature. Even the scholarship that studies the representation of persons of color tends to focus on the profilmic spectacle by concentrating so much on the spectacular character of Maciste and his heroic endeavors. In the rest of this chapter I will focus, instead, on the relationship between profilmic spectacle and the elements of realism that prop it up.

### Reframing the Historical Epic

First of all, we need to reset our points of entry. I began this chapter by pointing out that Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914) seems to be the film of choice whenever scholar want to discuss the representation of people of color in Italian silent cinema. Of particular interest to scholars, such as Bertellini and Reich, is the character of Maciste. More specifically, they are interested in the process by which the character stops being a Black hero in *Cabiria* and becomes a White icon over the course of the Maciste series.<sup>55</sup> The problem is compounded by the fact that Maciste was never Black to begin with, insofar as the character is so closely associated with the white actor who made him famous: Maciste was Pagano and Pagano was Maciste.<sup>56</sup> He was always a white body disguised in the lightest way possible, and never truly passed for a Black person to anyone in the audience.<sup>57</sup> This form of representation of Blackness is an important element, and the scholarly contributions of Bertellini and Reich are invaluable to the field of Italian cultural studies.

However, I am not interested in blackface, but rather the black faces that inhabit the background of historical epics, the black faces that go uncredited and yet are everywhere. Maria Coletti differentiates between diverse types of "faces" Italian cinema mobilizes regarding Black subjects, from the real black faces of Black actors (*facce*), to the stereotypes said actors are asked

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<sup>55</sup> Bertellini, "Colonial Autism"; Reich, "The Metamorphosis of Maciste in Italian Silent Cinema."

<sup>56</sup> Monica Dall'Asta, "Early Italian Serials and (Inter)National Popular Culture," in *Italian Silent Cinema: A Reader*, ed. Giorgio Bertellini (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing, 2013), 195–202. The first film after *Cabiria* that features the character of Maciste (*Marvelous Maciste*, 1915) collapses the character and the actor into one figure of modern heroism. From then on, Maciste will be the actor, eventually taking over the person, almost to the point of making Pagano disappeared. Shelleen Green also points out that according to Pastrone's correspondence, Maciste was actually meant to be a mulatto, not a Black slave.

<sup>57</sup> Reviews of the film give no reason to believe that anyone thought Maciste was played by a Black man. References to the fact that he is a slave are made, but not that he is "Black": "E passiamo all'interpretazione che è ottima per parte dell'attore Fulvio Axilla (!), e bene assai lo schiavo Maciste. Un magnifico colosso, che senza essere mai stato attore drammatico, sa vendersi per la sua figura e anche pel suo buon volere artisticamente simpatico." This interpretation is further reinforced by Pagano's next Maciste film, *Marvelous Maciste* (1915), which was filmed while screenings of *Cabiria* were still playing at the movie palaces, a fact that is written into the script. In the film, a damsel in distress sees *Cabiria*, and moved by Maciste's heroism, immediately goes looking for Pagano to ask for his help. There is no confusion as to who, and what, Maciste is. Pier da Castello in "Il Maggese Cinematografico," Turin, May 25 1914, cited in Liliana Ellena, ed., *Film d'Africa: film italiani prima, durante e dopo l'avventura coloniale* (Turin: Archivio nazionale cinematografico della Resistenza Regione Piemonte, 1999), 16.

to performed sometimes (*facette*), and finally to the erasure of the Black subject in the substitution performed in blackface.<sup>58</sup> In her “*facce / facette / blackface*” formulation, every step is a move towards abstraction, which starts with actual Black persons and ends up with symbols and figures, the epitome of which are media representations where there is no indexical connection to an actual body, to an actual person, such as songs (“*facetta nera*”) or the ads analyzed by Karen Pinkus in her study of Italian advertising under fascism.<sup>59</sup> I am interested in real bodies, in real faces, not just because real life encounters are at the root of every form of eventual abstraction, but also its destination: real encounters with the others generate symbolic matrixes, which in turn condition our subsequent encounters with the now constituted *Other*. This is a process already discussed in relation to Omegna’s African films. So that questions that now remain are, what are we to make of those black faces in historical epics? Moreover, what cinematic function do they serve?

In some ways the real black faces in the background of historical epics serve the same purpose as the blackfaces that play the supporting roles and the white faces that play the lead roles, which is to project fantasies of an ancient (mostly Roman) world of imperial power and dominance as a way to imagine what Italy could become. However, they do so at a different plane of representation. European actors, in blackface and not, perform at the narrative level, taking their places within clear binaries between good and evil, between the West and its (mostly) North African adversaries. Black actors, on the other hand, stand in the figurative (and often literal) background as simple props in the *mise en scène*. Though persons of color will play minor roles for decades to come in Western cinema, this particular configuration has a very specific function in historical epics, whereby Black actors serve primarily as referents of “verisimilitude” of an imagined historical past, and as reminders of current social relations between Italy and its colonies.

In some ways, the term “historical epic” is a major misnomer, for the one hundred-plus films that were made between 1908 and 1914 drew their narratives not just from historical accounts, but did so from the bible, mythology and literary sources as well. Where the scripts came from seems to matter very little though, for what brings these films together, according Giuliana Muscio, is “the recurrence of a familiar iconography depicting ancient times, carefully reproduced, which becomes the genre’s dominant trait.”<sup>60</sup> John David Rhodes goes one-step further and notes that, “all the historical films manifest a deployment of a spectacular *mise en scène* aimed at reaching both the verisimilar and the fantastic...the historical films offered what was perceived as a realistic rendition of Rome’s glories.”<sup>61</sup> Praise for its production value is indeed the most common denominator for the appreciation of these films, not just in the academic literature of today (which tends to tie it to artistic legitimization), but also in the trade journals of the time. Quality, art, the realistic reproduction of the past – these became the watchwords in relation to historical epics, and the elements that underscore its fantasy of the ancient world.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Coletti, “Fantasmi d’Africa.”

<sup>59</sup> Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes*.

<sup>60</sup> Giuliana Muscio, “In Hoc Signo Vincas: Historical Films,” in *Italian Silent Cinema: A Reader*, ed. Giorgio Bertellini (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing, 2013), 161–70.

<sup>61</sup> Rhodes, ““Our Beautiful and Glorious Art Lives,”” 310.

<sup>62</sup> While touring the US in 1909, Arturo Ambrosio gave an interview in which he argued for the artistic merits of his films, and Italian films in general, against the practice of the American film industry of mass-producing films on a schedule. He states, “our aim is to produce the most impressive, *most realistic* and technically perfect pictures

It may seem odd to see “realistic reproductions” as a constitutive element in what is obviously a film genre based on melodramatic stories with spectacular settings. However, in spite of their obvious fictional nature, this type of film has its roots in the aforementioned actualities of early cinema. Film scholars have noted that at the end of the century, when actualities were covering social events of great importance, it became acceptable to “reproduce” such events for the audience whenever it was not possible to be physically present to record it, as was the case with Edward VII’s coronation in 1901, or far away wars, like the Sino-Japanese War.<sup>63</sup> This logic applied even more so to the historical reproductions that were being made as early as 1897.<sup>64</sup> Richard Abel tells us that though Lumière initially differentiated between actualities and historical reproductions, eventually it became common practice to conflate them

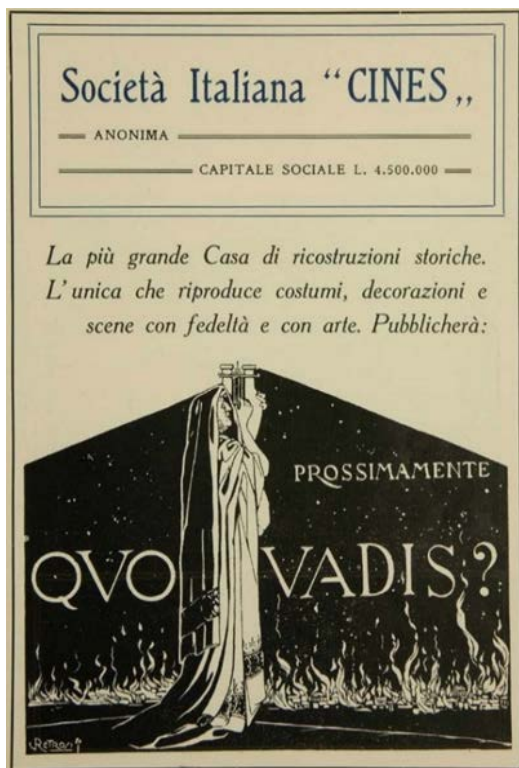


Figure 4: *La Vita Cinematografica*, Vol 4 No.1 1913.

in catalogs, for what separated fiction from non-fiction was the referent, not the mode of representation: in other words, it was the negative or affirmative answer to the question, “did it really happened?” Things started to change in 1908-1909, as fiction narrative started to establish itself as its own form of cinematic entertainment, and Pathé’s emerging newsreel set the bar for what could pass as “real events.” In fact, when Comerio Film released the war documentary *The Battle of Sidi-Said* in the summer of 1912, the film was harshly criticized for including recreations of battles rather than real ones.<sup>65</sup>

The emerging distinctions between films *dal vero* and *a soggetto* restricted historical epics’ claim to “realism,” particularly given its rather heterogeneous sources for scripts, and yet its brand relied heavily on notions of “realism” regarding its historical milieu. Regardless of how accurately the films were able to reproduce Rome, Carthage or Egypt, from as early as 1908, the verisimilitude of the profilmic space in historical films increasingly became the focus of multiple practices and discourses, from the promotion of the films, to their reception and study.<sup>66</sup> These

within the bounds of human ingenuity and genius.” “Important Interview with Mr. Arturo Ambrosio,” *The Moving Picture World* 5, no. 19 (November 6, 1909): 640. Emphasis mine.

<sup>63</sup> Bernardini calls this reproduction of social events “fake reportages,” and attributes their acceptability as a function of the audience’s growing sophistication, who understood that “in image-based representations a carefully-arranged shot, which is partly or completely fictional, can seem more realistic, plausible and truthful than a shot capturing random things and not under the control of the witnessing operator.” Bernardini, “Non-Fiction Productions,” 154.

<sup>64</sup> For example, *Execution de Jeanne d’Arc*, *Mort de Robespierre* and *Entrevue de Napoléon et du Pape*, shot by Hatot for Lumière. Alberini’s *The Capture of Rome* (1905) may fall under this category.

<sup>65</sup> *La Cinema-Fono*, No. 209, August 17 1912, Naples.

<sup>66</sup> Giuliana Muscio points out that the producers of these films opted for certain sources over other according to how well the iconography would work with the black and white medium: “This black and white iconography of silent films (and also of some genre prints) perfectly rendered the whiteness of togas and marbles, but this representational choice created the false, yet resilient idea that antique monuments were white, ignoring all the colors that actually adorned ancient clothes and buildings, to the point that the décor and costumes of Ridley’s

films openly traded on the dreams and fantasies surrounding the ancient world, on the larger-than-life imperial iconography, and on the spectacle of history [figure 4]. By 1913, the golden year for historical epics, great pains are taken to inform the audience (and potential buyers abroad), of how realistic and historically accurate the *mise en scène* is. In an interview with the newspaper *Giornale d'Italia* (11/4/1913), Enrico Guazzoni has the following to say regarding his film *Anthony and Cleopatra*:

Every part of the film's historical reconstruction has been studied scrupulously by me, on site, at museums, in libraries. Once this meticulous study was done, a troupe of artists and workers from Cines set about the patient task of rebuilding whole parts of the ancient city, as well as palaces, monuments, rooms, fountains, pools, furniture, weapons and changing rooms, so that everything corresponded to the absolute historical truth.<sup>67</sup>

Pastrone is reported to have done exactly the same for *Cabiria*, and visited the Carthage Exhibition at the Louvre to prepare for his film.<sup>68</sup> As the discourse from the industry focuses on the realism propping up the visual spectacle of the melodramatic narratives, the press responded in kind. Matilde Serao reviewed *Quo Vadis?* (1913) for a film journal and said the following:

However, no representative form could have ever given a more vibrant, more complete, more beautiful view of that which the living *Quo Vadis?* can be, if not for the one, pushed to the point of wonder, that is the cinematic reconstruction ... To bring to life in the setting and in the scenes the *Quo Vadis?*, all the *Quo Vadis?*, was the same as creating a world down to the most difficult elements to reproduce, from the exact colors of the Roman Empire, to the difficulty of putting into action the beasts of the Circus, the scene of the bull, the men burned alive and the immense fire of Rome.

It is a sight never seen before.<sup>69</sup>

Arduino Colosanti, reviewer of Guazzoni's *Anthony and Cleopatra* for the film journal, *La vita cinematografica*, responds to the film along similar lines:

Truly, that is Egypt of reality and of dreams. The Egypt described by the ancient historians, with its ingenious, but excitable, turbulent and bloody plebs with its rich landowners, who possessed wonderful luxuries but were unable to form a politically and militarily strong aristocracy... The historical truth, changed in the conceptualization of this great tragedy, comes back to life in its minute details, sometimes almost unconsciously, almost as a virtue of an acute instinctive feeling. The ephemeral Triumph, with which Marc Anthony escapes the idleness of his life of pleasure, makes us think of the real Triumph he celebrated upon entering Alexandria. The fantastic orgy that takes place in the ancient Egyptian palace through a series of magnificent frames, among the multitude of dancers, priests, courtiers, and slaves, could very well be the one Marc

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Scott's *The Gladiator* (2000) have been criticized as 'not faithful' because too colorful." Muscio, "In Hoc Signo Vinctes: Historical Films," 167.

<sup>67</sup> Prolo, *Storia del cinema muto italiano.*, 55.

<sup>68</sup> This is reported in multiple texts and is commonly known. An interesting factoid is that *Cabiria* may have been the first film where "body sculpting" was practiced: "L'attore Gemelli ebbe il solo incarico di lasciarsi crescere una barba veneranda, la prima autentica barba del cinema italiano." Ibid., 67.

<sup>69</sup> The last line reads in the original, "È uno spettacolo mai visto," where "spettacolo" can be either show, sight or spectacle. This review literally identifies the verisimilitude of the *mise en scène* with spectacle. Matilde Serao, "Ha trionfato recentemente con il Quo Vadis? La vita palpitante d'un grande romanzo.," *La vita cinematografica* 23–24 (December 1913): 13.

Anthony effectively held for an entire winter in the vast, luxurious palace of the Ptolomies after the catastrophe in Perugia.<sup>70</sup>

These reviews, along with many others found in film journals of the era, as well as interviews given by important members of the film industry, support the conclusion that the *idea* of faithfully reproducing the historical period of an imagined world was not only part of the spectacle; it *was* the spectacle, “a sight never seen before.” The purported didactic powers of these films, their artistic merit, their technological superiority (as in special effects and camera work), even the nationalistic implications of seeing Romans conquering others, were all based on the concept that what you saw in the screen was “realistic” – as realistic as the fantasy of classical Rome was to a common Western imaginary.

Black actors are mobilized within this spectacle of history, not as subjects, but as part of the objects upon which the illusion of verisimilitude is built. If Black bodies provide a spectacular rendition of reality in Omegna’s films, in historical epics they are part of the “realistic” referents that supports the melodramatic spectacle. As the films grew in size and sheer grandiosity, the numbers of sets increased as well as the locations, figures and properties. As Serao indicates, the historical epics grew from the representation of a few scenes in 1908, to the reproduction of an entire world, which include not only emperors, senators, centurions and plebs, but also lions, bulls, “dancers, priests, courtiers, and slaves.” It is in the embodiment of this last figure, the slave, that we see the appearance of black bodies, and though they do not appear in large numbers or often, their presence is intended to give the narrative a greater *sense* of historical truth, while referencing contemporaneous racial relations between Italy and its colonies.

One of the earliest examples that we have available to us today is Maggi’s *Nero, Or the Fall of Rome* (Ambrosio, 1909). This version of Nero is only 12 minutes long, and comprises a few scenes (12 total). In the opening scene, Poppea is sitting in a niche on the lower left corner of the frame with a man standing next to her. Nero, followed by a long train of courtiers, enters from the background left, and moves background right before walking to the foreground. Poppea and friend stand up and move to middle depth of frame to meet the Emperor and his train. Poppea and friend move to the background left and exit, while Nero remains in the middle ground, stupefied at Poppea’s beauty for a few seconds, then exits with his entire train by moving foreground right. Much like the set of a play or an opera, this is well-coordinated entrance and exit of a multitude of people, which keeps the scene fluid and moving. It is therefore curious to notice a pair of Black servants, standing still next to the niche, for the entire scene. It is easy to miss them at first, as they are standing almost behind the niche, and they are being blocked by Poppea’s male companion. However, as Poppea and her companion move from the foreground to the middle ground, the two black bodies come into view, almost in the middle of the frame. However, unlike the protagonist and the extras of the scene, they stand still the entire time, not saluting or bowing to the Emperor as everyone else does, and staying exactly where they are as everyone else exits the scene. In other words, they are not there as people, but as props of a scene, a simple referent to the geographical dominion of the Empire.

In a later scene, after Nero presents Poppea to the people as the new Empress, we find ourselves in a very crowded scene of festivities and celebrations. In the background a multitude of courtiers are sprawling about, drinking, celebrating, and moving in repetitive motions to suggest merriment. They are there to create the ambiance of debauchery and to provide visual

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<sup>70</sup> Arduino Colosanti, “Trionfa attualmente il tutto il mondo con Marcantonio e Cleopatra,” *La vita cinematografica*, no. 23–24 (December 1913): 15.

depth to the scene. In the foreground is Nero with his new beloved, and the entrance of Octavia, Nero's wife, provides the narrative conflict of the scene. While all of this is happening, three Black servants, dressed in white togas like everyone else, enter the scene. They are bringing wine to the festivities: two of them bring wine jars to the background for the courtiers, and one brings a single cup on a tray, which he presents on bended knee to Nero, and exits the frame right after. He exits by walking from the center of the frame, middle ground, toward the left corner in the foreground. That gives us 10 seconds in which a Black man occupies prime real estate on the silver screen. Overall, their actions are well within the expected duties of servants or slaves, therefore what is fascinating is not their activities, but rather the fact that they are there in first place, instead of Italian actors in blackface [figure 5].



Figure 5: Screen shots of scene 1 and 10 from *Nero, Or the Fall of Rome*.

In fact, blackface was quite common at the time. Our best-known example would be the aforementioned Maciste from *Cabiria*, but he is definitely not the only one. A recurrent character in blackface is Tigellinus, commander of the Praetorian Guard under Nero, who appears in blackface as early as Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis?* and as late as 1930 in Blasetti's *Nerone*. Other notable blackface characters include Locusta, the poisoner in *Agrippina* (1911, Cines), Zuma (played by the actor Hesperia) from the eponymous film, *Zuma the Gypsy* (1913, Cines), Narr Havas from *Salambo* (1914, Pasquali), and *Othello* (Ambrosio, 1914) [figure 6]. Italian actors in blackface are present in the background as well, as extras. They can be seen as slaves, servants, sedan carriers, etcetera in *Quo Vadis?*, *Agrippina*, *Cabiria*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, just to name a few. Certainly, the scant Black population in Italy at the turn of the century, and the ease with which Italians would put on blackface whenever necessary, give the presence of these unaccredited Black actors as props in the *mise en scène* a particular strong valence. A valence that would be very different if they had been used to play traditionally antagonistic secondary

roles, like Tigellinus in all the Nero theme films. In that case, the valence of their performance would fall along the melodramatic division of good and evil, between “us” and “them.” As props, however, their only function is to serve as a rather exotic historical referent that allows the *mise en scène* to claim a greater sense of historical verisimilitude. It allows the audience to look and see a “real” black slave, rather than an Italian in blackface.



Figure 6: Tigellinus (top left), Narr Hava (top right), Locusta (bottom left), Zuma (bottom right).

This form of historical “verisimilitude” speaks as much to the present as it does to the real and fantasized past. It serves to put on display contemporaneous relations between Italy and its colonies. In fact, Italy’s involvement in North Africa in 1911 prompted some small changes in the way black faces appeared in historical epics. One of the most subtle, yet significant, changes is the fact that Black actors played not only servants carrying trays or sedans, but started to play soldiers. Colosanti’s review of *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1913, Cines) focuses on a Triumph Anthony puts on in Egypt to commemorate his rule. The Triumph is a procession led by cavalrymen, followed by foot soldiers carrying military standards, and then by foot soldiers with spears. At this point, you see what could be a section of a tribal regiment: a commander wearing an Egyptian headdress with a long feather on top, followed by three Black soldiers with big, round shields and long spears. Behind them come four Black men carrying a platform with what seems like an Egyptian urn on top, and wearing a black uniform with six metal studs on the front, a broad, Egyptian-like, metal collar, and a long feather on their headdress. After them, the procession continues with trumpeters, foot soldiers, and other slaves/servants carrying other artifacts.

*Quo Vadis?* (1913) also has a similar scene. Nero arrives at a banquet, preceded by an escort of soldiers. They arrive from the background left and move diagonally toward foreground right. The escort is headed by four Roman foot soldiers with spears. Behind them are three Black

soldiers wearing non-Roman uniforms: diadem with a long feather, and a broad, shiny military necklace with a large stone set in the middle of it, and a short sword in front. The rest of their uniform is black with metallic trimmings, composed of a vest with six metallic studs and a peplum.<sup>71</sup> The uniforms are very similar to those worn by the Black soldiers in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, despite the historical gap. These are African soldiers belonging to the Empire, protecting the Emperor himself as he enters the room. In their role as subjects and soldiers for the Empire, these soldiers were most likely referencing the *Ascari*, the colonial troops active in the Libyan war, which thanks to the aforementioned war documentaries, were well-known in Italy. Among these troops, there was even a cavalry squadron, the “Cheren,” known more commonly as “The Falcon Feathers,” for the long feather that adorned their *tarbusc* (elongated fez). It is impossible to ascertain with absolute certainty whether the feathered Black soldiers in the film were indeed referencing the feathered Black soldiers in the Italian colonial army, but in all likelihood, they were. After the Italo-Turkish War, the myth of the “faithful Ascari” could only have grown as the war was heavily filmed and exhibited [figure 7].

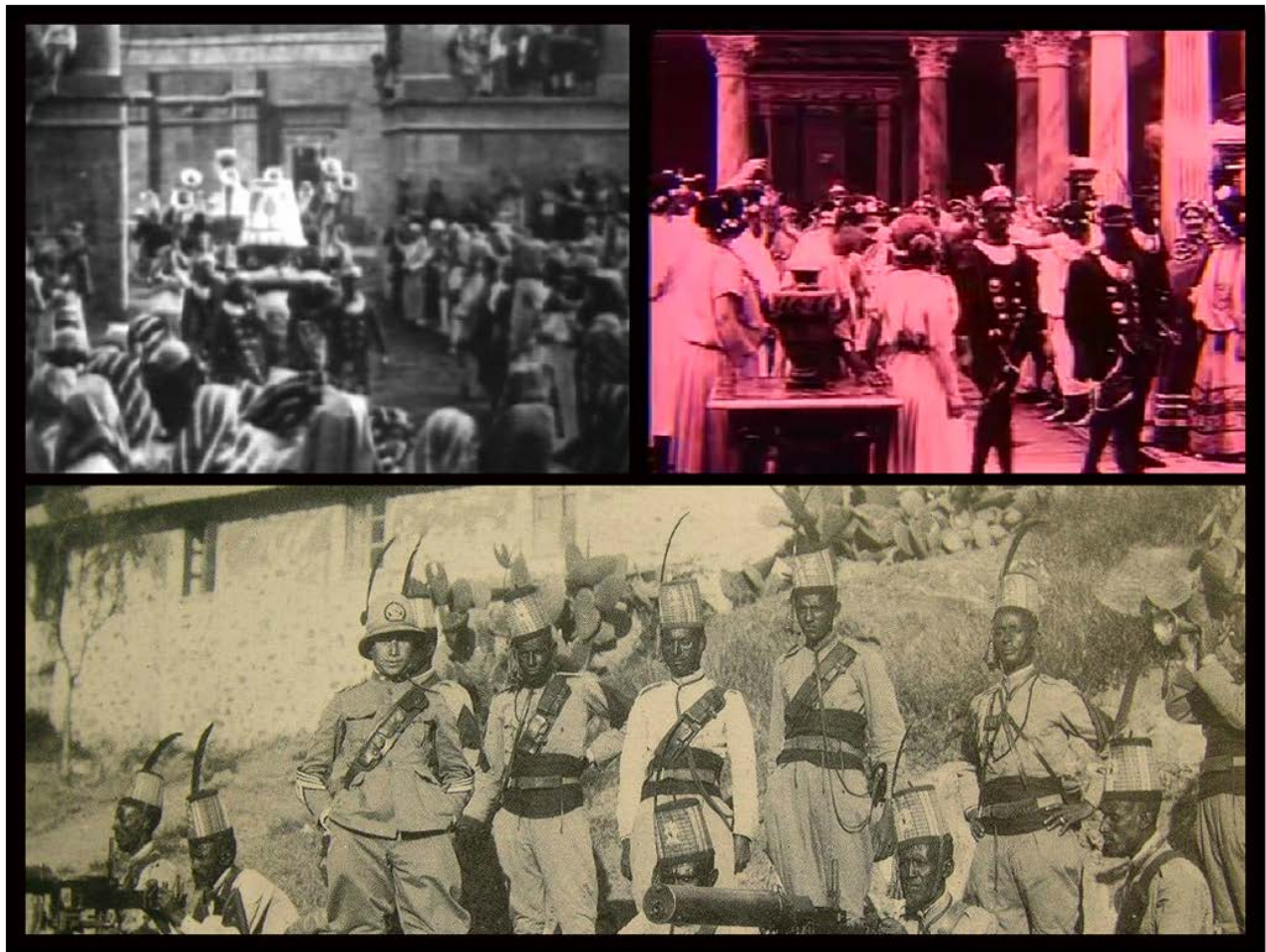


Figure 7: *Antonio and Cleopatra* (top left), *Quo Vadis?* (top right), Squadron “Penne di Falco” Ascari soldiers (bottom).

<sup>71</sup> The dye of the film I viewed made the trimmings and studs in the soldier’s uniform look like gold. However, the dye of that particular print may not be indicative of what was intended or what was most readily projected at the time. We can say with certainty, though, that they are made of some highly reflective metal that gives the uniforms a very distinguished look.



The cinematic nod to contemporaneous colonial troops does not erase the primary function of those unaccredited black faces of early Italian cinema, which is to serve as a symbolic referent to the glorified Roman Empire. More specifically, they are cinematic buttresses for a proclaimed realism of the profilmic space of these films. Over time, this “primary” function becomes secondary as the film industry responds to different social, economic and political exigencies. Films like *Quo Vadis?* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*, and other historical epics after 1911, are already part of a new era whenever they reference Italy’s colonial enterprises. They are, in fact, part of a transitional phase, where a Black actor playing a Black soldier of Rome is simultaneously responding to the socio-economic exigencies of a film genre that is carving out a market niche through its claim of historical realism, as well as a proto-colonial film genre that likes to parade Italy’s colonial troops through the veil of history.

Surely by the time *Maciste in the Lion’s Cage* (1926, Brignone) premiered in Italy, dominance from *realistic spectacles* had fully transferred to *colonial spectacles*. In this instance, present-day Maciste, in full explorer regalia a la Omegna in *Leopard Hunting*, goes to Africa to capture lions for a circus. While in a nondescript African location, he saves Saida, an African woman (in blackface) who follows him back to Europe. While at the port, strong black men with naked torsos are seen in the background loading the lions to his ship. In this 1926 instance, blackface and black faces are not at the service of articulating an imperial fantasy of what Rome used to be, and therefore by implication what Italy could become. Instead, they are presenting a vision of what imperial Italy looks like “now,” in the present. Indeed, this blackface lady in distress, these naked torsos laboring for Maciste, as well as the captured/tamed lions, are all referents of real and imagined colonial relations between Italy and Africa in the present, visually drawing from these historical epics and Omegna’s exotic films.

#### Exceptional *Faccette* and *Facce*

Until now, I have been following Coletti’s terminology and I have talked about *blackface* and *black faces*. However, I believe that my use of black faces does not quite match Coletti’s notion, at least so far. Black faces, or *facce*, are supposed to be indicative of black actors performing a discernable role, such as Thywill Amenia playing Kwaku in the seminal film *Tomato* (1990, Placido). These black faces express, emote, convey with words, actions and looks. What we have seen so far are not black faces, but rather black bodies that are mobilized as props in a set, as symbolic referents. We have not even discussed the stereotypical masks, the *faccette*, that are to be found in later films, for even these forms of cinematic representations require a minimum of performance, of presence, on the part of the actor.

However, there are a couple of exceptions. The first one involves a stereotypical mask, a *faccetta*, performed in a scene of *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1913, Ambrosio). Nydia, the blind and faithful servant, has been imprisoned by the antagonist Arbaces, and kept in a small, dungeon-like cell with a skylight on top. It is here where we find our first titled Black character, Sosia, the jail guard for Nydia. The scene is relatively long, and given the small space of the cell, it allows Sosia to occupy a considerable amount of space in the frame, particularly since he is much bigger than Nydia. More importantly, Sosia’s character has narrative weight, as he is the obstacle that Nydia must overcome in order to escape and help her beloved Glaucus. Nydia’s character is reminiscent of the Egyptian slave Charmian from *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1913, Cines), who must also escape imprisonment to save her beloved Anthony from the Egyptian conspirators. Charmian manages to escape by making a rope out of part of her robe, and by

surprising the guard and strangling him. This act speaks to the tenacity and strength of Charmian, but gives no narrative contours to the guard at all.

Nydia, on the other hand, escapes by pretending to be practicing a form of enchantment that allows her to speak with spirits. This farce gets the attention of Sosia, who readily believes that a magical/spiritual act is underway, and wants to participate. In order to see the spirits that Nydia is pretending to see, he must cover his face with her veil, blinding him. After this is done, she steals the key from his waistband and escapes, at which point Sosia realizes what has happened and finds himself locked in the cell. It is a great scene, allowing the uncredited actor a lot of exposure, giving him time and space to act his part. Unfortunately, the part that he must act is that of the gullible Black man. His gullibility stems from the stereotype that Africans are religiously atavistic and believe in spirits and ghosts, and are therefore easy to manipulate. The entire performance is excellent, but it betrays a general belief that Africans are naïve and tribal, and therefore the act must be considered as a *faccetta*, and not just an instance of a Black actor performing a part in Italian early cinema [figure 8].



Figure 8: Nydia and Sosia from *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1913, Ambrosio).

There is, however, one instance in which a Black actor performs a substantive and dynamic part. The actor is once again unaccredited, and plays the role of Spendius, sidekick to the protagonist Matho in Pasquali's *Salambo* (1914). Much like the contemporaneous Maciste character in *Cabiria*, Spendius turns out to be more dynamic and more decisive than the supposed protagonist. The story begins when Matho, a slave of Carthage, meets the priestess Salambo and falls in love with her. Two years later Matho is not only free, but is the leader of a large mercenary contingency. Spendius, along with Narr Havas (Italian actor in blackface), is second in command and personal aid to Matho. A protracted war with Rome causes the leaders of Carthage to seek the aid of Matho and his mercenaries. After the Romans are defeated, there is a great celebration inside the city. The presence of Salambo rekindles Matho's passion for her, and causes a fight with Narr Havas as well.

Unfortunately, Carthage tries to cheat the mercenaries by giving the mercenaries false gold, a fact discovered by the clever Spendius. A war between the mercenaries and Carthage is about to ensue, but Matho is so engrossed in his obsession with Salambo that he cannot think of a way to win the war. It is once again Spendius who comes up with a plan, and convinces Matho to put that plan into action. Later on, Spendius will rescue Matho and ensure a happy-ending for him and Salambo by climbing inside a statue and impersonating Tanit, the Carthaginian god, and directing the city to accept Matho as its leader. It is true that during the first incursion into the city, Matho takes the lead, and through enormous feats of strength, saves himself and Spendius. However, his character continuously falls flat compared to that of Spendius, who through wit and strength, continuously outmaneuvers the antagonists [figure 9].

These two unaccredited actors may very well be the first Black actors in Italian cinema. However, at least one of them need not be unaccredited forever. While researching for this chapter, I explored the digital archives of the *Museo Nazionale del Cinema*, and consulted various film journals from 1908 to 1914. In Volume 3, Number 1 of *La Vita Cinematografica* (1/15/1912) there was an announcement that the film division of Unitas was to become a different company in the near future, one called Centauro Films. The announcement was signed by the future owner and director of the company, the Engineer Dario Omega – no known relation to Roberto Omega. Centauro Films started to produce films that very year, though according to the film index provided by Bernardini and Martellini, the production studio was in business only until 1915.<sup>72</sup> Of particular interest to us is the fact that in the 1913 December double issue of *La Vita Cinematografica* (No. 23-24), the film journal printed the artistic directory of various studios with pictures. The entire directory of Centauro Film was present, which included the name Jean Fall alongside the image of a gallantly dressed Black man with suit, tie and top hat, sitting on a chair holding a club. The person looking at us is no other than the actor who played Sosia in Caserini's 1913 *The Last Days of Pompeii* [figure 10].

I have no further information on the actor, and unfortunately, I have yet to access any of the 62 films attributed to the studio in the Bernardini/Martellini index. In fact, many of them are listed as “untraceable.” Therefore, it is impossible to know at this time if there were other films in which Jean Fall acted in Italy, or for how long he worked in the country. I do not even know where Mr. Fall is from, given the high degree of movement in the film industry at the time, where every Italian studio employed actors and technicians from different European countries.

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<sup>72</sup> The film index is derived from the 21 volumes of the series, *Il cinema muto italiano 1905-1931* published by the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* and *Nuova Eri* over the course of five years, from 1991 to 1996. The filmography was drawn from all 21 volumes by Baldo Vallero for the non-profit *Associazione Italiana per le Ricerche di Storia del Cinema*, and can be accessed at <http://airscnew.it/index?pid=41> (accessed May 11, 2015).

What I do know is that Sosia is not just a black face, or a black body, he is first and foremost a person, a Black actor whose name is Jean Fall.

### Conclusion

What this chapter has attempted to demonstrate is that whether by circumstance or by design, the representation of persons of color, particularly black bodies, in early Italian cinema is often pulled into the orbit of a binary discourse on realism and spectacle. This will continue to be the case, more or less, for decades to come as the relationship between Italy and the global south is framed first by colonialism, and then by a willful amnesia of Italy's participation in said historical phenomenon. This dual form of engagement, dominion or disavowal, means that persons of color who may have claimed a piece of *Italianità* though blood or history remained perennially "over there," outside of the imagined community of the Italian nation – even as said "imagined community" is riddled with structural fractures. Perhaps those very structural fractures have a role to play in the willful turning away from the possibility that (ex)colonial subjects in the first place, or immigrants from the global south in the second place, could participate in the process of imagining a national community. The Southern Question, emigration, the rise and fall of fascism, Cold War divisions of Left and Right – these are all fractures and cracks that run deep in the façade of *Italianità*, requiring constant and unrelenting attention by the establishment and the machinery of cultural production. The very tending to these fractures constitutes a great deal of the ongoing project of nation formation, which means that the solipsism Bertellini identified in the silent era extends beyond that period: Italy turns away from the world to which it is invariably connected through complex networks of exchange and looks only "inward" to the perennial questions that involve only itself.

The effects of decolonization and the end of the Cold War is changing it all. The continual arrival of immigrants from the global south since the 1980s means that Italian culture cannot longer pretend to live isolated from the global systems that undergird its economy. For a country that has obsessed for decades over its status as an emigration country, the arrival of thousands of people is not only frightening, but also spectacular. Though immigrants arrive in Italy through a wide variety of itineraries, the so called *carrette del mare* have become iconic of this social, political and historical phenomenon. The modality of spectacular reality returns in the media's engagement with immigration and second generations ethnic Italians; sensationalism becomes the norm in the 1990s and 2000s. The Italian film industry will immediately throw its hat in the ring, and engage as well, but from a "leftist" perspective. To a large degree, though, it does not matter. Left-leaning film practices, Right-leaning political rhetoric, it is all (once again) the solipsistic stance of *la lupa* on the Palatine Hill, licking her wounds, tending to the new fractures of its *Italianità*. Just look at how Italian culture frames the lives of immigrants through the lens of its own emigration past, and how it packages the visual products of these solipsistic visions with the bows and ribbons of its cinematic history. Italian cinema of immigration: spectacular realities or realistic spectacles – it is hard to tell the difference sometimes.

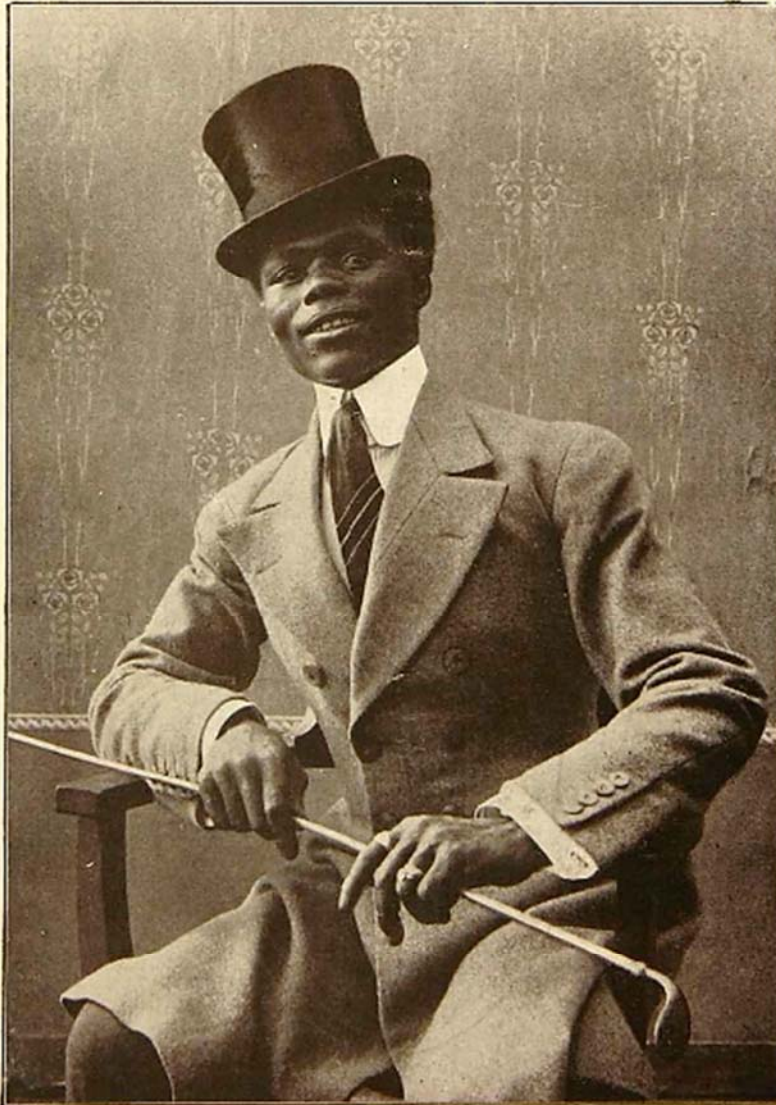
The only hope of breaking the solipsistic loop is to let an *Other* speak the language of *la lupa*, to have her say, and to add her accent to the mix of already heterogeneous voices that make up the *bel paese*. This is happening now, in very small instances. The question before us, then, is not "can the subaltern speak?" but rather, "can s/he be heard?"

Auuuuuu...



*Figure 9: Actor who plays Spendius in Pasquali's Salambo, 1914*

Le figure artistiche della "Centauro-Films"



Jean Fall

Figure 10: Jean Fall, actor who plays Sosia in Caserini's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 1913



## Chapter 2: “They are as we once were”?

*“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 Stella<sup>1</sup>

After the historical fantasies of a glorious Roman past ended with WWI, the Italian cinematic gaze on Black people and other persons of color remained temporally on the present. From the Maciste films of early 1920s to the war films of the late 1930s, the cinematic interactions between Italians and people from the global south in the interwar period were couched within the colonialist fantasies of the Fascist state. Though these films allowed for the physical presence of Black subjects on Italian soil from time to time, the dominant spatialization of said interactions clearly marked all person of color as belonging “over there.” With the exception of a brief period after WWII, when the neorealist lens focused on the Black GIs occupying Italy, this sort of spatialization of social relations between Italy and persons of color remain in place well into the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> As long as the number of people coming in and out of Italy from the global south remained small, and therefore socially invisible, Italian cinema maintained an orientalist gaze upon the exotic lands and subjects of the world, as if such places and people were forever to remain “over there,” where they belong.

All of that changed at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, which were years of tremendous transition for Europe in general, and Italy in particular.<sup>3</sup> One of the most salient social changes for Italy was the influx of immigrants from the global south. Italy had long seen itself as a country of emigrants, and was thus unprepared culturally and politically for immigration in massive scale, which in the late 1980s made Italy the primary European receiving country.<sup>4</sup> The lack of a positive cultural matrix of reception on the one hand, the inaction of the state in creating a legal framework for the introduction of that migrant labor force into the system on the other, plus the symbolic mobilization of the immigrant for the political gains of emerging conservative parties in the North, led to social tensions and clashes: rampant discrimination against the new immigrants, shortage of housing, lack of labor protection, the

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<sup>1</sup> Gian Antonio Stella, *L'orda: Quando gli albanesi eravamo noi* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2002), 57. Translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> For more details on Black GIs please see, Shelleen Greene, “Buffalo Soldiers on Film: Il soldato afroamericano nel cinema neorealista e postbellico italiano,” in *L’Africa in Italia: Per una contro storia postcoloniale del cinema italiano* (Rome: Aracne, 2013), 93–108.

<sup>3</sup> Within the span of three years (1989–1992), the political structures of the Cold War disintegrated, ushering 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.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Cole, *The New Racism in Europe: A Sicilian Ethnography*, 107 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4.



racialization of the immigration phenomenon by the Left, and the sensationalist approach of certain sectors of the media, all led to an overall sense of social emergency. The collapse of the Iron Curtain in the early 1990s only exacerbated the phenomenon as thousands of Eastern Europeans headed west.

In response to the tumultuous events 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.<sup>5</sup> Since 1987 the state-owned network RAI 3, under the leadership of Angelo Guglielmi, had been airing TV shows that in one way or another tried to address some of the issues of contemporary society. While critics had different opinions on the worthiness of this type of *TV-verità* (was it truly exposé? Or simple spectacle?), the general consensus was that Italian cinema was in desperate need of social engagement after years of American dominance and Italian comedies.<sup>6</sup> Unlike television, in their opinion, cinema had long abandoned the engaged ethics and aesthetics of its neorealist forefathers for the rather inadequate mode of comedy. They were calling for a “neo-neorealism” that would be similar or better than what was found in the programming of RAI 3.<sup>7</sup> A “neo-neorealism” that would not just copy the techniques of neorealism, but adapt to the new, modern realities Italy was facing.

Italian cinema of immigration emerged within this ideological environment. Italian directors tackled the issue of immigration from the global south head-on, and adopted stylistic elements that were generally understood to be part of the neorealist legacy: social realism, shooting on location, indexical reality of time and space, non-professional actors, etcetera. More importantly, they mobilized a trope that became an interpretative matrix for the new immigrant and the shock of mass immigration – namely, they created an analogy between the new immigrant from the global south and the Italian emigrant from previous generations. The trope basically states, “they are as we once were,” and in so doing, the trope seeks to explicate to an Italian audience the life and experiences of Italy’s newest residents.

However, despite the progressive intentions behind the mobilization of such a trope, there are major problems with its premise, which ultimately undermine its efficacy. In this chapter I will take apart that neorealist trope and show that despite its progressive intentions, it is basically flawed and ultimately detrimental to both immigrants and the memory of Italian emigration. I will show that the trope is based on a historical sleight of hand, a misremembering of history, and that such historical erasure is so ingrained in Italian culture as to go unnoticed, feeding upon long standing discriminatory hierarchies between the North and South.

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<sup>5</sup> Anna Maria Mori, “Primattrice la realtà,” *La Repubblica*, June 3, 1989, sec. Mercurio - Il Neo-realismo; Anna Maria Mori, “Le finzioni dei programmi verità,” *La Repubblica*, June 3, 1989, sec. Mercurio - Il Neo-neorealismo; Ugo Pirro, “La voglia c’è ma non si vede ancora,” *La Repubblica*, June 17, 1989, sec. Mercurio - Mass Media; Natalia Aspesi, “Neo-neorealismo, parte seconda,” *La Repubblica*, June 17, 1989, sec. Mercurio - Mass Media; Angelo Guglielmi, “Bisogna parlare ma in piazza,” *La Repubblica*, June 3, 1989, sec. Mercurio - Il Neo-neorealismo.

<sup>6</sup> The debate on the legitimacy of *TV-verità* was born out of an article by Umberto Eco published on May 13 1989 in *La Repubblica* and the response given by Angelo Guglielmi on the same newspaper on June 3 1989. Eco’s argument is a continuation of his earlier work from the early 1980s on Neotelevisione and Paleotelevisione. See, Umberto Eco, “Io e lei quando eravamo piccoli...,” *La Repubblica*, May 13, 1989; Guglielmi, “Bisogna parlare ma in piazza”; Umberto Eco, “C’è un rischio: la TV sulla TV,” *La Repubblica*, June 3, 1989, sec. Mercurio - Il Neo-neorealismo.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

### *Il colore dell'odio and Tomato*

Pasquale Squitieri's film, *Il colore dell'odio*, premiered at the Sorrento Film Festival on October 5 1989, and it could not have premiered at a more auspicious time.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, the debate on neorealism and the need for a more engaged cinema had intensified in the months after *La Repubblica* articles on "neo-neorealism" (June 1989). Furthermore, the death of Cesare Zavattini in October of that year fueled a broader reconsideration of neorealism and its role in Italian history and culture, as the "Neorealism Retrospective" at the Turin's film festival that same month shows.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the murder of the South African Jerry Masslo (August 25 1989) in the tomato fields of Villa Literno, brought the issue of immigration and immigrant rights to the forefront of Italian society as the case garnered tremendous media attention, inspiring massive street demonstrations against racism, and the first immigration law in Italy.<sup>10</sup>

In many ways, *Il colore dell'odio* perfectly responded to the call for a more realist cinema while addressing the salient topic of racism and immigration in Italy. The film takes a drastic turn away from the exotic films of the 1970s which eroticized the bodies of actresses of color such as Laura Gemser and Zeudy Araya. It also rejected the tactic of using immigrants as comic relief, where the migrants play the most tangential of roles in the plot, and whose function is basically to be the butt of a joke.<sup>11</sup> Instead the film places the migrant's narrative front and center, and with a dramatic approach, it showcases some of the difficulties a person of color faces in Italian society. The narrative of the film revolves around the misfortunes of a biracial couple, Miriam and Rashid, who must run away from the law due to a case of mistaken identity: Rashid is falsely identified as the assassin of an Arab diplomat, and out of fear he goes into hiding.<sup>12</sup> Worried for her boyfriend, Miriam goes searching for him, and in doing so unveils for the audience a parallel world of misery, illegality and precariousness.<sup>13</sup> Having decided to escape to North Africa, the couple gets involved in petty crimes in order to raise money for the passage. However, the dream of Africa will never come, as the police get wind of Rashid's whereabouts, and end his life in a shoot-out.

The film should have received a good reception by the critics and the public given the topic of the narrative and its "realist" style. However critics from *La Repubblica* and *L'Unità* had lukewarm responses to the film: they all admired the choice of topic, but felt that the film was "too melodramatic" to properly represent the neorealist tradition.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Placido's *Tomato* (1990), which premiered at Cannes only seven months later, was received quite well by the

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<sup>8</sup> Whenever possible, the official English title is given. If no English title exist, the original Italian title is used.

<sup>9</sup> Nino Ferrero, "Cinema Giovani niente crisi del settimo anno," *L'Unità*, October 27, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> The death of Jerry Essan Masslo became a turning point for the growing social tensions surrounding the issue of immigration and the violence against immigrants that was becoming all too common. For the first time in Italy, large public manifestations against racism were organized, with over two hundred thousand people marching on the streets. Jerry's death received a lot of media attention, and his funeral was televised and attended by government functionaries. It also brought to light the need for Italy to update its immigration laws, which at the time only recognized political asylum for citizens of Eastern Europe and had no provisions for migrants of other parts of the world. Anna Morelli, "Marcia della civiltà: A Roma 200.000 contro il razzismo," *L'Unità*, October 8, 1989.

<sup>11</sup> Case in point would be the Italian lesson scene in Verdone's *Acqua e sapone* (1983).

<sup>12</sup> Miriam is Italian, and Rashid is "extracomunitario" – though he is already a hybrid subject as the son of a Sicilian father and a Moroccan mother. Rashid is played by the Eritrean born Salvatore Marino.

<sup>13</sup> Paolo D'Agostini, "Il razzismo di oggi la lotta armata di ieri," *La Repubblica*, October 6, 1989, sec. Spettacoli.

<sup>14</sup> Paolo D'Agostini said, in more than one occasion, "se Squitieri vuole tenere alta la bandiera dei valori neorealisti dovrebbe forse cedere un po' meno a certi eccessi partenopei." Paolo D'Agostini, "Cronache di razzismo," *La Repubblica*, December 12, 1989, sec. Spettacoli.

critics, despite the fact that it also makes a strong appeal to emotions to convey its points.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the films share a lot of elements: they both look at immigration from the perspective of the African immigrant, both feature a biracial couple, both are serious drama, both give a Dantesque tour of the hellish margins of society, and both end the film with the death of an immigrant to accentuate the gravity of the subject matter. With so many similarities, why were the films read so differently by the critics?

While one could engage with questions of cultural capital to account for some of the reasons why these two films were received so differently, instead I would like to focus on how they were promoted in light of the contemporaneous debates on the need for an engaged and “neo-neorealist” cinema.<sup>16</sup> In the case of *Colore dell’odio*, showing the “problems confronting ordinary people in the present moment rather than the historical past or an imagined future” was not enough for it to be considered of neorealist pedigree by its critics.<sup>17</sup> A stronger reference to the neorealist tradition and the immediate postwar era was necessary. Placido’s *Tomato* was able to provide both in a rather direct and explicit way: the film’s narrative movement from south to north showing the “real” conditions of Italy, and its one-word title in dialect reflecting the way in which the film’s marginal subjects talk to each other, is reminiscent of *Paisà*. The connection between *Tomato* and neorealism is further reinforced by Placido’s explicit claim that *Tomato* was inspired by Germi’s *The Path of Hope* (1950).<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the film makes a direct reference to the tragedy of Jerry Masslo by shooting part of the film in the tomato fields of Villa Literno, thus heightening its claim to social realism and addressing immigration at large through a well-known and highly publicized incident.<sup>19</sup> *Tomato*, unlike *Il colore dell’odio*, wore its neorealist credentials on its sleeve and the critics accepted them quite readily.

When all things are considered, however, it becomes quite obvious that *Il colore dell’odio* is just as “neorealist” as *Tomato*, sharing three basic building blocks of neorealist films: the theme of marginalized people, the aesthetics of indexical realism, and more importantly, the

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<sup>15</sup> “Film di aspri contrasti e di nobile ispirazione, *Pummarò* riesce con piglio originalmente realistico e con digressioni sociologico-psicologiche pertinenti a toccare il nervo scoperto di un dramma tutt’ora aperto, tragicamente divampante.” Sauro Borelli, “Pummarò, dai campi alla Germania,” *L’Unità*, September 17, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> The question of cultural capital and its effects on cinema of immigration, particularly in relation to the legacy of neorealism, will be addressed in the following chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Bill Nichols defines the neorealist style as “indexical”: “a casual, unadorned view of everyday life; a meandering, coincidence-laden series of actions and events; natural lighting and location shooting; a reliance on untrained actors; a rejection of close-ups dotting on the faces of stars; and a stress on the problems confronting ordinary people in the present moment rather than the historical past or an imagined future.” Also called “indexical realism.” Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Dario Formisano, “Io uomo bianco tra i pummarò,” *L’Unità*, September 1, 1990; Borelli, “Pummarò, dai campi alla Germania”; Laura Delli Colli, “Michele Placido senza Piovra fa il regista con Pummarò,” *La Repubblica*, October 4, 1989.

<sup>19</sup> “Pummarò’ Placido fa il regista,” *L’Unità*, August 6, 1989, sec. Cultura e Spettacoli. In this interview the director said that he started shooting two days prior at Villa Literno, but within the diegesis of the film, the town is called Civitella Licinio. It is worth noting that the film project, with its scenes in the tomato fields of southern Italy, was already conceptualized before the murder of Jerry Masslo. However, that fact does not stop an article written five days after Masslo’s murder to claim that, “it is in fact a story about the sad situation of immigrants of color in our country, which the tragic facts at Villa Literno with the assassination of Jerry Masslo have made it even more relevant to today. In fact, those very events forced Placido to get his hands on the script in order to highlight the different manifestations of intolerance and racism.” “E Placido prepara Pummarò,” *L’Unità*, August 30, 1989, sec. Cultura e Spettacoli.

progressive intentionality that drives the very production of the films.<sup>20</sup> However imperfect Squitieri's film may have been, it falls well within the cinematic legacy of neorealism in Italy. It is part of its many permutations over the decades since WWII, a film legacy that while vague with undetermined parameters, is also recognizable in the productions of Petri, Olmi, Rosi, Pontecorvo – among many others.<sup>21</sup> *Tomato* is clearly part of the same legacy as well. However, by explicitly drawing an analogy between the new immigrant and the subjects of classic neorealist films, *Tomato* accessed certain fantasies regarding neorealism and the postwar era, which in turn were deployed as an interpretative matrix for the emerging cinema of immigration.

### Invoking Neorealism and Its Cultural Legacy

One of the most important elements *Tomato* was able to access by invoking neorealism is a certain sense of cinematic and artistic legitimacy. Neorealism is by far the most famous and prestigious contribution Italy has made to the overall cinema canon. To name it as your progenitor is to claim for yourself a certain artistic pedigree, a necessary move given the contemporary market and cultural conditions. From a commercial perspective, comedies were the most viable domestic product in Italian cinema in the 1980s, while socially engaged films were not known to be commercially successful. And yet a certain type of social realist drama were successful towards the end of the 1980s. As mentioned earlier, reality TV and exposé types of shows, whether on the mainstream RAI 1 or the left-leaning RAI 3, had become quite popular in recent years. Case in point is *La Piovra*, a dramatic RAI 1 TV show on the inner workings of the Mafia featuring *Tomato*'s director, Michele Placido, as its protagonist. Premiering in 1984, a year after the Mafia wars and two year before the Mafia Maxi trial of 1986, *La Piovra* dealt with one of the most salient topics of the times while becoming one of the most popular TV series of the 1980s.<sup>22</sup> By 1989 the show had completed four successful seasons. Furthermore, in 1987 RAI 3 started airing TV shows such as *Telefono Giallo*, *Chi l'ha visto?*, *Un giorno in pretura*, *Io confesso*, *Allarme in città*, etc, shows that were part journalism, part exposé, and part social engagement. More importantly, however, is the fact that they were all very popular.

Equally as important as the cultural capital elicited is the progressive political valence obtained by claiming to be of the neorealist line. Born out of the chaos of WWII, neorealism was a social phenomenon that encompassed all Italian cultural aspects, a phenomenon around which all transformative and redemptive forces gathered, becoming the first step towards a new

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<sup>20</sup> For Mark Shiel, the progressive intentionality of the films is what distinguishes neorealist films from “realist” films in the fascist era and the even those that came after. In his analysis of certain realist films made before neorealism he states, “but this was realism, carefully-controlled and laced with a firmly authoritarian spirit, and it appealed to fascist regimes precisely because it had an aura of cultural and popular authenticity...far from being precursors of neorealism, however, these films were antithetical to it on every level except that of visual form.” (28-29).

<sup>21</sup> Peter Bondanella rightly identifies the political films of the 1960s and 1970s as part of neorealism's legacy in Italian cinema. He goes further by stating that the cinema *d'impegno*, or socially and politically engaged cinema, goes beyond the 1960s and 1970s, for it is not a genre, but a metaphorical thread:

The ‘political film,’ therefore, must be understood as what Italians film historians call a *filone*: literally a ‘thread,’ here a metaphorical one that runs through many directors, many genres, and a number of decades in Italian film history, that can never really be pinned down to originating in a specific film or director, and that continues more or less uninterrupted in most of the postwar period down to the present.

Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema*, 242.

<sup>22</sup> For more information on *La Piovra*, please see Milly Buonanno, *Italian TV Drama and Beyond: Stories from the Soil, Stories from the Sea* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012).

national myth in the post Fascist era.<sup>23</sup> Yet it was not a formal school with a well-articulated manifesto or self-appointed leaders to give it shape and form. Neorealism was rather, as Italo Calvino pointed out in his nostalgic introduction to the 1964 edition of *The Path of the Spider's Nest*, a chorus of marginal voices, of previously unheard constituencies, rising at the end of (and in opposition to) Fascism, expressing a sense of possibility in what was to come. Neorealism was therefore a spontaneous, chaotic, formless and borderless phenomenon, one that for a short while encompassed everything and anything that was progressive, subversive, anti-fascist, revisionist, etc – even if only superficially so.<sup>24</sup> For *Tomato* to claim Germi's *The Path of Hope* as its source of inspiration is to claim for itself that progressive, Left-leaning ideological valence, an ideological position of particular importance given the overall sense of historical transition felt throughout the West at the beginning of the 1990s.

On top of the cultural capital and the symbolic valence mobilized by the invocation of neorealism, *Tomato* gained access to certain narrative structures and characterization tropes which helped to familiarize the rather alien social phenomenon of immigration. However, in order to explain these structures and tropes, it is necessary to delve a bit further into the traditional taxonomy and evolutionary history of neorealism. Neorealism, as stated earlier, was not a formal school with well-defined parameters a priori. When it comes to cinema, few moments “have been as hotly debated in their day and by succeeding generations as the moment of Italian neorealism in Italy after World War Two.”<sup>25</sup> Rather than trying to find clear borders delineating a stable parameter, it is best to identify constitutive elements, voices of the neorealist *chorus*, which run through the corpus of Italian cinema like threads from the postwar era to the

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<sup>23</sup> Luisa Rivi argues that neorealist films like 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.” Luisa Rivi, *European Cinema after 1989: Cultural Identity and Transnational Production* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 4.

Fabiana Woodfin also notes that “the neorealist method was a ‘moral weapon’ to be used against the past in order to secure absolution for the nation’s sin,” and that neorealism in general was “an epistemological apparatus that enabled filmmakers and audiences to see an Italy that had been concealed during the Fascist *ventennio*, and an ontogenetic device allowing for the making of a new Italian.” Fabiana Woodfin, “Spaesati d’Italia: Emigration in Italian National Identity Construction from Postwar to Economic Miracle” (Berkeley, 2011), 44.

The idea is also echoed by Gian Piero Brunetta, who notes (without irony) that neorealism “became the winning diplomatic card for Italy’s rehabilitation (...) and its rapid reintegration into the international community.” Gian Piero Brunetta, *The History of Italian Cinema: A Guide to Italian Film from Its Origins to the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Jeremy Parzen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 109.

<sup>24</sup> According to Gian Piero Brunetta, “For some time, everyone hopped on the neorealist bandwagon. All that was needed were certain common elements – even if merely thematic – and an Italian film was categorized as neorealist. At a certain point, there was an attempt to create a discipline, but by that time everyone had taken separate paths, diverting from the initial direction.” The value judgment is, of course, part of the a posteriori drive to define neorealism by separating neorealist films from other less ‘worthy’ films. What is important to note is that in the immediate postwar period, Italian cinema in general was highly invested in the contemporary state of Italy. Brunetta, *The History of Italian Cinema*, 140.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Shiel, *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), 1. Shiel points out that in the aftermath of neorealism, critics have not been able even to agree on the films that make up the corpus of neorealism beyond a core group of seven films: *Roma città aperta*, *Paisà*, *Sciuscià*, *Ladri di biciclette*, *La terra trema*, *Germania anno zero* and *Umberto D.* In fact, Pierre Sorlin’s count of neorealist films tallies at 20, Lino Micciché’s tally is around 90 films (between 1945 and 1953), while Forgacs count is 259 for the same period. *Ibid.*, 5.

present. These constitutive elements are intentionality, form and themes.<sup>26</sup> Neorealism's perceived intentionality, its fundamental humanism and ethics, is its strongest, most defining and long lasting characteristic, and the basis for the aforementioned progressive political valence the phenomenon enjoys in Italian culture and literature. It is part of its ideological work, which on the one hand was a progressive force that sought to bring to light the social inequalities of Italian society and actively advocate for the victims of such inequalities.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, as Luisa Rivi and other scholars have noted, it helped to build a new national myth whereby all personal and national responsibility for the war is disavowed and shifted to impersonal historical processes and undefined social forces.<sup>28</sup> The end result is a symbolic space where being Italian means being an active combatant against Fascism (Partisan), or the victim of the Fascist regime, the war and its aftermath – whether that aftermath be political, social or economic.<sup>29</sup> Thus neorealism bears within itself a duality, in which it stands as a progressive force against Fascism, while simultaneously it becomes a phenomenon busy with the conservative work of nation-building through erasures. Due to its ideological work (deliberate and not), neorealism's formal qualities and themes are tightly bound to its perceived intentionality.

Given neorealism's "strong desire to uncover the truth about widespread suffering in Italy, and to identify with the plight of the victim,"<sup>30</sup> neorealism adopted the cinematic form of "realism," which at some level holds the ideological stance that the lens of a camera can show reality as it is, in all of its ontological being.<sup>31</sup> To do so it adopted a style that Bill Nichols calls "indexical realism," which conveys a sense of reality of time and place by simplifying the language of cinema and minimizing the use of overtly artificial elements: artificial lighting, artificial sets, mood-setting music, non-linear editing, etc.<sup>32</sup> The neorealist camera thus exposes

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<sup>26</sup> While the terms used here are my own, the general taxonomy is derived from Mark Shiel's introduction to *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City*. However, it is worth noting that traditional literature on neorealism has noted these elements repeatedly, though perhaps not always systematically or within this particular frame.

<sup>27</sup> Bazin said that such "fundamental humanism" was neorealism's chief merit, Andre Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, vol. II (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 21. 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: Princeton University Press, 1986), 23. Fabiana Woodfin echoes the sentiment by focusing on what she calls the "redemptive mission of neorealism," Woodfin, "Spaesati d'Italia." Carlo Celli calls such intentionality an "attitude", an attitude which "includes 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.

<sup>28</sup> See note 28.

<sup>29</sup> Neorealism was concerned in the first place, with showing the social cracks previously effaced by the seemingly perfect veneer of Fascist cinema. Since the new Christian Democrat government was also invested in presenting to the world a perfect, if false, image of Italy, neorealist films and directors also earned the disapproval of the new Christian Democrat regime, which criticized these films as offensive to Italian prestige.

<sup>30</sup> Celli, *New Guide to Italian Cinema*, 44.

<sup>31</sup> Bazin was particularly fond of discussing neorealism primarily on this plane of thought, which in his reasoning is the base for its politics: "As a result, the Italian films have an exceptionally documentary quality that could not be removed from the script without thereby eliminating the whole social setting into which its roots are so deeply sunk...Reduced to their plots, they are often just moralizing melodramas, but on the screen everybody in the film is overwhelmingly real." From his article, "*An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism (Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of Liberation)*" published originally in the magazine *Esprit* on January 1948. Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, II:20–21.

<sup>32</sup> "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

certain aspects of Italian society and culture that to a certain degree had not been allowed during the Fascist regime – local languages being perhaps one of the most notorious ones. In the hands of neorealist directors, this indexical reality of time and place became synonymous with the social and historical realities of the lower classes. In fact, over the years the indexicality of neorealism's 'realism' became much less important than its ideological engagement, to the point that the very term "neorealism" itself reverberates much farther and wider within an ideological symbolic system than within any discourse on cinematic formal elements. To this day, to call anything 'neorealist' is to recognize within it (or attribute to it) a certain perspective from the lower social classes, the point of view of the subaltern subject, the victims of society.

The themes of neorealism revolve around the idea of misfortune, around victims of circumstances outside their control. In fact, for a few years after (and even during) WWII, the Italian film industry focused on the effects of the war on Italian society, with particular emphasis on traditionally marginalized figures. Italian cinema focused its lens on bicycle thieves, day laborers on rice paddies, pensioners, peasants, fishermen, prostitutes, ex-soldiers, American GIs, students, concentration camp survivors, partisans, emigrants, etc. – all of them making ends meet, all of them practicing *l'arte di arrangiarsi*, the art of getting by. When the historical conditions unifying the three elements of intentionality, form and themes passed, classic neorealism began to unravel, its threads becoming material for other forms of cinema.<sup>33</sup> Comedies and melodramas in the late 1940s and early 1950s carried on with the themes of neorealism, though often trading neorealism's overtly critical aims for entertainment value. In time such comedies and dramas would once again unite neorealism's themes and intentionality in the form of *commedia all'italiana* and *cinema d'impegno*, forsaking conventional resolutions for more complex narrative compositions and darker humor.<sup>34</sup> In the meantime, however, the themes and story lines originally embraced by neorealism were adapted by Italian cinema in general, becoming running threads upon which iconic figures and stock narratives developed over time, creating not just neorealism's legacy, but also important elements of Italy's national narrative.

*Tomato* accessed these themes and figures and appropriated them by selectively recalibrating certain aspects of them while still availing itself of the rich history and tradition already embedded therein. One of the figures appropriated by *Tomato* with long lasting consequences was that of the Italian migrant. Though by no means a neorealist invention, the Italian migrant became a figure closely associated with neorealism and the postwar realities of Italian society.<sup>35</sup> No longer a figure of Fascist nationalism or colonialism, the migrant was

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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." Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 133–134.

<sup>33</sup> The historical moment of possibility ended with the election of the Christian Democrats. Furthermore, audiences started to favor other forms of cinema like comedy and melodrama, and the newly elected political powers openly opposed neorealism as something that was shameful to national pride.

<sup>34</sup> At this point, it is worth noting, the concept of "realism" had completely lost its indexical, documentary valence and meant, instead, social realism.

<sup>35</sup> The cinematic figure of the Italian migrant goes back as far as 1906 in the US (*Black Hand* by McCutcheon) and 1915 in Italy (*L'Emigrante* by Febo Mari). Even then the figure of the Italian migrant was a symbolically charged vehicle for divergent ideologies: in the US the "dego" was tied to nativist's fears of foreignness, in Fascist Italy of the late 1930s it was mobilized for nationalist and eventually by colonialist discourses. Part of the reason for the migrant's longevity as a cinematic figure has to do with the simple fact that migration has been and continues to be an important and defining aspect of Italian history and culture. That topic will be covered later on this chapter. Gian Piero Brunetta, "Emigranti nel cinema italiano e americano," in *Storia Dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Rome: Donzelli, 2001), 489–515. See also Woodfin, "Spaesati d'Italia." And

recalibrated by neorealism as a symbolic figure, embodying the new ethos of victimhood that was so central to the new national myths. While some figures mobilized by neorealism became fixed icons of the immediate postwar era (partisans/fascists), or remained as categorical figures of suffering lacking historical specificity (peasants), the Italian migrant evolved into a figure that was both specific and categorical.<sup>36</sup> Given the continual and changing flows of Italian migration from the 1940s to the 1970s, the Italian migrant started as a dynamic character or type, a relevant figure referencing specific – yet changing – historical phenomena. However, over time the symbolic valence of the character progressively became one-sided and stereotypical, streamlining the migrant into the perennial victim, and its narrative as one where no pleasure of hybridity is to be found. Under the tutelage of the cinema of immigration, the Italian migrant (and to a lesser extent the entire topoi of the margins) was repackaged and marketed as referents of Italianness, as markers of a comprehensive Italian identity couched in the safe brackets of history.

### They Are As We Once Were

When Michele Placido cited Geremi's *The Path of Hope* in an interview for the newspaper *L'Unità* on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1990, he did not explicitly reference the artistic or ideological affinities between his film and Geremi's – though of course they were implied.<sup>37</sup> What he referenced explicitly were the narrative structure and the characters:

The idea for the film – continues to say Placido – came to me after seeing Geremi's *The Path of Hope*. In the film there was a group of southerners traveling north in Italy, looking for jobs, not unlike what happens to the illegal African migrants today; manual labor willing to do any job. The drive for this film, however, was born out of desire to understand, to know. While traveling, whether by car or train, I often encountered these colored 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?'<sup>38</sup>

According to the director, the drive for his cinematic project was the desire to understand and to know, a sentiment which he repeated in other interviews even when the details of the film's origins varied.<sup>39</sup> The desire to know and to understand the lives of African immigrants, whose

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<sup>36</sup> It is worth noting that in the early 1990s, the figure of the prostitute gained historical specificity by linking the cinematic figure of the prostitute with the effects of massive migration from the East into Italy. The social realities of the growing prostitution rings using women from Eastern Europe gave these cinematic characters weight, until the connection was abused with use and simplification, rendering the "prostituta slava" nothing more than a cliché at best, and a dangerously racist figure at worst. See *Un'altra vita* (Mazzacurati, 1992), *Vesna va veloce* (Mazzacurati, 1996), *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (2005). When Nigerian prostitutes became visible entities in Italian culture, they started to become the subject of cinema of immigration too. See *Terra di Mezzo* (Garrone, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Note in the quote below the expressed "desire to understand, to know," which implies that through the lens of the camera a certain truth is revealed, the truth of a certain social reality hidden from the view of most Italians. Most importantly is the epistemological claim of having access to Reality. The last sentence, with its "I asked myself why" sets the exposé tone of the film, its desire of being an article of social engagement.

<sup>38</sup> Formisano, "Io uomo bianco tra i pummarò."

<sup>39</sup> Matilde Passa, "Applausi a scena aperta per 'Pumaro' di Michele Placido: 'Ho fatto un film per non sentirmi piu' razzista,'" *L'Unità*, May 14, 1990. The same sentiment will be repeated by Giordana in relation to his film, *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* fifteen years later: "It is not gratitude, but rather a desire to understand these strangers [sconosciuti], to know how was their life before it all, before the trip, before their lives as



faces had become ubiquitous in the Italian peninsula, highlights one of the biggest problems for those that sought to tell stories from a “positive” and “progressive” (immigrant’s) perspective: the epistemological gap between the Italian native population and the new migrants. The faces and bodies that were seen on the streets selling knick-knacks, or at train stations with no apparent purpose, or on magazine and newspaper as either the object of racist violence or the subject of criminal suspicion (and on political posters in 1990), were faces and bodies without an established positive narrative.<sup>40</sup>

The epistemological gap explains why in 1989 (when the film was conceptualized) Michele Placido chose an analogy to structure the narrative of *Tomato*. Analogies, after all, are formed in such a way that when two things are compared on the basis of some understood similarity, the better-known entity explicates the lesser-known one.<sup>41</sup> In the case of *Tomato*, the better-known figure of the Italian migrant is used to explicate the unknown African (and later Albanian and then Romanian) immigrant, positing that the new immigrants are as Italian migrants once were. In the act of referencing Geremi’s *The Path of Hope*, Placido sets an interpretive matrix through which the viewer can make sense of the narrative, and implicitly calls the audience to see the immigrant tomato picker as the miners of Geremi’s film, and then as the perennial *cafoni* of southern Italy, initiating a chain of implications and association that sets up the immigrant simultaneously as a reiteration of both the neorealist “victim” and the Italian migrant of later years.

The analogy between the two groups of migrants is constructed from the very beginning of the film, which opens with the sound of a ship’s horn and a shot of the protagonist Kwaku hiding inside a jeep in the cargo bay of a ship. Kwaku is looking at a picture of his brother Giobbe and listening to the last tape-letter he received from him. Within this establishing sequence, the film inserts a high angle shot of the ship’s prow crossing the ocean, with two people looking into a horizon tinted in warm hues of red and orange, as if it were an old picture faded out by time. The shot, with its hues and composition, makes a subtle but obvious nostalgic reference to the long history of Italian transatlantic emigration. Even though the shot does not mimic any particular film, it nonetheless triggers a chain of symbolic associations created over decades by multiple paintings, photographs, films, documentaries, TV shows, as well as novels and family letters describing the passage into the American continent.<sup>42</sup> These cultural items

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undocumented migrants, in order to become their friend.” Natalia Aspesi, “Giordana a Cannes crescere guardando un’altra realtà,” *La Repubblica*, May 6, 2005, sec. Spettacoli.

<sup>40</sup> Pap Kouma’s *Io venditore di elefanti*, was the first published narrative from the perspective of an immigrant in Italy. The book came out in 1990. Pap Kouma, *I Was an Elephant Salesman: Adventures between Dakar, Paris, and Milan*, Global African Voices (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle’s definition of a metaphor is also very useful in understanding how the neorealist trope discussed in this chapter works: “metaphors should derive from cognate and homogeneous subjects, giving a name to something which before was nameless, and manifesting their cognate character as soon as they are uttered.” Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, trans. J. E. C. Welldon (London: Macmillan, 1886), 234.

<sup>42</sup> The Italian transatlantic emigration is well documented, not just in retrospect, but as it was happening as well. Poems by Pascoli, novels by De Amicis, Silone and Pavese, newsreel and documentaries by the LUCE institute and films are but a few of the many Italian cultural items that helped to establish the association between large ships and Italian transatlantic emigration. A particularly interesting example is De Amicis blockbuster novel, *Cuore* (1886), which includes a story (“From the Appennini to the Andes”) about a boy named Marco, who goes from Genoa to South America looking for his mother. This particular episode from the novel inspired three feature films (1916, 1943, 1960) and one TV miniseries (1990) – not to mention a Japanese anime series, *3000 Leagues in Search of Mother* (Takahata, 1976) which aired in Italy as *Marco – Dagli Appennini alle Ande* in 1980. In each instance the transatlantic crossing plays a significant part, as the 1916 (Paradisi) version shows, viewable from the Cineteca

have cemented in the Italian imaginary the association of Italian emigration to the new world with the very large, and often crowded, ships in which the passage took place. And like the many transatlantic narratives, which pause at the moment there is visual contact with the new world in order to contemplate what is to come, the film's title appear superimposed over a shot of the Neapolitan harbor at the moment of arrival to Italy.

This opening sequence signals another variation of Italian emigration. In his letter, Giobbe shows off some of his newly learned Neapolitan-Italian and describes his new life in Italy, glossing over some of the most negative aspects for his brother's benefit.<sup>43</sup> More importantly, Giobbe mentions the reason why he is in Italy in the first place: to raise enough money to send Kwaku to Canada for his medical specialization, and in doing so fulfilling a promise both brothers made to their grandfather. The nostalgic communion with absent loved ones via photographs and letters is in itself a trope of many migrant narratives, and this particular scene is reminiscent of a similar one in *Bread and Chocolate* (Bread and Chocolate, Brusati 1974). In that scene Nino Garofoli, an Italian migrant in Switzerland, is in his dark bedroom having a conversation with the picture of his absent wife. As Nino talks to the picture of his family, a disembodied voices answer back, reproaching him for his prolonged absence, to which he responds that their (his family's) well-being is the reason why he is in Switzerland, and not his own pleasure. In both scenes, the disembodied voice of the loved one is juxtaposed with the photographic image within a dark and confined space, accentuating simultaneously a sense of anxiety and nostalgia.

From the very beginning, and in a manner that expands upon the observation made by Placido in the interview, the film establishes not only the reason for emigrating, but also the effects it has upon the émigré. Giobbe and Kwaku – like their Italian counterparts Nino (*Bread and Chocolate*), Peppino (*Little Funny Guy*, 1973), Carmela (*A Girl in Australia*, 1971), Rocco (*Rocco and His Brothers*, 1960), Mario (*The Magliari*, 1959), among others – embark upon a long and painful journey, full of sacrifices for the sake of family, for the sake of making a better life for themselves and those they love. That is the “cognate character” that is made visible by the comparison, and the name “given” by the Italian migrant to the new immigrant is that of *sfortunato*, or *sfigato*: a victim of historical circumstances that are beyond anyone's control.<sup>44</sup>

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Bologna website: <http://cinestore.cinetecadibologna.it/en/video/dettaglio/3639>. His next novel, *Sull'oceano* (1889), was entirely about the transatlantic passage.

<sup>43</sup> For example, the picture of Giobbe shown at the beginning of the film shows him smiling, posing next to a truck. On the tape he says that he bought a truck to improve his money making ventures. However, as his voice is narrating that point, the film shows that in fact that picture was taken as he was stealing the truck in an act of rebellion against the Camorra.

<sup>44</sup> The Italian population had more than enough reason to feel that there was a great historical shift happening in Italy as well as in Europe at the turn of the decade: the end of the Cold War in sight, the war on organized crime, emerging regional parties shifting the political landscape, etc. However, it was rather unclear to Italians exactly how the changing world order was affecting the new immigrants in their own countries, and yet there was a clear sense that the growing waves of immigration were connected to it. This explains why *Pummarò* focuses only the Italian part of the immigrant's journey. As a greater understanding was gained about global interconnectivity and different types of networks, particularly in relation to immigration, a more nuanced view of these “historical circumstances” is depicted in Italian films. In 1994, Amelio's *Lamerica* specifically connected the new Albanian diaspora with Italian colonialism. In the following decade, films like *Le ferie di Licu* (2006), *Lettere dal Sahara* (2006), *Io, l'altro* (2007), *Gomorra* (2008) and *La cosa giusta* (2009) not only tackled the subject of immigrants living in Italy, but also focus on their religious and cultural traditions, on their communities in their sending countries and in Italy, on international terrorism, globalization, organized crime, black markets and their effects on said migrants.

Despite the negative connotations attached to the figure of the postwar Italian migrant – victimhood, misfortune, ineptitude – the analogy is actually meant to “adorn” the new immigrant, at least relatively speaking.<sup>45</sup> In the 1980s and then the 1990s, Italian newspapers and other visual media tended to publish images of African immigrants in direct correlation with either crime news or other types of social “crisis.” The *Lega Lombarda* and *Liga Veneta*, emerging conservative parties in northern Italy, referred to them as a threat to the social order, a threat to a contemporary sense of economic stability, and a threat to the continuation of an idealized (regional/national) identity:<sup>46</sup> “Umberto Bossi makes this quite clear when he accuses the established parties of wanting to transform Italy into a ‘multiracial [multirazziale], multiethnic and multi-religious society’ which ‘come closer to hell than to paradise.’”<sup>47</sup> Against such totalizing and negative depiction of immigrants, *Tomato* provides a specificity of experience that humanizes the immigrant, that showcases the socio-economic hardships imposed upon the migrant in order to give a sympathetic valence to his/her narrative.

*Tomato* is the story of a young Ghanaian medical student, Kwaku, who goes to Italy in search for his older brother, Giobbe, because he has not heard from him in a while.<sup>48</sup> The last letter Kwaku received from Giobbe tells him that he is working at the tomato fields near Naples, and that’s exactly where Kwaku goes looking for him at the beginning of the film. Of course he does not find Giobbe there, since he had a run-in with the local Camorra and has since migrated north. Following clues left behind by his older brother, Kwaku begins an exploratory journey up the Italian boot, passing through Rome, Verona, and finally ending his search when he identifies Giobbe’s corpse at a morgue in Germany.

The general northward movement of the narrative is a strategic choice that serves multiple purposes, one of which is to indirectly reference a rather large body of films touching on Italian internal and continental migration. From the moment the director compares *Tomato*

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<sup>45</sup> “Again, if it is your wish to adorn a subject, the proper means is to borrow your metaphor from things superior to it which fall under the same genus; if to disparage it, from such things as are inferior.” Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, 232.

<sup>46</sup> The characterization of immigrants from the global south as criminals, invaders and/or agents of social and economic disruption was often a political tool used by emerging extreme-right groups in the 1980s, political groups that preyed on the insecurities caused by the growing social, political and economic instabilities in Europe. For a European overview, please see Hans-George Betz, “The New Politics of Resentment: Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe,” *Comparative Politics* 25, no. 4 (July 1, 1993): 413–27, doi:10.2307/422034.

For a specific view on Italy’s *Lega Lombarda/Lega Nord* and its political propaganda against migrants from southern Italy and the global south, please see Damian Tambini, *Nationalism in Italian Politics: The Stories of the Northern League, 1980-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Carlo Ruzza and Oliver Schmidtke, “The Northern League: Changing Friends and Foes and Its Political Opportunity Structure.,” in *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

For a bottom-up view on immigrants in Italy see Laura Maritano, “An Obsession with Cultural Difference: Representations of Immigrants in Turin,” in *The Politics of Recognizing Difference: Multiculturalism Italian Style* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 59–76; Jeffrey Cole, *Dirty Work: Immigrants in Domestic Service, Agriculture, and Prostitution in Sicily* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007). For a firsthand account of such reception, in the 1980s please see Khouma, *I Was an Elephant Salesman*.

<sup>47</sup> Betz makes it quite clear that this backlash against immigrants from the global south was, by no means, a purely Italian affair, but rather one that is easily identifiable across many Western European countries in the 1980s. Betz, “The New Politics of Resentment,” 417.

<sup>48</sup> Kwaku’s name, as the character explains in the film, derives from the Akan’s people tradition of naming their children based on the day and order in which they were born. The name Kwaku means that the character was born on a Wednesday. Incidentally, it is important to mark that his brother’s name, Giobbe, does not seem to derive from this system. Actually Giobbe is the Italian equivalent of Job, as in The Book of Job from the Bible, symbol par excellence of suffering.

with Germi's *The Path of Hope*, a long chain of cinematic associations is deployed, calling to mind films like *The Magliari* (Rosi, 1959), *Rocco and His Brothers* (Visconti, 1960), *The Seduction of Mimi* (Wertmüller 1972), *Bread and Chocolate* (Brusati, 1974), and every other film depicting Italian migration in the postwar era. This cinematic tradition often points to a migratory pattern whereby people leave the south of Italy to settle either in Italy's northern industrial cities or in some northern European country.<sup>49</sup> *Tomato* simultaneously references both patterns by showing the vicissitudes of settling down in the Veneto on the one hand, and by ending its overall narrative arch in Germany on the other. The 40 minute segment (the longest in the film) taking place in Verona shows Kwaku finding a steady job at a factory, and building a social network in which he simultaneously takes steps towards cultural integration (taking classes on Italian language and culture), while reinforcing his bonds towards his country of departure through cultural events, musical performances and language.

However, the segment also shows constant instances of racial discrimination suffered by immigrants, which in this particular case culminate in a physical attack against Kwaku and his Italian girlfriend. The acts of discrimination, exclusion and violence showcase the negative reception of immigrants whenever they settle down in a new community, a reception that references not only the attacks on the African immigrants that were so common at the end of the 1980s, but also the many acts of physical violence perpetrated towards Italian migrants in northern Italy and abroad.<sup>50</sup> The last segment of the film, which serves as an epilogue as much as the initial scene of Kwaku on the ship served as a prologue to the film, takes Kwaku to Germany where he is to identify his brother's corpse. The epilogue is short, only ten minutes long, but it is long enough to highlight the cold reception, the humiliation (cavity search in Kwaku's case), and finally the overwhelming sense of helplessness that not only ends the narrative of the film, but indirectly reminds the audience of the experiences hundreds of thousands of Italians suffered in the Teutonic north. It serves 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.

Thanks to Placido's framing of the film in his interviews, and the title of the film itself, the audience was pre-disposed to think of the migrant field hands as the classical figure of the Italian peasant, or at the very least to think of the former within the context of the later. The context of the Italian peasant, of the *contadino* or the *cafone*, is one of ignorance and suffering. From Foscolo's *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, to Verga's *Vita dei campi*, to Silone's *Vino e pane*, and of course to *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, the Italian peasant has played an important role in the Italian imaginary. Over the years the *cafone*, and its various permutations (the miner, the fisherman, the day laborer, etcetera), has become a multivalent symbol, but one that in the most general sense is understood to be representative of the people, of the folk, the masses – and the first victims of everything and anything under the sun. In the words of Don Pasquale from Silone's *Vino e pane*, peasants are “carne avvezza a soffrire” (flesh accustomed to suffering),

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<sup>49</sup> France and the Benelux were choice destination in Italian films in the immediate postwar era, but were substituted by the Teutonic north in the late 1950s. South America was often the destination in the Fascist period, and continued to be a relatively common destination in Italian films until 1950.

<sup>50</sup> Case in point, in Germi's *The Path of Hope*, the Sicilian miners find a violent reception in northern Italy where they agree to work in the wheat harvest for a week. The reasons being, in this particular case, that the Sicilian miners were unknowingly crossing a picket line and thus undermining the communal efforts of the local workers. However, the reasons for the negative reception are less important than the negative reception itself: there are always a plethora of possible reasons to justify anti-immigrant sentiments, which invariable always lead to the same xenophobic conclusion.

subject to exploitation and abuse.<sup>51</sup> It is thus not surprising that within the prologue of *Tomato*, when the backstory to the narrative is being set up and the deep emotional connection between the two brothers is being established, the film displays the defining nature of field labor in southern Italy: exploitation.

Kwaku is unaware of this fact until he hears about it from other African immigrants in Civitella Licinio, and until he sees and experiences the exploitation and violence himself. The first segment of the film (and its second longest) showcases some of the hardships immigrants working in the agricultural fields of southern Italy must endure. They work long hours, with extremely low pay, and without any social benefits such as retirement or sick leave. They work illegally, under the table, and for people that are a law unto themselves, rendering the state irrelevant. They have no proper housing, many of them sleeping at the cemetery, and others at the overly crowded Caritas, a Catholic run organization that for a long time was the only source of help for the immigrant. Their work, their bodies, and their very lives are marginal to Italian society, a fact demonstrated by two things. First, other than Kwaku, hardly any Black person speaks in the film, serving mostly as visual evidence of the hard conditions they live in. In fact, the person who explains their condition orally is a poor Italian living among them called “the professor,” who serves as a cultural mediator for Kwaku as well as for the audience listening to his stories. Second, is the story of *Finito*, or “Finished,” an immigrant who was killed by local people because, as the professor explains to Kwaku one night at the cemetery where they sleep, he dared to get romantically involved with a local woman.

The depiction of the immigrant’s circumstances in southern Italy reflected some well publicized realities in the aftermath of the murder of Jerry Masslo in 1989. However, it is also representative of the way Italian migrants had been represented in Italian cinema over the years. Living at the margins of society, at times in an almost animalistic state, recalls various films on this topic. One of which is the aforementioned *Bread and Chocolate*, in which Nino is stripped of his work permit and goes to a chicken farm to work as an undocumented worker. The people at the farm work in the countryside, completely isolated from other people. They live in a chicken coop, and sleep on the floor. Due to the low ceiling of the coop, they walk permanently hunched over, and given the nature of their work they are always covered in feathers. In a rather grotesque scene, they start clucking like chickens to show off their imitation “skills” to a shocked Nino. It all stops abruptly when they realize that the beautiful adult children of the owner are outside having a picnic by the river, in the nude. All of them stare at the beautiful, blonde, naked people through a window covered in chicken-wire, making them look like animals themselves.

This is an extreme and unforgettable scene. It is one that connects to *Tomato* in spirit when it comes to the marginalization of immigrants, though perhaps not in the specifics. Yet it does not take much to think of films that show Italian emigrants in marginal situations and at the mercy of Italian criminal organizations as were the migrants in *Tomato*. Corbucci’s *Terra Straniera* (1952) highlights the rough working conditions of Italian miners in France, ending in death. Death to terrible working conditions also features prominently in Comencini’s *Somewhere Beyond Love* (1974). Monicelli’s *Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958) shows, on the other hand, a group of people from all over Italy living on the margins of legality in order to survive, for whom going in and out of jail is just part of living. Zampa’s *A Girl in Australia* (1971) illustrates the loneliness of the migrant men who settled down in communities where establishing romantic links locally may not be an option. Scola’s *Ugly, Dirty and Bad* (1976) displays the precarious lives of southern migrants living in a shantytown at the periphery of Rome, at the edge of

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<sup>51</sup> Ignazio Silone, *Vino e pane* (Milan: Oscar classici moderni, 2002), 115.

civilization. Rosi's *The Magliari* (1959), reveals the possible violence that may erupt between migrant groups when jobs are on the line, and the long reach of Italian organized crime at such levels of society – even in Germany.<sup>52</sup>

In fact, Italian organized crime begins to feature more prominently after 1960 in narratives about Italian migration, even in films dealing with the emigration of previous generations. For example Lattuada's *Mafioso* (1962), Wertmuller's *The Seduction of Mimi* (1972), Campanile's *Little Funny Guy* (1973), Stegani's *The Last Desperate Hours* (1974), and Rossi's *Pure as Lily* (1976) feature the Mafia as yet another source of problems for the Italian migrant. Of course the Mafia does not have to be involved for there to be violence in general, as Vernuccio's *A due passi dal confine* (1961), Monicelli's *The Girl with a Pistol* (1968) demonstrate. All in all, their substandard living conditions, the exploitative nature of their work, and the constant threat of violence from the local population on the one hand and organized crime on the other, make the African farmhand a completely sympathetic figure, one that can easily make the audience think (as Placido intended) of the migrants in *The Path of Hope* and the peasants that once worked those same fields.

The second segment, and shortest of the film, takes place in central Italy, in a peripheral neighborhood of Rome called “The Valley of Hell” (*Valle dell'inferno*, or Valle Aurelia), where the story of a different migrant community is developed – that of the African prostitutes.<sup>53</sup> The Prostitute with the Heart of Gold is a well-established stock character of western literature and a common trope in film and TV shows. In the history of Italian cinema, particularly in the postwar era, the stock character has been performed by some of the biggest names in the industry: Anna Magnani, Sophia Loren, Giulietta Masina and Claudia Cardinale – just to name a few. The trope has been deployed in multiple circumstances in a variety of manners, serving often as a device to shed light into the social and financial margins of society, which invariably includes the marginal spaces of Italian migration. Among the most famous instantiation of this trope is Nadia (Annie Girardot), from *Rocco and His Brothers* (Visconti, 1960), whose circumstances eventually lead to her death, even though she had chosen to do “the right thing.” She pays the ultimate price for other people's shortcomings, and her rape scene has become one of the most unforgettable scenes in the canon of Italian Cinema. Carmela (Claudia Cardinale) is a lesser known character from *A Girl in Australia* (Zampa, 1971), but one that follows a common and less tragic path of the Prostitute with a Heart of Gold: she goes from the street to the home. In order to escape her life as a prostitute in Rome, Carmela flies to Australia to marry a man who turns out to be much less handsome and well-off than she had previously thought. Given her desire to not go back to prostitution, she apprehensively accepts Amedeo and her new life, signaled by the last shot of the couple: Amedeo carrying Carmela over the threshold of their new home.

Part of the trope's appeal, particularly for Placido's *Tomato*, is its redemptive possibility. The prostitute is a figure with enormous moral implications, one that is often the easy target of conservative factions in (Italian) society, which see it as an agent of corruption of family values.

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<sup>52</sup> The term “magliari” indicates street vendors, or more precisely door-to-door merchants of textiles of questionable quality. In many ways, this type of job, which the film indicates Italian migrants engaged in abroad, is analogous to the African street vendors in Italy, the infamous *Vu' cumprà* who are often denigrated in Italian society.

<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note that this neighborhood, located on the hills behind the Vatican, has previously served as the setting for narratives of poor and marginal characters in Italian cinema, such as Scola's *Brutti sporchi e cattivi* (1976). At the time when Scola's film was shot, the area was a shantytown for nearby construction sites, and filled with migrant workers. The characters themselves were from southern Italy, and the film closes with a clash between two southern families trying to occupy the same shack.

The prostitute with a heart of gold provides a counter narrative by shifting the locus of moral failure away from the prostitute to society, which failed the woman and contributed to her pitiful situation. In this segment, which is shot mostly at night, the interactions between Kwaku and the prostitutes show kind, strong, sweet and passionate women, who nonetheless are caught in circumstances beyond their control, and would welcome the chance to escape. Even when one of the prostitutes, Nanu, defends her professional choice by showing how smooth her hands are compared to her mother's, and by saying that she feels free and that she is nobody's servant, the narrative implies otherwise. The backstory she provides to Kwaku, in which she was abused by a white man when she was nine-year old fruit vendor in Mombasa, undermines the idea of prostitution as a choice and sets it instead within the parameters of trauma, and within a long history of victimization and colonization. The freedom she points to is also undermined by the scene following her conversation with Kwaku, as her pimp starts to beat her up for being late to work. Last, but not least, her romantic attachment to Giobbe and the hope that she harbors for his return, and by extension for a familial lifestyle, covers her (and the other prostitutes by extension) with the tragic and redeeming aura belonging to good people caught in an impossible situation.

The last segment takes place in Verona. I have already pointed out that in this segment the film addresses the racist attacks against immigrants that had been much reported in the Italian media. While violence against immigrants was by no means something that happened solely in the north (as the first segment of the film showed), the emerging regionalist politics of the *Lega Nord*, with its exclusionary and xenophobic rhetoric, made those attacks particularly symbolic of the social tensions that were accumulating in the Italian state. More importantly, however, is the fact that the community of immigrants presented in this segment was, in many ways, different from the previous communities visited in segment one and two. The immigrants in this segment have secure, well-paid, factory jobs during the day, and attend night classes to improve their Italian at night. Unlike the communities in the south and center, this one seems to be composed of well integrated families, with children born and raised locally, children who speak with a heavy Veneto accent and who never learned to speak the language of their parents. Perhaps it is this last fact that starts to show a crack in the veneer of a perfectly integrated migrant community for it points at a sense of alienation that develops over the years between the first and the second generation. But this subtle observation about the conditions of migrant families is not how this film explores the tensions that undermine the seemingly perfect harmony between immigrants and the local populace.<sup>54</sup> Rather, *Tomato* explores the racial tensions that often explode into violent attacks, but does so in manner in which the agents of such violence are faceless, nameless, acting in the cover of darkness. It does not take nor give responsibility for the attacks, for the racist violence, to anyone in particular, as if to imply that such acts simply exist. Kwaku and Eleonora escape without major physical trauma, but the misogynistic insults the attackers hurl at Eleonora and the racist appellations they throw at Kwaku imply the possibility of a deathly end, thus echoing Finito's story from the first segment, as well as the infamous rape scene of Nadia in *Rocco and His Brothers*.

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<sup>54</sup> By 1990, this observation had already been made about different migrant communities in different national settings. Within the Mexican-American context, I can easily point out to the song *La Jaula de Oro* (1983) by the group *Los Tigres del Norte*, which explores how the growing alienation between parents and children only acerbates the already grave sense of social alienation felt by immigrants, who despite their better economic conditions, feel trapped: "Aunque la jaula sea de oro, no deja de ser prisión/ though the cage be made of gold, it never stops being a prison."

It is important to note the seemingly assimilated nature of Verona's community of immigrant because it marks yet another layer of symbolism to the northbound movement of the film, which is simultaneously geographical, social and temporal. At this point it is important to go back to the similarities between *Tomato* and *Paisà*. Both films are meant to be seen as realist narratives conveying an overall survey of certain realities on the ground at a time when Italy was undergoing critical historical shifts. The titles of both films as similar to each other as they are dissimilar between other films of their respective periods: both titles are single words in southern dialect used as forms of interpellation for an individual and a class of people.<sup>55</sup> No other neorealist film or film of immigration has a similar title, which makes sense when one considers the fact that both films emerged at the beginning of their respective "movement" and in their titles they are signaling the new type of subject to be treated and discussed: common people in *Paisà* and the Italian immigrant in *Tomato*. The explicit structural element of *Paisà's* movement is dictated by the way in which Italy was liberated, which started with the Allies landing in Sicily and moving up north, however the scenes in each segment are meant to be read symbolically for larger problems in postwar Italy as well as episodes on site-specific problems. The first episode touches upon the Italian diaspora and the hardships of communicating in a country that has been historically made up of different peoples. The second episode touches upon the vast economic misery left at the wake of the war, the third episode touches upon some of the moral dilemmas and choices that war forced upon some Italian women. The last three episodes deal with issues of faith, sacrifice and the formation of new national myths centered on the Resistance. They take place in the northern part of Italy, where the allied forces and the clandestine Partisans forces are fighting the Fascists and Nazis, creating clear lines between *us* and *them*. In these three episodes in the north of Italy is where violence is overt and death gratuitous.

As I have shown, *Tomato* is also segmented into episodes, and like *Paisà*, the scenes are meant to be read symbolically as much as realistic episodes on site-specific problems. Broadly speaking, in fact, both films focus on similar themes in the same geographical places: in southern Italy both films focus on rural people and poverty, in Rome they both focus on prostitution caused by the war in *Paisà* and colonial dynamics in *Tomato*, in northern Italy both films focus on the violent clash between the native population and foreigners.<sup>56</sup> This general alignment shows that the northbound movement of *Tomato's* narrative is not only geographical, but also dense with cinematic references, as well as socially and temporally symbolic.

The temporal aspect of the film's symbolic northbound movement is shown in the correlation between latitude and integration. The field workers in the south are single men

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<sup>55</sup> *Paisà*, within the context of this particular film, may refer to the way in which Italian-American soldiers addressed Italian civilians during the Allied occupation of southern Italy during WWII. However, the term itself is a pronoun used to directly address an individual that comes from your own town or village, thus establishing a bond of origins. Giobbe was called *Pummarò* because of the job he did in the field, which was picking tomatoes, making it within the logic of the film a general pronoun designed to signal the occupation of the interpellated subject. Both pronouns are meant to be used between individuals, and yet signal a larger "class" of people: rural southerners.

<sup>56</sup> The analogy between Partisans fending off Nazi occupiers and the racist attacks on Black immigrants in northern Italy may be a stretch, and a simple side effect of two films that align themselves so well in some initial aspects, but not necessarily on this last part. However, it might be worth considering that perhaps Placido was not promoting the analogy so much as undermining its potential mobilization by others, given that, as David Ward puts it, anti-immigrant movements in the 1990s sometimes aligned themselves with the resistance: "The racist groups have been able to locate themselves in the continuum of an antifascist tradition not because they are not fascist, but because they have been able to exploit that aspect of the Resistance that antifascism chose to privilege: namely the Resistance not so much as a class or civil war (although it was also that), but as a national war of liberation fought by Italy against a foreign invader." Ward, "'Italy' in Italy."



working in the countryside, sleeping in makeshift and temporary spaces. They are representative of the first wave of migrants, which statistically aligns with the first waves of immigrants from the global south to Europe, and symbolically resonate with the waves of Italian emigration to the new world.<sup>57</sup> The prostitutes in the second segment are women who live at the periphery of the metropole, but work in its central public spaces. They are figures upon which moral discourses are mobilized, but they are permanent fixtures in urban spaces, and therefore visible and participant in it – even if marginally so. The people in the third episode are fully integrated communities of immigrants, with homes, steady work in factories alongside Italians, cultural centers, and children born and raised locally, who also speak with an Italian regional accent. Viewed from this perspective it is obvious that the move north is a move across time as well, showing migrant communities at different levels of integration, from the invisible bodies beyond the margins of society (*Finito*), to the integrated families raising a new generation of Italians of color.

Sadly, what unites all three episodes, and by implication the geographical, social and temporal position immigrants occupy in relation to Italian society, is violence. Violence against the immigrant. Italian films are not known for the classic “happy endings” of Hollywood, and even comedies can end in a bitter sweet note. Films about Italian migration are no different, and some are even stained by the mark of death towards the end, like the aforementioned *The Path of Hope* or *Rocco and His Brothers*. However, Placido’s *Tomato* lacks all the sweet hope implied by the voice over at the end of Geremi’s film, as the group of Sicilian miners cross into France, or by the shot of young Luca walking down the street into the future. Instead, *Tomato* ends with one last escape from the hope of settling down in northern Italy, the view of Giobbe’s dead body on a slab, and a silent and depressed couple of Black immigrants getting lost in a sea of holiday festivities and white bodies. Despite the constant synchronic and diachronic referencing of Italian films, whether neorealist or about Italian migration (the first one being a synchronic group and the second one diachronic), *Tomato* is at the end about a whole new reality in Italian society, and thus ultimately reflects the views and sensibilities of its time and place. Unfortunately that reality seemed very bleak in 1990.

### A Template to Follow

*Tomato*, while not a commercial blockbuster, became a critical success, and overtime the acknowledged foundational film engaging immigration from a progressive perspective.<sup>58</sup> Its interweaving of neorealist tropes and aesthetics created a general template to follow, one where the idea “they are as we once were” was always at the center, even when it was not explicitly mobilized. It became crucial in addressing a social issue that was becoming all the more

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<sup>57</sup> Generally speaking, in Italian literature and cinema, it is the men who leave first. Da Amici’s “*Dagli Appennini alle Ande*” is the only exception I know of.

<sup>58</sup> 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 taken out of exhibition after a week, making only 18 million lire – roughly \$9,000. Michele Anselmi, “L’Italia è già Kappaò,” *L’Unità*, September 23, 1990.

However, the film’s participation at Cannes and two other international festivals, plus the nominations it received for a *David* and a *Nastro* - not to mention the growing fame of Michele Placido and the growing relevance of films on immigration – means that the film accumulated enough cultural capital to still be in circulation today. It can be bought from any major media retailer. For more information on the role of cultural capital on films of Italian immigration, please see the chapter “From Cinema of Immigration to Migrant Cinema” in this dissertation.

pressing with fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the establishment of a united, borderless Europe through the Maastricht Treaty of 1992/1993 and the Schengen Agreement of 1995. Mass immigration, whether undocumented or documented (the EU expansions of 2004 and 2007 encompassed many former eastern bloc countries), became an undeniable Italian reality, and a galvanizing issue for a country fraught with political instabilities and social anxieties about the fast pace changes it was undergoing.<sup>59</sup> Films about immigrants in the 1990s and early 2000s engaged those realities through the cinematic language established by *Tomato*, naturalizing its aesthetic codes and explicit ideological bent. For over a decade, films like *L'articolo 2* (1992), *Vesna Goes Fast* (1996) and *Giamaica* (1998) continuously employed a dramatic tone and realist aesthetics to represent the exemplary stories of particular immigrants whose lives are in constant tension with the receiving country, symbolized by state institutions or social groups.<sup>60</sup> These films position themselves as exposing the unacknowledged reality of immigrants, as seeking “to depict the conditions of those often ignored,” which was very much in line with the neorealist vein employed by *Tomato*.<sup>61</sup>

Over the course of the 1990s the trope gained a foothold and was mobilized at different levels in the film industry. The trope was simultaneously used to structure the narrative of a handful of films (like *Tomato*), and as a commonly deployed reference in many films to reinforce the ideological associations with neorealism. Some of the films that use the trope to structure their narrative are Amelio's *Lamerica* (1994), Da Seta's *Lettere dal Sahara* (2004) and Giordana's *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (2005). Of these three, Amelio's and Giordana's films are internationally known and well-remembered in Italy. They both have well known directors who had previously earned international recognition either at Cannes or Venice by the time they released these films, which also premiered at either Cannes or Venice. The films also feature well-known actors, and were well funded.

Amelio's *Lamerica* famously dealt with the massive exodus of Albanian immigrants into southern Italy after the fall of the communist regime, while Giordana's *Once You're Born* dealt with the Mediterranean passage of undifferentiated immigration from all over the world, with a particular emphasis on Romanian immigrants.<sup>62</sup> Both of these directors embraced to different degrees *Tomato*'s neorealist trope. For example, while Placido constructed the analogy mostly

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<sup>59</sup> Some of this issues have already been addressed in the introduction, such as the fall of the First Republic. For a more in depth analysis of the many social and political changes Italy was undergoing since the 1980s, please see Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, state, 1980-2001* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Both *L'articolo 2* and *Giamaica* were based on real life events, which the directors read via newspapers. *L'articolo 2* is the story of a Muslim immigrant who for various reasons must bring his second wife to Italy, where he comes at odds with Italy's anti-bigamy law. *Giamaica* is the story of a young African man who was burn to death within a cultural center by xenophobic group of men.

<sup>61</sup> Celli, *New Guide to Italian Cinema*, 70.

<sup>62</sup> The film's emphasis on Romanian immigrants is important for the following reason: unlike other European countries, Italy did not and does not have a dominant national minority among its immigrant community. By 1999 Italy had immigrant communities from all over the world, with “45 nationalities having at least 5,000 representatives,” for various historical reasons, which are beyond the scope of this study. However, it is important to note that over the years, Italian media has singled out (in a very complex process that is reflective as it is constitutive) particular communities to be representative of immigrants as a whole, and usually within a negative connotation. From a socio-historical perspective, *Tomato* (1990), *Lamerica* (1994) and *Once You're Born* (2005) provide chronological markers for Italy's changing ‘*nemico ereditario*’ within the immigrant community, or the immigrant group perceived as the most threatening at the time: the sub-Saharan African, the Albanian and the Romanian. For more information see Ralph Grillo, “Immigration and the Politics of Recognizing Difference in Italy,” in *The Politics of Recognizing Difference: Multiculturalism Italian Style* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 1–24.

within the diegetic world of the film, Amelio went further and pushed the analogy at a discursive level as well. When Amelio's *Lamerica* premiered at Venice's Film Festival in September of 1994, interviews with the director shows how central the trope had become to his film. In one interview he said, "Albania is the South, Lucania above all. I have found the places, the landscapes, the places of the South." More specifically he uses his family's own emigration experience to explain how he sees the new Albanian immigration into Italy. He claims to "have seen Albania the same way [his] father would have seen Italy, and Albanians the same way Italians would've been in the 1940s. And my father's dream was the same: bread." Furthermore, he claimed 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." The jump from his own family's personal experiences to universalizing historical interpretation is a small one: "I, an Italian that goes to Albania, see there what we once used to be."<sup>63</sup>

The trope is not only present in the discourse generated by the film, but it determines it, it structures the conversation. If the director and actors interviewed presented the idea in no uncertain terms, then the critics embraced it as the interpretative matrix for the film and kept it in circulation for a long time.<sup>64</sup> The title of one of the many articles release in those days, articulates Amelio's point in a very succinct way, "Emigrants and Wheeler-Dealers: We are the Albanians," a phrasing 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 that was the Italy that we have forgotten. We Italians are the Albanians."<sup>65</sup> The analogy set up by *Tomato* gained strength and became focused in *Lamerica*, becoming a tight metaphor whereby the "they" are not just "like us," but rather "they are us."

This is not to imply, of course, that the film itself did not have elements that begged to be read this way. In fact, *Lamerica's* narrative elements made the connection between the new Albanian immigrants and Italian emigrants from the postwar era much more evident and explicit than *Tomato*, including an element that Amelio himself called, "The mechanism of the old Albanian/Italian"<sup>66</sup> The mechanism refers to the character of Spiro-Michele, a senile elderly Sicilian who came to Albania as a soldier during the Fascist colonial wars. When Italy withdrew from Albania, Michele was left behind, and in order to escape persecution under the new communist regime, he adopted an Albanian identity which he kept all of his life. At the end of the film he regains his Sicilian identity, but in his senility, he thinks that he is a young soldier after the war. The film closes with Spiro-Michele on the deck a crowded boat named "The Partisans" going to Italy, but in his senility he thinks that he is going to America, like so many young Italians did after the war. The formal elements of *Lamerica* and the discourse that surrounded it shows that in the four years between the premiere of *Tomato* and *Lamerica*, the

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<sup>63</sup> Maria Pia Fusco, "Michele Placido: 'ho ritrovato il nostro sud,'" *La Repubblica*, September 6, 1994; Irene Bignardi, "Emigranti, faccendieri, gli albanesi siamo noi," *La Repubblica*, September 6, 1994; Maria Pia Fusco, "Il mio film ad un alto costo umano," *La Repubblica*, September 6, 1994. Matilde Passa, "L'innocenza impossibile," *L'Unità*, September 6, 1994, sec. Venezia Cinema; Goffredo Fofi, "Il regista de 'Lamerica' ci racconta il suo cinema," *L'Unità*, October 24, 1994, sec. Libri.

<sup>64</sup> Even a year later, the American critic Janet Maslin from the New York Times echoes a lot of the same 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 films with an "acute sense of history." Janet Maslin, "Scheming Italians in Troubled Albania," *New York Times*, October 4, 1995.

<sup>65</sup> Bignardi, "Emigranti, faccendieri, gli albanesi siamo noi." Maria Pia Fusco, "Vargas Llosa, ti sfido," *La Repubblica*, September 9, 1994, sec. Venezia Cinema. Italics mine.

<sup>66</sup> Fusco, "Vargas Llosa, ti sfido." "il meccanismo del vecchio albanese-italiano."

notion that some discursive solidarity could be invoked between Italians and immigrants, based upon the Italian history of emigration, had become a focused trope capable of not only structuring an entire film project, but of providing an interpretative matrix for different narratives of immigration into Italy.

Fast forward ten years later and the comparison is still active to the point that analogies at the structural level of the narrative need not be particularly strong for the trope is readily mobilized at the discursive level. Much like Amelio, Giordana explicitly makes the analogy between the immigrants of his film *Once You're Born* (2005) and the Italian emigrants of previous generations. The filmmaker states that his film “simply describes our relationship with *others*, with the foreigners whose life drama is to be poor. That’s how it used to be for us in the past, when sixty millions of us were forced to emigration.”<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the author of the article echoes the sentiment in such a way as to imply that such comparison is simple common sense. The comparison is also made at the formal level. Overall, *Once You're Born* follows the basic formula of neorealist-socially-engaged films: natural lighting, shooting on location, non-professional actors, and etcetera. More importantly, at the narrative level it has certain markers that puts the film in the genealogy of *Lamerica*, *Tomato* and neorealist films of emigration, such as a sea crossing sequence, and a south-to-north narrative movement. Though at different levels of engagement, these films – and all others where the comparison was made either by the film’s crew, the critics reading these films, or even the scholars giving a more in depth analysis – maintain the basic analogy between the new immigrant and the Italian migrant of old, whereby the latter is meant to explicate the former.<sup>68</sup>

Though not every film dealing with immigration mobilized the analogy explicitly, all of them were working within the general neorealist framework within which the trope functioned. These films, while forgoing the explicit immigrant-to-migrant exchanged, they nonetheless accessed other neorealist figures which mobilized the same structures of feeling, giving their depiction of immigrant similar emotional valences. Some of the figures in questions were the prostitute, the student, the nomad, the laborer, and others. While it may be posited that those are not necessarily neorealist figures, but stock characters of modern alterity, the discourse surrounding such films never fails to apply neorealism as a prism, as a mode of understanding and discussing films of destitution, of conditions of marginalization and painful uprootedness.

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<sup>67</sup> Gabriella Gallozzi, “Vite da sbarco,” *L’Unità*, May 6, 2005, sec. in Scena.

<sup>68</sup> It is worth noting that exceptions exist, and some films explored the connections between migrants from Italy and the global south at different levels. Davide Ferrario’s *Figli di Annibale* (1998) is a good example. Named after the Almamegretta’s song and EP (which plays prominently in the film’s background), the film is not about immigrants from the global south entering Italy, but rather about two Italians who after hitting social bottom, decide to migrate to Africa to start all over again. At the film’s end the two inept Italians with their recent reunited families are crossing the Mediterranean heading to Egypt. However, as they find themselves a bit stranded in the middle of the sea, not knowing exactly how to start their boat, another boat heading in the opposite directions passes by them. It is a boat filled with undocumented immigrants heading to Italy, and as they pass by both groups of subaltern migrants salute each other. There are minute nuances in this sequence that could be analyze in a misguided attempt to try to establish some sort of hierarchy of representation: who is “truly” in a position of privilege and/or subalterity. However, the sequence, as well as the film at large, posits a simple yet radical idea at the time, mainly that hierarchies which place Italy as a destination country while Egypt (and by synecdoche the often mentioned ‘Africa’ in the film) as a departure country are not stable or inherent ones. To that end the film ends with a narrated letter written by one of the Italian men to his lover in Italy, which reads no different from other epistles written by migrants, either in the past or in the present, from Italy or from the global south. Every Mediterranean shore is a point of departure and arrival, even in the highly structured capitalistic world.

For example, one of the earliest symbols of victimhood explored by Italian cinema of immigration were women, most of which were from Eastern Europe, and discussed mostly within the context of prostitution. To this rather essentializing corpus of films belong the following titles: *Another Life* (Mazzacurati, 1992), *A Soul Divided in Two* (Soldini, 1993), *Portami via* (Tavarelli 1994), *Vesna Goes Fast* (Mazzacurati, 1996), and *Terra di Mezzo* (Garrone, 1996). The first four films feature women protagonists from the former eastern bloc, while Garrone's documentary signals the return of the black prostitute to Italian cinema. Of course in the coming years there would be many other films where immigrant prostitutes would feature in the background, as simple reflections of certain social and symbolic realities that had taken hold in Italian culture as well as in the Italian imaginary.<sup>69</sup> But in the early and mid-1990s, the immigrant prostitute was still a relatively unknown subject, or at the very least one that was surrounded with more questions than answers, and therefore one worth of exploring and explicating by putting their narratives front and center.

Due to its low budget and its "documentary" label, Garrone's *La terra di mezzo* is most closely associated to the neorealist model: "Influences? Neorealism – he answers – and not just because I deal with stories born and matured within history, within current events and tradition, but also because I use nonprofessional actors. Generally speaking I use natural light too."<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, it fully embraces the pedagogical nature of (neo)realism, seeking to bridge the epistemological gap between the subjects of the film and the audience:

After watching this film, if one has a bit of social consciousness, you leave the theater with a real awareness of those that stand by the traffic light, for those that pump your gas in the middle of the night. They are people with a story, not foreigners without an identity: Matteo Garrone has told us their stories and done so quite well....<sup>71</sup>

The other four films, while less explicit in their reliance on the neorealist model, nonetheless follow on the footsteps of *Tomato* in aligning the immigrant narratives with broader social anxieties within a cinematic realism that is more ideological than indexical. For example Mazzacurati's *Another Life* (1992) focuses on the story of a Russian prostitute that is trying to find her way to Canada (like Kwaku), and at the same time the film seeks to explore broader social ills in Italian society:

Urban degradation, the homogenization of city peripheries – one and another, all the same – is for the director a mirror and a sign of the society in which we live, without any

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<sup>69</sup> It is important to note that social and symbolic realities, in regard to narratives of immigration, are related but separate entities. Obviously prostitution is not now, nor was it in the early 1990s, a new subject. However, immigrant prostitution raised a lot of question about how it came about, who these women were, etcetera, etcetera. The proper investigation of the subject can lead to numerous volumes from different fields, and still not be exhausted. This is at odds with the simplifying drive of mass media in its quest to produce consumable narratives. Thus over time the complex issue of prostitution in immigrant communities is reduced to commonly traded narratives that are easily accessible to the viewer – for example the Nigerian prostitutes working under the threat of black magic and the Albanian (and later Romanian) prostitutes working under the threat of physical violence by organized crime from the eastern bloc. This is the reason why the audience of *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (Giordana, 2005) can easily interpret that a beautiful woman standing outside of Sandro's car window is a prostitute from eastern Europe, as well as why Alina, the pretty Romanian girl, was being prostituted by her supposed brother at the end of the film. By 2005, Romanian prostitutes are a symbolic reality that no longer needs an explanation.

<sup>70</sup> Giovanna Grassi, "La faccia buia di Roma: Solo extracomunitari nel film di Matteo Garrone," *Corriere della Sera*, October 31, 1996.

<sup>71</sup> Giovanna Grassi, "Le prostitute nigeriane, i giovani albanesi, il benzinaio egiziano," *Corriere della Sera*, April 30, 1997, sec. Cinema.

identity anymore, without a historical memory. “One lives day after day without a sense of a future, as if something had been irreparably ruptured. Almost in an absence of destiny. Maybe it is a transitory phase, but I simply don’t feel good in it: I look around and I feel that I’m in a world, in a country that I don’t like. The goal of *Another Life*, was to capture that general sense of disorientation.”<sup>72</sup>

Yes, the plot is about “a Russian girl that belongs to that part humanity on the move trying to escape the past,” and following in the footsteps of *Tomato* and *Il colore dell’odio*, the film does not fail to give its audience a tour of the seedy underbelly of society that is associated more and more with immigrants.<sup>73</sup> But as the aforementioned quote points out, it is also about Italy’s own social anxieties during these times of transition, a self-reflexivity that never fails to evoke an association with neorealism: “there seems to be in *Another Life* all the elements that could put this film along the same lines of that young Italian cinema often called neorealist.”<sup>74</sup>

Likewise, *Portami via* is a film where immigrant narratives and Italian anxieties are commingled to the point where one cannot be told from the other. Tavarelli’s *Portami via* was chosen for the 1994 Mostra’s *Panorama Italiano* Section, which according to one of the organizers, Sauro Borelli, was organized that year to reflect a certain theme:

We looked for films and filmmakers that could give an idea of the times in which we live in, in a symptomatic way. The hope is that every film will be an indication of the reality of our country, and that taken all together, they can provide an organic and homogenous window.<sup>75</sup>

With such ideological couching the film, much was made of the film’s treatment of the urban landscape, of the way it presented the city itself, and the social spaces occupied by those that practice the oldest profession as well as those that require their services.<sup>76</sup> Therefore its realism, according to the critics, is a “murky and mannerist realism” or the dark and self-conscious realism of stories that dwell on Italian urban anxieties.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Roberto Rombi, “Il miraggio di una donna nel deserto della vita,” *La Repubblica*, August 27, 1992, sec. Spettacoli.

<sup>73</sup> This is a fact that the critic does not fail to notice and highlight in his review:

Lei [Alia] vive in un posto di mare, non lontano da Roma, uno di quei luoghi, nuovi nella realtà italiana, dove si concentrano gli immigrati russi. “Nel momento in cui Alia scompare, la vicenda assume una struttura di tipo investigativo. Attraversiamo un mondo che è quello della nuova sopravvivenza, della gente che vive a metà tra legalità e illegalità. Il secondo personaggio maschile, Mauro, approfitta senza riserve degli strumenti che questo paese offre. E’ un mondo in cui si possono fare con facilità piccole fortune. Un mondo sotterraneo, di cui non si parla molto, pieno di attività frenetiche, di piccoli traffici, di intensa vita notturna, di gente che gira apparentemente senza senso e si sbatte di qua e di là”. Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> “Panorama sull’Italia finestra sul mondo,” *La Repubblica*, July 29, 1994, sec. Spettacoli.

<sup>76</sup> In reviewing the film, Roberto Rombi from *La Repubblica* quotes Tavarelli who says that his film “is not a generational film, nor a film about friendships, it is a film about the city (I chose Turin because there the juxtaposition between city center and the periphery is so strong) and about that which the city forces you to do.” Thus the focus of the film is on the couple of Italian friends, who are taken to be representative of “that humanity that has no points of reference,” lost and aimless. The couple of Slavic prostitutes are meant to be compliment and foil to the two Italian males, meant to reinforce the sense of uprootedness and aimlessness (because they are immigrants and prostitutes), but at the same time inspire hope for a future and the catalyst for change (because they are women, and their presence presents the possibility of the classical redeeming force of love). Roberto Rombi, “Quando la vita è altrove...,” *La Repubblica*, August 22, 1994, sec. Spettacoli.

<sup>77</sup> “Indecisioni, una balata torinese,” *L’Unità*, September 9, 1994, sec. Venezia Cinema. It is worth nothing that in that same article, the writers finishes the piece by criticizing its lack of linguistic realism, which was one of the most noticeable aspects of neorealism: “Solo che non si capisce perché tra di loro parlino italiano (essendo l’una bulgara e l’altra russa dovrebbero intendersi nelle loro rispettive lingue).” This highlights to what degree the legacy

On the other hand, *A Soul Divided in Two* (1992) and *Vesna Goes Fast* (1996) are films that were described by their own directors, and by the critics, as intimate, psychological, personal. The word “realism,” with or without the ‘neo’, was not the dominant adjective. Soldini insisted on radical alterity as the focus of his film, an otherness that goes beyond that of African or Eastern European migrants because, he said, when everything is said and done, those immigrants want the same thing as we do: stability, home, and work – basically a life as conceived by the modern world.<sup>78</sup> Pabe, the protagonist of his film, belongs to an alternate mode of thinking. As a Roma, she lives in a universe with alternate frames of references, alternate desires. All of this to simply signal that his film, unlike the other films about immigrants, was not to be representative of that particular social issue, but of a philosophical train of thought, of ultimate alterity. Vesna’s story is a bit more conventional and thus more in line with the growing body of work about immigrants, particularly those mentioned so far that deal with immigrant women. Like all of the films discussed in this section, at the root of this film’s narrative is the romantic entanglement between the immigrant woman (Pabe was not a prostitute) and an Italian man.<sup>79</sup> However, unlike *Another Life* and *Portami via*, its romantic story focuses more on the relationship between the protagonists rather than on the social spaces they occupy: “Vesna is a cozier, smaller, more intimate film.”<sup>80</sup>

However, for all of its desire to “think about diversity, about alterity” *A Soul Divided in Two* could not be described or written about without somehow accessing the same sematic field used to describe other films about immigrants where the connection between them and neorealism was more explicit. For example, within the same quote where Soldini says that his film will be about “diversity” and “alterity,” he says, “I like making a film that captures the reality of society, today’s society, which is becoming less monocultural and whitecentric.”<sup>81</sup> For all of its stated philosophical goals, its plot line begins and ends at the same place as all films about alterity at the time: the immigrant and Italian social anxieties. And while Soldini may be right in pointing out that his plotline is not plucked from the *cronaca nera*, but rather a plotline chosen exactly because of its improbability and quasi symbolic valence, the film nonetheless manages to steer back the discourse to elements commonly associated with neorealism:<sup>82</sup> truth, social engagement, politics, and social anxiety.<sup>83</sup>

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of neorealism had left its mark in Italian cinema, constructing an expectation for films that by common accord should be following on its footsteps.

<sup>78</sup> Maria Pia Fusco, “E’ davvero impossibile amare una nomade?,” *La Repubblica*, March 12, 1993, sec. Spettacoli.

<sup>79</sup> Much can be said about this “damsel in distress” trope that is repeated throughout the films discussed in this section, and which actually extends beyond the figure of the prostitute and encompasses other other migrant women in later films. But that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

<sup>80</sup> Alberto Crespi, “Italia senza amore per la prostituta ceca,” *L’Unità*, August 30, 1996, sec. Il fatto.

<sup>81</sup> Anna Maria Mori, “Silvio Soldini l’aria inquieta dell’amore...,” *La Repubblica*, April 16, 1992, sec. Spettacoli.

<sup>82</sup> Fusco, “E’ davvero impossibile amare una nomade?” It is worth noting that Soldini’s reference to *cronaca nera* not only points to *Pummarò* which indeed owed a lot of its first segment to the infamous story of Jerry Maslo, but also to Mazzacurati’s *Un’altra vita*, which has a plotline that could have been taken out of the *cronaca*. In future years films like *L’articolo 2* (1993), *Lamerica* (1994), *Terra di Mezzo* (1996), *Giamaica* (1998), and to a certain extent *Once You’re Born You Can No Longer Hide* (2005) were based on particular events from the *cronaca nera* or news in general.

<sup>83</sup> For example, an article from *Corriere della sera* said about this film: “Questo suo nuovo film è meno poetico, meno ispirato del suo primo lavoro, ma è una storia bella, vera, importante, assolutamente ancorata al nostro tempo, al razzismo strisciante, alla violenza sui più deboli.” “Amore e società Un’anima divisa in due,” *Corriere della Sera*, September 15, 1993. Goffredo Fofi also praised the film for its “sensibilità politica,” even though the choice of a Rom was meant to take it out of ongoing discussions in regard to immigration. Alberto Crespi, “Frammenti di

Vesna, for all of its focus on the intimate struggles of a young lady, could only be contextualized within the discourse of immigration and neorealism as well – even if only to criticize how badly it met its “inherent” neorealist expectations:

If the aim of the film were to have a strong impact, to be harsh, dramatic, even accusatory – as the topic of the film implies – then the goal was not achieved. If what he wanted, instead, was to make a small, dream-like, intimate film, driven by an abstract sense rather than plot, a sentimental encounter between two loners, then it can be said that he succeeded. However, some perplexity remains, because the topic was and continues to be, tragic. One gets the sense that from time to time Mazzacurati makes the film too “poetic.”<sup>84</sup>

And there is the crux of the problem, highlighted by the offhandedness in which the film critic Alberto Crespi says “as the topic of the film implies.” Immigration, in the broadest sense, had come to be considered as naturally belonging to the realm of socially engaged cinema with neorealist connotations, and deviations from that could be penalized as too “poetic” (echoing the criticism laid against *Il colore dell’odio*). The ghettoization of this growing body of films within this particular cinematic (and ideological) discourse is not one that is superimposed by critics alone, but one in which the directors fully participate, even when they signal that their film are somehow different. Mazzacurati, who said in one interview that with *Vesna* he did not want to document a social phenomenon but tell a singular story, nonetheless says as well that “prostitution, until a few years ago, was linked almost exclusively with the distribution of drugs, and prostitutes seemed like disturbing spirits. *Vesna* and girls like her resemble, instead, the Italian girls who sold their bodies out of desperation right after the Second World War.”<sup>85</sup> In attempting to explain his protagonist’s character, Mazzacurati could not help but to place her within a context of ‘social issues’ while reaching for the trope “they are as we once were,” to justify and redeem her.

### Misremembered History

As I have stated earlier, in order for this move to function, 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. In order 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 this process of recognition initiated by these films because it is not actually based on recognition of the historical record, but its misrecognition. From *Tomato* all the way to *Once You’re Born*, the point of reference has not

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disordine amoroso,” *L’Unità*, September 9, 1993. Lastly, the director is quoted saying that the scene he regrets most cutting is one where a Senegalese street vendor approaches the protagonist to sell him some stuff, because “sembrava proprio un momento di verità.” Maria Pia Fusco, “La voglia di fuggire verso mondi diversi,” *La Repubblica*, August 31, 1993, sec. Venezia Cinema. From the right, left and center corner of the mediasphere, the discussion surrounding this film invariably steered back to elements commonly associated with neorealism and/or its cinematic legacy of *cinema d’impegno*.

<sup>84</sup> Crespi, “Italia senza amore per la prostituta ceca.” “Se puntava all’opera di forte impatto, aspra, drammatica, persino ‘di denuncia’ – come il tema poteva far pensare – beh, non ci siamo. Se invece voleva girare un piccolo film intimo, sognante, fatto più di atmosfera che di trama; un incontro sentimentale fra due solitudini allora si può dire che la missione è compiuta, ma qualche perplessità rimane. Perché il tema tragico era e tragico rimane, e la sensazione è che di tanto in tanto Mazzacurati lo renda troppo ‘poetico.’”

<sup>85</sup> Michele Anselmi, “Il Sogno di Vesna una ‘luciolina’ che viene dall’Est,” *L’Unità*, July 16, 1996, sec. Spettacoli.



been the statistical data gathered by the Italian state ever since 1876 and published periodically over the years, but rather the stereotype of said migration that has established itself over time in the Italian imaginary.<sup>86</sup>

It is not surprising that Placido cited Geremi's *The Path of Hope* as his point of departure for the many reasons already covered in this chapter. And yet it is quite interesting that out of the many films that dealt with Italian migration in the neorealist period, Placido chose that one in particular. After all, according to Catia Monacelli, between 1945 and 1950, there were at least 10 films dealing with that very topic, and if we extend our timeline to include the latter years of neorealism (mid 1950s), that number goes up to at least 15 known films.<sup>87</sup> The question remains then, is there a reason why Geremi's film was privileged over other films such as Fabrizi's *Emigrantes* (1949) or Corbucci's *Terra Straniera* (1954)? I would like to suggest that one of the main reasons lies in the narrative structure of the film, which reflects more accurately how Italian migration is *remembered* than how it historically took place, or even how it was represented at that time.

One of the greatest myths regarding Italian migration is that it was principally a south-to-north phenomenon. According to Placido, Geremi's *The Path of Hope* inspired him because "in the film there was a group of southerners traveling north in Italy, looking for jobs, not unlike what happens to the illegal African migrants today; manual labor willing to do any job." The heart of that analogy lies in the narrative movement from South to North, a journey undertaken by the wretched masses of Italy (in the first place) and of Africa (in the second place). The manner in which this historical phenomenon is narrated reinforces the collective memory of postwar Italian migration, which over the years has been perceived as primarily a flow of the poorest and least educated people of the Mezzogiorno into northern Italy or Europe. This perspective, at a first glance, may not seem controversial. After all, it is true that in the time of the First Republic, millions of Italians from the southern regions settled in different parts of Italy, among which were the industrial cities of the north. Furthermore, this viewpoint has been supported over the years by multiple agents of cultural productions (film, television, poetry, literature, etc), of which scholars have played a part from time to time by over emphasizing the southern aspect of Italian migration.<sup>88</sup> It may not seem controversial because, from a certain perspective, it is all true.

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<sup>86</sup> Samples of book containing statistical data collected by the government and analysis of it are 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, Lorenzo Prencipe, and Direzione Generale per gli Italiani all'Estero e le Politiche Migratorie Ministero degli Affari esteri, *Museo Nazionale Emigrazione Italiana* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2009). It is worth noting that in recent years, analysis of the data has taken into account a regional perspective, not just the traditional division of North, Center and South. This allows for a more nuanced analysis of the migratory patterns in Italy.

<sup>87</sup> Catia Monacelli, "L'emigrazione nel cinema italiano," in *Museo Nazionale Emigrazione Italiana* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2009), 271–97. Monacelli's numbers are augmented by titles I have encountered over the years as part of my research as well as by titles found in Brunetta, "Emigranti nel cinema italiano e americano."

<sup>88</sup> As recently as 2006, scholar Enrico Pugliese stated that "the principle flows of migration has been from south to north: from Mediterranean countries to France and England, and then to Switzerland and Germany. And Italy, beyond these migration patterns, has been also the subject of significant internal movements that are also oriented prevalently – though not exclusively, from south to north, from poor zones to rich ones, from agriculture to industry." Even though Pugliese leaves room for other motives and reasons to justify the migratory patterns in the postwar era, he nonetheless privileges heavily the traditional and over simplistic ideas of south to north and poor to rich. Though he mentions the Triveneto and the Mezzogiorno as the regions of departure in the 1950s and 1960s in

Likewise the Italian collective memory remembers the mass emigration of the Liberal era as primarily a move, via transatlantic voyage, from the South to the United States.<sup>89</sup> This “South to America” narrative of the Liberal era is equally as important as the “South to North” narrative of the postwar era because together they are, for the representation of Italian emigration as a whole, the fixed points around which the Italian imaginary revolves and to which it continually returns.<sup>90</sup> They are the two most iconic “moves” in the history of Italian emigration (post-unification), and often serve as linchpins for its periodization, which is traditionally broken down into the Liberal period, the Fascist period, and the Postwar period.<sup>91</sup> More importantly for our purposes, however, is the fact that these two narratives ideologically reinforce one another, and thus must be considered as part of a single system of representation. Furthermore, it must be stated that just as the “South to North” narrative is partly true, so is this transatlantic “South to America”: it is true that millions of people from the Mezzogiorno boarded large steamers and migrated to the US. Both of these narratives are true, but they are not representative of the whole, statistically verified, historical truth. It is this gap between the narratives that have become cultural truism today, and the historical record, that undermines the progressive intentions of the trope “they are as we once were.”

## The Liberal Period

Migratory patterns in the peninsula in the 1800s and at the turn of the century were essentially rural in nature. Scholars such as Matteo Sanfilippo, Giovanni Pizzorusso, Pietro Bevilacqua, among others, have been able to discern that migratory patterns during this period were tied to cyclical agricultural patterns whereby peasants migrated from the mountains to the valleys, and back to the mountains again. This pattern was true for sectors deep within Italy (from the Apennines in Le Marche to the coastal regions in Lazio, for example), as well as those bordering other European states (from the Alps towards France, Switzerland and from the Dolomites to Austria for example).<sup>92</sup> Though this movement of labor was tied to agricultural

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the introduction of his book, in the actual text, he spends less than one page (47) on the Triveneto. Enrico Pugliese, *L'Italia Tra Migrazioni Internazionali E Migrazioni Interne*, 2. ed (Bologna: Il mulino, 2006), 12.

He is not the only one either. Antonio Golini, writing on a special edited volume commemorating 100 years of documented Italian migration, begins his article with the following sentence: “Nine million losses due to emigration for the Mezzogiorno in a hundred years of Italian history: two million to the industrial triangle region of the north-west, a million eight hundred thousand to the Lazio region, which has greatly contributed to balance territorially the demographics of Italy – which otherwise would be much more differentiated – and to accelerate the amalgamation of the population of the various regions.” Once again the data is being presented in such a way as to imply a narrative where migration is solely a southern phenomenon. Antonio Golini, “Migrazione interne, distribuzione della popolazione e urbanizzazione in Italia,” in *Un secolo di emigrazione italiana: 1876-1976* (Rome: Centro studi emigrazione, 1978), 153–85.

<sup>89</sup> According to Prencipe and Sanfilippo, “Within the collective imaginary, when it comes to emigration at the turn of the century, what comes to mind even today are the great transatlantic ships that landed at Ellis Island, the fazendas of Brazil, and little Italy of Buenos Aires.” Lorenzo Prencipe and Matteo Sanfilippo, “Per una storia dell’emigrazione Italiana: Prospettiva nazionale e regionale,” in *Museo Nazionale Emigrazione Italiana* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2009), 51.

<sup>90</sup> Not only does my previous analysis of *Pummarò* and *Lamerica* bear this out, but also Italian cinema in general continues to revisit these migration narratives. For example, see Crialesse’s *Nuovomondo* (2006).

<sup>91</sup> For an in depth discussion on the question of periodization of Italian emigration and its implication, please see Matteo Sanfilippo, *Problemi di storiografia dell’emigrazione italiana*, Sophrosyne 2 (Viterbo: Sette città, 2002).

<sup>92</sup> Matteo Sanfilippo, “Tipologie dell’emigrazione di massa,” in *Storia Dell’Emigrazione Italiana*, vol. 1 (Rome: Donzelli, 2001), 85. Piero Bevilacqua, “Società rurale e emigrazione,” in *Storia Dell’Emigrazione Italiana*, vol. 1, 2

patterns, not all labor was agricultural in nature: craftsmen, artisans, merchants, musicians, and skilled labor continually circulated the Italian peninsula (and Europe) working seasonal jobs.<sup>93</sup>

The rural nature of Italian migration explains why emigration was dominated by northern regions during this period. The unification of the peninsula into a single state brought about a crisis in the agricultural sector, which coupled with a high demand for unskilled labor in other European countries and the American continent, created the perfect conditions for mass emigration from Italy.<sup>94</sup> 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 the Friuli (803,000) then Piedmont (685,000) and finally Lombardy (497,000).” In part this is due to geographical reasons, for agricultural workers in those regions were already accustomed to going beyond the Alps whenever economic conditions became too difficult in their own land.<sup>95</sup> That is why from 1876 to 1886, their primary destinations, as in previous decades, were France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany and Austria. This initial flow of emigration was no different from previous patterns, and these peasants went “to accumulate in the shortest time possible the necessary capital to buy lands back home.”<sup>96</sup> However, Lorenzo Prencipe and Matteo Sanfilippo note that long-standing patterns of migration were starting to change, as “the flows from Italy and within Italy grow year by year in terms of number and duration” abroad, signaling a partial shift towards permanent emigration.<sup>97</sup> This is the beginning of what has been called, the “great Italian migration,” a historical phenomenon that lives quite well in the Italian imaginary.

According to the statistics gathered by the Italian state, from 1876 to 1915, 14 million Italians migrated out of Italy, of which 6.1 million migrated to European countries while 7.6 migrated to the American continent (43% to South America, 54% to the US). Before 1900, northern emigration outpaced considerably southern emigration: from 1876 to 1900, the northern regions of Veneto (940,711), Venezia Giulia (847,072), Piedmont (709,076), and Lombardy (519,100) made up, by themselves, 57.5% of all Italian emigration. By comparison, the four southern regions with the highest number of emigrants in that period were Campania (520,791), Calabria (275,926), Sicily (226,449) and Basilicata (191,433), making up 23% of all Italian

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vols. (Rome: Donzelli, 2001), 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).

<sup>93</sup> In fact, according to Bevilacqua, craftsmen and farmers were often the same people: during the winter months when the harvest season was over in the mountains, the same farmers would migrate temporarily to practice other jobs in which they were skilled. Marco Porcella notes that by the mid-1800s, many of these Italian migrants had made it to cities in the east coast of the United States. These migrants were of two separate classes: the first group were political exiles along with people of financial or cultural means; the second group were mostly Ligurian and Tuscan farmers, who became the first Italian organ players in the streets of New York and “the vanguard of rural emigration to North America.” Marco Porcella, “Premesse dell’emigrazione di massa in età prestatistica (1800-1850),” in *Storia Dell’Emigrazione Italiana*, vol. 1 (Rome: Donzelli, 2001), 36.

<sup>94</sup> The agricultural crisis affected not just Italy, but various European countries, and the reasons for such crisis are complex, and included not only a steep drop in prices due to new imports, but also disease affecting key crops and the ramifications of poor management by the new Italian state. At the same time, demand for labor was on the rise in other European countries and the American continent due to rapid industrial growth. Please see Bevilacqua, “Società rurale e emigrazione,” 103.

<sup>95</sup> Alessandro Nicosia, “Diversità e unitarietà,” in *Museo Nazionale Emigrazione Italiana* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2009), 39.

<sup>96</sup> Sanfilippo, “Tipologie dell’emigrazione,” 88.

<sup>97</sup> Prencipe and Sanfilippo, “Per una storia,” 49.

emigration in that period.<sup>98</sup> After 1900, particularly in the 7 years leading up to WWI, southern emigration skyrocketed, overtaking northern emigration by a considerable margins. However, Sanfilippo points out that since the north never stopped exporting labor, their total numbers in the period 1876-1913 is higher than that of the south. The main exporting regions during that period are, in descending order, Veneto (1,822,000), Piedmont (1,540,000), Campania (1,475,000), Venezia Giulia (1,407,000), Sicilia (1,352,000), and Lombardy (1,342,000).<sup>99</sup> Every other region exported less than 1 million each. That means that four out of the top six exporting regions of labor prior to WWI were from northern Italy.

One factor to consider along with the statistical data regarding the people leaving Italy, might be the data regarding the number of people returning to Italy at the turn of the century. One of the reasons why the agricultural crisis hit the northern regions the hardest in the late 1800s was because in the north, farming was done by small landowners while in the south land was concentrated in a few hands, whereby most of the people tending the land were tenant farmers. The crisis disrupted the historical rhythm of temporary migration, making it unsustainable. Many of the farmers from the north, particularly from the Veneto and Friuli, ventured first to Europe but eventually privileged South America as their destination (followed by Australia and South Africa), where the possibility of owning land became an enticing factor for permanent resettlement.<sup>100</sup> Of course many people still returned, particularly those that migrated to Europe as it was historically done, but by and large those that embarked upon the transatlantic voyage did not, and went on to permanently settle in places like Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. Their stories, in the Liberal period and beyond, was known and told through poetry, serial novels, literature, theater, and in the early years of Italian cinema, by films.<sup>101</sup> Over time, however, changing political and ideological exigencies, plus the fact that many of those that left never came back to tell their stories, have pushed the narrative of northern emigrants to the back of Italy's memory, where it still lingers.

Southern emigration followed a different trajectory. Unlike northern farmers, southern emigrants went primarily to the United States, particularly after 1900, to large urban areas with the plan of working for a certain amount of time in order to save money and come back to Italy. In fact, many returned relatively quickly, bringing about a lot of changes to the south and to the country as a whole, of which much has been written about.<sup>102</sup> In fact, from the Italian perspective, it is not the "great emigration" of so many southerners that motivated so much fascination, but rather the "great immigration" of so many that had previously left. It is their stories, their

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<sup>98</sup> Nicosia, Prencipe, and Ministero degli Affari esteri, *Museo Nazionale Emigrazione Italiana*.

<sup>99</sup> Sanfilippo, "Tipologie dell'emigrazione," 79.

<sup>100</sup> Prencipe and Sanfilippo, "Per una storia," 85; Sanfilippo, "Tipologie dell'emigrazione," 88; Bevilacqua, "Società rurale e emigrazione," 107.

<sup>101</sup> For more on Liberal era representation of northern Italian emigration, please see Sebastiano Martelli, "Dal vecchio mondo al sogno americano. Realtà e immaginario dell'emigrazione nella letteratura italiana," in *Storia Dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Rome: Donzelli, 2001), 433–87. While Martelli does not distinguish between emigration between northern and southern (or central for that matter) Italy, the texts he chooses to explore do reflect migratory trends, so that the late 1800s Da Amicis could be taken to speak of northern emigration to South America, while the Pascoli and Pirandello can be said to reflect turn of the century patterns to North American from Southern Italy.

<sup>102</sup> It might be useful to do a small comparison between two key regions: the Veneto and Sicily. From 1905 to 1915, 925,847 people emigrated from Sicily, while 292,522 people returned. From the Veneto, 658,145 emigrated while only 39,753 people came back in that time period. Not just in raw numbers, but also in percentages, the south had more people returning back to Italy. A lot of what has been written about the effect of repatriation to southern Italy happened after WWII, the importance of which will be explored shortly.

memories of *Merica* that were told again and again, repeated and passed down and out to the broader Italian culture, where agents of cultural production appropriated and recast them to a broader Italian audience. The effects that such departure and return were quite real for the local communities in the south, effects linked to the introduction of knowledge, money, customs, education, entrepreneurial opportunities, etcetera. However, the effects such migratory pattern had on the Italian imaginary were far reaching as well, creating *over time* an image of Italian migration that simultaneously reinforced pre-existing notions of the south, as well as being reinforced by a broader symbolic system spearheaded by Hollywood.

## Interwar Period

Cinematically speaking, the articulation of the Italian emigrant took two separate paths until WWII, one in Italy and another one in the United States. While it is true that southern emigration became much more prominent at the turn of the century, northern emigration to South America had a much longer history, which was mirrored in Italian cinema. In 1915 the first Italian film showing Italian emigration was produced, Febo Mari's *L'emigrante*, which tells the story of a northern emigrant to Argentina.<sup>103</sup> Mari's film was followed by Paradisi's *Dagli Appennini alle Ande* (1917), and adaption of part of De Amicis' novel *Cuore* (1886), which focuses on the emigration of a young boy from Genoa to Argentina in search for his mother. The next films dealing with Italian emigration on record appear in the 1930s, after the industry recuperated from the crisis of the 1920s when it nearly collapse, and well after Mussolini's Fascist party came into power. Given Fascism's interest in using cinema as a propaganda tool, it is not surprising that the few films about Italian emigration served as vehicles to express ideological standings of the regime, such as nationalism, colonialism, and etcetera.<sup>104</sup> As Monacelli notes, the reasons for leaving are de-emphasized, and instead the migrants are shown to be "valuable representatives of the Italian people, bringing to the world productivity, skills and culture," where by "world" South America and the African colonies are meant.<sup>105</sup> The important part is, however, that the narratives of the poor, subaltern emigrants, as seen in Mari's and Paradisi's films, are brushed under the carpet.<sup>106</sup> Their stories, their history, were articulated only

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<sup>103</sup> Though the film does not explicitly say that the older emigrant is from the north, the traditional peasant clothes that his family is wearing before his departure mark him as being from the North. Furthermore, the production company was *Itala*, based in Turin, which makes it more likely that they would be producing a narrative that the producers would be more familiar with.

<sup>104</sup> Brunetta, "Emigranti nel cinema italiano e americano"; Monacelli, "L'emigrazione nel cinema italiano." Furthermore, Martelli identifies that generally speaking, "emigration as a mournful event, as misfortune, sickness, madness, and death is a strong underlying theme in emigration literature from the 1880s to the 1920s." Even so, the negative valence to the migratory experience is not all the same: though there is some latent anti-Americanism from the very beginning, depiction of emigration in the 1800s was basically sympathetic towards the migrants themselves and on the voyage out. Then in the 1900s the emphasis shifts on the "*rientrati*," or those that came back, and on the possible ramifications. Then after 1910, nationalist sentiments starts to take over and the anti-American sentiment finds stronger articulation. Emigration is now seen not as a phenomenon of the masses, but as a *vulnus*, or wound, to the nation. Martelli, "Dal vecchio mondo."

<sup>105</sup> For example: *Passaporto Rosso* (1934) by Brignone, *Il suo destino* (1938) by Guazzoni, *Luciano Serra Pilota* (1938) by Alessandrini, as well as films with an obvious colonial angle such as *Abuna Messias* (Vendetta Africana, 1939) by Alessandrini, *Il grande appello* (1936) by Camerini, *Sotto la croce del sud* (1938) by Brignone, *Giarabub* (1942) by Alessandrini, and *Bengasi* (1942) by Genina. Monacelli, "L'emigrazione nel cinema italiano," 275.

<sup>106</sup> Even in most literature written under the regime by intellectuals who spent time in the United States, the mass immigration of subaltern Italians is ignored and not mentioned, as in Emilio Cecchi's *America Amara* (1939). See, Martelli, "Dal vecchio mondo," 455–463.

in narratives written by those in exile such as Silone's *Wine and Bread* (1938), or right as the Fascist regime was falling, as demonstrated by the works of Pavese, Levi, and Jovine.<sup>107</sup>

At the same time as Mari's *L'emigrante* (1915) was being released in Italy, Reginald Barker's *The Italian* (1915) premiered in the United States. Like Mari's film, it also featured a northern Italian, a Venetian gondolier to be more precise, as its main protagonist. Furthermore, it also reflected Mari's general sympathetic depiction of the Italian immigrant, who like the migrants of the post WWII era, found itself trapped by social and historical forces beyond his control. However, Barker's film was rather the exception and not the rule. As Italian cultural production was turning towards a nationalistic and anti-American perspective in its approach towards emigration, American cinema reflected a nativist sentiment that was quite strong at the turn of the century.<sup>108</sup> According to Gian Piero Brunetta, "within the American cinematic production of the first decade, the Italian immigrant, the 'dago,' has already a considerable and specific valence, one tied to fears of foreigners [*del diverso*], of new forms of delinquency, of passion crimes, of kidnappings and so on..."<sup>109</sup> It is not surprising to learn then that the first cinematic depiction of Italians in American cinema is also the first depiction of organized crime: McCutcheon's *Black Hand* (1906), which references the eponymous practice of kidnapping and extortion within (southern) Italian communities in American big cities at the time. Of course, American nativist fear of foreigners did not malign only Italians, but the Positivist rhetoric of the criminal southern Italian, and the fact that the majority of people that migrated to the United States came from such regions, led to the well-known associations of Italians and organized crime.<sup>110</sup> According to Brunetta (citing Mirella Affron), in the silent era alone, there were at least one hundred films tied to the Italian-American community, which primarily represented Italians as "Mafiosi and gangsters" (some by well know directors like Griffith).<sup>111</sup> Though in the 1930s the Italian stereotype was temporarily discontinued in response to multiple pressures on the industry, among which were economic concerns over films being banned in foreign markets, the association of southern Italian immigrants and criminality had taken root by then and continues to manifest itself in American media to this day.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> The relationship between the Fascist regime and the United States was a complex one. Italy simultaneously looked at the US as a model of modernity (particularly in the 1920s), and criticized it for being uncultured and somewhat "barbaric." This is a time period where the only migratory perspective that circulated in Italy was that of intellectuals, journalist, artists, and other persons of means. For more details on this complex relationship, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>108</sup> Gian Antonio Stella does a great job at showing how southern Italian immigrants were perceived at the turn of the century by American media as criminals, anarchists, uneducated dirty masses that were a disruption to American civility and way of life. Of particular interest is Appendix One, where it collects newspaper quotes from the New York Times, New Herald, Harper's Weekly, and others. The quotes show how the stereotype of Italians, southern Italian sin particular, began to be articulated in the American imaginary, leading to the now iconic southern Italian Mafioso of American cinema. Stella, *L'orda*, 263–288.

<sup>109</sup> Brunetta, "Emigranti nel cinema italiano e americano," 496. Ellipsis in the original.

<sup>110</sup> I am referring primarily to the works of Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), whose works on criminality established the notion that crime was the result of inherent traits in people, and through already existing notions of evolution, proposed a racial hierarchy whereby people of color (and southern Italians) were inherently more criminal than their Aryan/northern European counterparts. His theories were widely read, discussed and criticized in Europe and the United States.

<sup>111</sup> Brunetta, "Emigranti nel cinema italiano e americano," 511–512.

<sup>112</sup> For more on the curving of ethnic stereotypes in American cinema in the 1930s, please see the chapter "Why is Mr. Brown Eating Spaghetti? Content Regulation and the Production Code Administration" in Ruth Vasey, *The World according to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 127–157.

This bifurcated path of the cinematic representation of Italian migration shows that during the Fascist period the act of misremembering, or erasing Italy's migratory past and present, started to take place. Not only are previous emigrations waves to Europe, South America and North America hardly mentioned, but when they are mentioned they are rewritten to fit the Fascist propaganda machine. Fascism's mechanism of erasure is one where the ghost of an ancient, Roman past are sometimes superimposed in contemporary nationalist narratives – sometimes in not so subtle ways as in Gallone's *Scipione l'africano* (1937). All the while, as recent scholarship points out, migration of people was still taking place despite the restrictions put on by the government. It is true that the transatlantic waves were much diminished, but they were not gone, and every other form of mobility was still taking place: to Europe, North and South America and beyond. In fact, a grand total of 4,355,240 people left Italy between 1916 and 1942, with half heading to Europe and the other half to the Americas.<sup>113</sup> The end of Fascism, however, did call for yet another form of erasure, one that did not reach to the ancient history of the Romans, but rather the Liberal period, activating questions of the nation and unification.

### The Postwar Period

The fall of Fascism meant the end of the silence regarding subaltern Italian migration, and in that creative chaos in which neorealism sang its chorus of heterogeneous voices, a myriad of migratory trajectories found expression once again – trajectories not only of the present, but also of the past. Only then could the southern *Sciatàp* narrate to an Italian audience his sojourn in Mulberry Street (New York) before Fascism, and northern Anguilla could speak of his return to Italy to tell of his travels in California during Fascism.<sup>114</sup> Neorealist cinema, in that initial period of creative chaos between the fall of the regime and the entrenchment of the First Republic, reflected multiple migratory trajectories: 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.

It is during this period that Italian cinema is able to tell the story of Giuseppe from Rome, who migrates to Argentina permanently; or the story of Professor Taumen, Holocaust survivor, who leaves Italy with his daughter and heads to British Palestine; or the story of 9 year-old musical prodigy Pierino who moves to France to play music; or that of Cristoforo Colombo and Gaetano, two unfortunate fools from Turin who migrate to South America only to return to Italy empty-handed.<sup>115</sup> To these stories we need to add that of the *mondine*, farms hands in the rice fields of northern Italy, and who come from different parts of Italy – and even from Italy's

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Nicosia and Prencipe point out that the Mafia has become one of Hollywood's favorite themes when it comes to the Italian-American community, Coppola's *Godfather* (1972) being the paragon of them all. More importantly, however, is that according to Nicosia and Prencipe, there have been about 1057 Hollywood films from 1928 to 2000 featuring Italians or Italian-Americans, of which 73% show Italians in a negative role, 40% depicts them as outright criminals, and 33% show them in more 'benign' roles as uncouth, bigoted, stupid or as buffoons. Alessandro Nicosia and Lorenzo Prencipe, eds., *Museo Nazionale Emigrazione Italiana* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2009), 442–443.

<sup>113</sup> Luigi Favero and Graziano Tassello, "Cent'anni di emigrazione italiana (1876-1976)," in *Un secolo di emigrazione italiana: 1876-1976* (Rome: Centro studi emigrazione, 1978), 34.

<sup>114</sup> I am reference, of course, to characters in Ignazio Silone's *Wine and Bread* (1937, 1955) and Cesare Pavese's *The Moon and the Bonfires* (1950)

<sup>115</sup> *Emigrantes* (1949) by Aldo Fabrizi, *Il grido della terra* (1949) by Duilio Coletti, *La grande aurora* (1948) by G.M. Scotese, *Come scopersi l'America* (1949) by Carlo Borghesio.

former colonies, unbeknown to the audience.<sup>116</sup> Last, but no least are the stories of Sicilian miners, and of a fugitive Fascist along with the unemployed partisan, heading for France.<sup>117</sup> At the outside 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 *Soliti ignoti* (1958), 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 ignored by the canon, are representative of a migratory pattern equally ignored or forgotten by Italian cultural memory today. In fact, the patterns in the post war era are consistent with previous patterns of mobility: from rural areas towards urban ones, from mountains to lowlands, from Italy to Europe and the rest of the world. Furthermore, the emigration from the South did not become predominant until the 1960s. 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."<sup>118</sup> This information goes against the image later enforced by Italian cinema, whereby a southerner (mainly Sicilian or Neapolitan) are the main migrants in either Turin or Milan after the war. In fact, at the height of the Economic Boom (1958-1963), 70% of Milan's immigrants were from rural areas of Lombardy itself and the Veneto, and only 30% were from the southern regions. All in all, the data supports an interpretation of post war Italian migration to be dynamic and multidirectional, with a predominantly rural nature at its core rather than southern one, as it would later become post 1960.

The overall shift in focus from the heterogeneous narratives of the postwar era 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 (the USA) to a position of global prominence, brought about the necessity of wiping the slate clean, of readjusting the national narrative in order to better adhere to the new political exigencies of the new world order.<sup>119</sup> From a cinematic, neorealist, perspective, this meant the repudiation of Fascism by shifting the Italian population to the side of the victims, away from the role of perpetrators. From a wider cultural perspective, the repudiation of Fascism was accompanied by the glorification of the Risorgimento in order to relegate Fascism to a

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<sup>116</sup> *Riso amaro* (1949) by Giuseppe De Santis. The 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, and 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*.

<sup>117</sup> *The Path of Hope* (1950) by Pietro Germi, and *Fuga in Francia* (1948) by Mario Soldati. It is worth noting that the heroic partisan in Soldati's film is played by no other than Pietro Germi.

<sup>118</sup> Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 219.

<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, this new world order represented by the USA on one side and the Soviet Union on the other, is in itself a re-articulation of the binary of Left and Right, whereby Left stands for communist ideals and myths which favor narratives of community formation through subaltern struggle, an ideological standpoint that clearly influenced not only neorealist productions, but many other facets of Italian cultural production. The Right, alternately, stands for capitalist ideals of the free market and individual progress. The tension of between these binary points affects, as we shall see, the way in which the past and present are articulated.



parenthetical position in Italian history: the Resistance was declared a second Risorgimento and the First Republic was 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 it deeply influenced the framing of said history in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly regarding Italian emigration.<sup>120</sup>

In fact, according to Sanfilippo, the periodization of Italian history into Unification, Fascism and Republic had the effect of not only erasing the migratory continuities between early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also of overemphasizing the creation of a single market as the sole reason behind Italian emigrations:

However, 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 on 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 such 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.<sup>121</sup>

The reduction of complex historical and social processes by both the Left and the Right into purely economic cause and effect mechanisms, obscured the role played by multiple contemporary factors. In fact, if all history is indeed contemporary history, then the scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s on the Liberal era is obviously overdetermined by the economic landscape created by the Boom in the late 1950s, and the increase southern migration in the 1960s. From the post Boom perspective, the North is rich and industrialized, and the South is rural and poor, an economic distinction that unfortunately becomes an ideological one in the emigration scholarship of the era.

For example, if the “renewed interest on the Southern Question” is the motivation for these analyses, as Sanfilippo suggest, then the framework for such scholarship was biased from the start. Not only did such framework forced analogies between the Liberal era and the 1960s, focusing primarily on the narrow period when Southern migration spiked during the Liberal era, but reduced migratory patterns to a narrative split between North and South, between northern industrialized centers and southern surplus labor. The socio-economic landscape created by the Boom provided a lens through which the 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 economics.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> There had been in the late 1800s some treatises about Italian emigration, but they looked at it not has a transhistorical phenomenon, but rather as a contemporary social one. It was the scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s that articulated the notion of the “great migration” of the Liberal era, and looked Italian emigration from a historical perspective – albeit a biased and limited as it only considered Italian migration from the Unification period forward.

<sup>121</sup> Sanfilippo, *Problemi di storiografia dell'emigrazione italiana*, 89.

<sup>122</sup> From the moment in which the industrialized northern Kingdom of Sardinia took over the agricultural southern Kingdom of the Two Sicilies during the unification of Italy, the northern overlords saw their southern

This rewriting of history taking place in the Boom period is put in further relief by the way emigration was actually represented in the Liberal era. Before the rise of the Fascist regime, the many forms of Italian migration found ample representation in the Italian imaginary. Sebastiano Martelli does a great job at pointing out the many forms in which Italian mobility were represented in Italian novels, short stories, poetry, theater, and even cinema.<sup>123</sup> The trajectories these symbolic representations reflected were equally as varied: from north, center and south people were going to North America and South America, to different parts of Italy (some would return, others would not), and while most of these works were in Italian, some were in dialect. Nor were the Fascists the ones to privilege the narrative of the southern subaltern migrating to America, which was seen as shameful and antithetical to Fascist greatness.<sup>124</sup> No, it is the historical assessment of Italian emigration conducted in the post Boom period that mobilizes such factors to justify the excessive focus on southern migration over any other type of Italian migration, both by Left and Right, both directly and indirectly, as a result of the aforementioned new ideological and political exigencies.

This backwards glance and projection of the South over previous migratory patterns, whether pre or post Fascism, was further reinforced by its cinematic representation. With 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, streamlining the heterogeneous narratives of the immediate post-war years into a more coherent narrative with repeating and recognizable elements. Let us look at the following list of films from 1960 to 1977:

Film	Year	Director	Destination	Departure
Rocco and His Brothers	1960	Visconti	Milan	Lucania
<b>Woman in the Window</b>	<b>1961</b>	<b>Emmer</b>	<b>Holland</b>	<b>Veneto</b>
A due passi dal confine	1961	Vernuccio	Milano	Sicily
Scorched Skin	1962	Fina	Milan	Puglia
Mafioso	1962	Lattuada	Milan	Sicily
Uno sguardo dal ponte	1962	Lumet	N. America	Sicily

subjects as backwards, underdeveloped savages, and thus referred to as Africans: “*This is no Italy! This is Africa. The Bedouins are the flower of civil virtue when compared with these yokels!*” From a letter written by Luigi Carlo Farini to the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia, Camillo Benso di Cavour, upon the annexation of the Naples region. Farini was appointed governor to the region of Emilia and then to the region of Naples, becoming eventually Prime Minister of the newly constituted Kingdom of Italy in December 1862 (though only for three months). 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*, v. 3 (Padua: F. Sacchetto, 1871); Cesare Lombroso, *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); Pasquale Villari, *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); Alfredo Niceforo, *Italiani del Nord e Italiani del Sud* (Turin: Bocca fr., 1901); Alfredo Niceforo, *La Delinquenza in Sardegna: Note Di Sociologia Criminale* / (Cagliari: Edizioni della torre, 1977); Cesare Lombroso, *In Calabria, 1862-1897: studii* (Bologna: A. Forni, 1988).

<sup>123</sup> Martelli, “Dal vecchio mondo.”

<sup>124</sup> Even though discreetly it made use of Italian farmer’s willingness to migrate not only to justify its colonial enterprise, but to populate the Duce’s urban projects in Agro Pontino as well.

<b>The Fiances</b>	<b>1963</b>	<b>Ormi</b>	<b>Sicily</b>	<b>Milan</b>
An Italian in America	1967	Sordi	N. America	Rome
The Girl with a Pistol	1968	Monicelli	England	Sicily
My Name Is Rocco Papaleo	1971	Scola	N. America	Sicily
Lady Liberty	1971	Monicelli	N. America	Southern Italy
A Girl in Australia.	1972	Zampa	Australia	Southern Italy
The Seduction of Mimi.	1972	Wertmüller	Milan	Sicily
Trevico-Torino... Viaggio Fiat-Nam	1973	Scola	Turin	Campania
Little Funny Guy	1973	Campanile	N. America	Naples
Bread and Chocolate	1974	Brusati	Switzerland	Southern Italy
Delitto d'amore	1974	Comencini	Milan	Sicily
The Last Desperate Hours	1974	Stegani	Milan	Calabria
Come Home and Meet My Wife	1975	Monicelli	Milan	Campania
A Virgin Named Mary	1975	Nasca	Turin	Southern Italy
Pure as a Lily	1976	Rossi	London	Sicily
Ugly, Dirty and Bad	1976	Scola	Rome	Puglia, Sicily
Il giorno dell'Assunta	1977	Russo	Rome	Southern Italy
Nel cerchio	1977	Minello	Venice	Sardinia

Compared to the films that go from *Fuga in Francia* (1948) to *Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958) previously discussed, we can see that the representation of emigration after 1960 takes certain recognizable patterns, which become retroactively foundational. With the exception of *Woman in the Window* and *The Fiances*, Italian migration takes a decisively southern profile, and is motivated almost exclusively by economic concerns, or reasons that are more in line with stereotypes of the South rather than realities on the ground. It is a process that cinematically speaking makes the Italian migrant increasingly into a southern caricature, profiting from the stereotypes traditionally associated with it, while simultaneously reducing almost all forms of southern mobility into a function of economic lack.

Individually speaking, these films can be (and often are) assessed as performing an act of social criticism, shedding light into problems affecting Italy's subaltern subjects. More often than not, particularly in comedies, they use stereotypes of the South to perform said subversive and critical functions. Yet, taken in the aggregate, and in the absence of alternate modes of migrations within these films, they reinforce the very stereotypes they seek to use as simple rhetorical tools. In their consistent and unflinching 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 Monicelli's *The Girl with a Pistol* (1968), Catia Monacelli states:

It is another grotesque and caricatural comedy that repeats the well-rehearsed game, described by the 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 southerner one.<sup>125</sup>

This film deploys Sicilian stereotypes of the island as a socially backwards culture where the smeared honor of a woman needs to be cleansed by shooting the offender. Of course not all films reduce their characters to such degree of caricature, but even so they often mobilize well known stereotypes of the south, such as links to the mafia and/or family honor as in Lattuada's *Mafioso*, Wertmüller's *The Seduction of Mimi*, and Segani's *The Last Desperate Hours*. What is important to remember, however, is that regardless of the intensity with which each individual film avails itself of southern stereotypes, the emigrant is almost always a southerner, thus helping to establish a pattern that becomes its own cinematic stereotype.

The reductionist tendency of this repetitive form of 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 also all forms of southern mobility as instantiations of the South's economic underdevelopment. Even films like Lattuada's *Mafioso* and Wertmüller's *The Seduction of Mimi*, which focus so much on stereotypes of southern criminality, are narratives underwritten by the necessity to emigrate for economic reasons: the stereotype of the South's backwardness, though still accessed freely in the way the characters are presented, is demonstrated anew in the South's inability to economically support its own people.<sup>126</sup> Comparatively speaking, if one looks at Germi's *The Path of Hope* (1950) within the film's cinematic milieu, one can see that the miner's 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 used in the 1990s, for Germi's film is not read or seen within its own milieu, but it is rather framed by the long shadow cast retroactively by these post 1960 films. In fact, as stated earlier, this shadow is cast retroactively to cover not only the postwar period, but also the Liberal period. Case in point are Campanile's *Little Funny Guy* (1973), which is an example of the growing tendency to think of the transatlantic voyage as a purely South-to-America passing, a point further reinforced by films as recent as Crialesse's *Golden Door* (2006).<sup>127</sup>

### They Are As *They* Once Were

The long incursion into the history of Italian migration and its representations over the years has been necessary to show a process of erasure that is at the heart of my argument: in

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<sup>125</sup> Monacelli, "L'emigrazione nel cinema italiano," 286–287.

<sup>126</sup> This reductionist tendency in the representation of southern mobility is underlined explicitly in 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 question/assertion by the driver is, "emigrant?!" Gaetano automatically refutes that interpretation by saying that he has a life and a job, like everyone else, in Naples, 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.

<sup>127</sup> 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 success of *The Godfather* (1972) consolidated the idea, and made it an easily recognizable trope in world cinema.

attempting to create a sense of solidarity with the new immigrant from the global south, cinema of immigration in fact compounded their estrangement. I have shown extensively how *Tomato* constantly references different neorealist films and figures, such as *Paisà* in name and narrative structure, as well as overall figures of suffering. I have also shown how *Tomato* specifically references previous films about Italian emigration in the way it articulates the suffering and struggles of its characters. A closer look at the films I identify as being referenced by *Tomato* will reveal the fact that *Tomato* is actually referencing two different, though related, film phenomena, and conflating them as if they were one. On the one hand it definitely avails itself, as the rest of the film industry in the 1990s, of the semantic field that belongs to neorealism. Such semantic field is a synchronic phenomenon in so far that it can be pinned to a specific time period and place and spreading across different types of cultural production: Italy in the first ten years after the war, 1945-1955. The reasons to appeal to neorealism have been explored quite extensively: prestige, legitimacy and figures of suffering.

It is this last reason, the figure of suffering, serves as a connection to a secondary cinematic phenomenon, mainly the diachronic development of the Italian migrant into a southerner after 1960. I have shown how *Tomato*, and *Lamerica* as well, reference the transatlantic voyage of southern Italians to the US before WWI and after WWII, as well as the many films dealing with Italian migration after 1960. It is true that both directors of *Tomato* and *Lamerica* discursively claim to echo postwar (neorealist) migration patterns, citing even specific neorealist films like Germi's *The Path of Hope* (1950). However, the continual and repetitive southern references bear little resemblance to the postwar period, either cinematically or statistically. Italian migration in the neorealist period, both in film and in reality, was varied and dynamic, emerging from all over the peninsula and motivated by multiple reasons. After 1960 things shifted, and statistically speaking there was a spike in southern migration, much like there had been at the turn of the century. However, the spike in southern migration did not preclude other forms of migration to continue, which they have even to this day. Yet cinematically speaking the figure of the Italian migrant became decisively southerner, and more often than not, increasingly stereotypical. It is this figure, these films, that cinema of immigration in the 1990s constantly references whenever they mobilize the trope, 'they are as we once were.' I have been calling it a 'neorealist trope' because the language has consistently been geared towards neorealism, however, the reference point has consistently been a stereotype that developed afterwards and applied retroactively.

In other words, that 'we' that 'once were' never actually was. And what was, was never a 'we' but rather the perennial 'they' of Italian culture. The idea of the trope was to create a bridge of human experience between the unknown, and often maligned, immigrant from the global south and the Italian public by linking the new migratory patterns with older Italian ones. In doing so, cinema of immigration was meant serve as a mirror on which the Italian audience could see their own national history reflected back, upon which the Italian subject could see themselves. Instead, cinema of immigration, unknowingly perhaps, mirrors back an image that the audience recognized but was not necessarily an image of themselves. That recognizable image is that of Italy's perennial internal other, of Italy's marginalized subject per excellence, and thus a reference of exclusion, not inclusion. If the analogy is set up so that the Italian migrant explicates and gives weight and valence to the new immigrant from the global south, then the weight and valence the new immigrant receives is that of the eternal subaltern in Italian culture.

Of course this is not to say that Sicilians, Calabrians, Apulians, etcetera, are not in the audience, or that they are not Italians and therefore their story could not be construed as

reflecting and aspect of Italian history. Not at all. The fact that Gianni Amelio's father and grandfather migrated from Catanzaro to Argentina serves to remind us of this fact, and to a certain limited degree, to justify the southern angle of his film *Lamerica*. However, stereotypes are not constructed by singular elements but rather by the consistent repetition of reductive elements that are made to stand for much broader and complex systems. Likewise, the issue is not only that the Italian 'national' referent is always a southern subject or the south in general when trying to explicate the immigrant, but rather the level upon which such analogy is being made. I have already explained why the cognate character that links these two figures is that of the "victim of historical circumstances that are beyond anyone's control." From a historical perspective, such a figure would be appropriate and quite logical at a specific time and place. Right after the fall of Fascism, the marginalized subjects that rise to tell their multiple suppressed stories are not only appropriate but necessary for the construction of a new national narrative. In the late 1980s, when the rise of regional right-wing parties were vilifying immigrants as a means to launch themselves into the national stage, it was necessary to show that they were most likely to be the victims rather than the aggressors. In both cases, it is logical to place both constituencies in a subaltern position in relation to the dominant powers as a starting point.

However, past that historical point, the repeated "victimization" of said constituencies gain a different value, particularly in relation to changing global and historical realities. If the differentiation between the inside and the outside, between subject and other, during the late 1800s was articulated through the logic of colonialism, then it should not be surprising that the maintenance of the aforementioned hierarchy in the postcolonial era should be done through different forms of articulation. The entrenchment of the American capitalistic model in western Europe through the reconstruction efforts after the war, particularly after Italy's own "economic miracle" in the late 1950s, framed the relationship between the Italian "self" (through the state) and the different permutations of its internal others. On the one hand there is the Law, the state, economic wealth, individual achievement, modernity, Europe, etcetera. On the other hand is the lawlessness, the periphery, communal poverty, rural primitive spaces, etcetera.

Taking the new postcolonial/globalization landscape into consideration, then it could be surmised that the continual victimization and *southernization* of the migrant only serves to marginalize both the South and the migrant as it lays 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 set this process as a linear cause and effect projection, where the latest addition to the equation is but its latest result: 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 process that is constantly adapting 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. According to philosopher Franco Cassano, the South's subaltern position has been articulated through different figurations that place it as an eternal "*non-ancora*," or "not quite yet" – the South as a Mafia hub and a rustic tourist paradise being but the latest figurations.<sup>128</sup> The Mafia places the South outside of the law while the insidious rustic tourist paradise places it outside of modernity. A comparison with the new immigrants from the global south only compounds the peripheral position of the South in so far that such immigrants

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<sup>128</sup> Please see Franco Cassano, *Il pensiero meridiano* (Rome: Laterza, 2010). Pp.viii, 6.

are already perceived as moving, living and thriving outside of the law, and as subjects that come from a much more '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, 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 him/her to a fixed position in a conceptual orbit that can never occupy the center – or the present. This positioning remains true for all the cinema of immigration in the 1990s and the new millennium that insists on presenting all phenomena of migration as a perennial contact zone where migrants of all types are in a constant state of 'arriving' while the mobility and transnational nature of the 'native' population is erased.

Simultaneously, the formulation allows the Italian subject to disavow the associations that come with the word 'migrant' by removing itself completely from the formulation. The trope does not claim, "you are as I am now," but rather shifts all the things that the "migrant" could be unto the southerner, and into the past.<sup>129</sup> Despite Amelio's continual claims regarding *Lamerica*, that "we Italians are the Albanians," a cursory glance at his interviews and the film itself easily shows that he means southern Italians from Italy's primitive past and landscape. This move may be deemed necessary because the word 'migrant' not only evokes the terms already discussed, such as victim, necessity, unemployment, lack, poverty, etcetera, but more importantly, it is antithetical to the modernity envisioned by post industrialized states, which is a point of anxiety for a country that has not forgotten its previous moniker of "l'italietta." In this 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 your borders determines your position within the new economic world order.

Therefore the (neo)realist trope from the 1990s and early 2000s, "they are as we once were," must be considered a failed attempt to explicate the new immigrant from the global south. Motivated by progressive intentions, it is nonetheless based upon a bad recurrent nightmare in Italian culture, one that insists upon a symbolic hierarchy between the North and the South, between Europe and the rest of the (underdeveloped) world. Perhaps in its first instantiation, *Tomato*, it could be considered useful for it created a symbolic meeting place, *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. Let us hope that as the second generation of immigrant-Italians come to age and gain greater access to the means of cultural production, a more complex image of Italy, and of all Italians, emerges on the screen.

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<sup>129</sup> Fusco, "Vargas Llosa, ti sfido"; Giani Amelio, "Siamo Tutti Albanesi," *L'Unità*, September 6, 1994; Bignardi, "Emigranti, faccendieri, gli albanesi siamo noi"; Giuseppina Manin, "Amelio: 'Quegli albanesi li conosco, siamo noi,'" *Corriere della Sera*, August 30, 1994, sec. Speciale 51a Mostra Internazionale del Cinema di Venezia.

## Filmography

Title	Year	Director	To	From
The Italian	1915	Baker	USA	Veneto
Little Funny Guy	1915	Mari	S. America	U
Dagli appennini alle Ande	1916	Paradisi	S. America	U
Passaporto rosso	1934	Brignone	S. America	U
Luciano Serra pilota	1938	Alessandrini	S. America	U
Il suo destino	1938	Guazzoni	S. America	U
Due Milioni per un sorriso	1938	Borghesio	N. America	Milan
Harlem	1943	Gallone	N. America	U
Fuga in Francia	1948	Soldati	France	U
La grande aurora	1948	Scotese	France	U
Riso amaro	1948	De Santis	Veneto	U
La terra trema	1948	Visconti	Mainland Italy	Sicily
Il grido della terra	1949	Coletti	Israel	U
Emigrantes	1949	Fabrizi	S. America	Rome
Come scopersi l'America	1949	Borghesio	S. America	Turin
Il monello della strada	1950	Borghesio	S. America	Turin
Napolitano a Milano	1953	De Filippo	Milan	Naples
Terra straniera	1953	Corbucci	France	U
La grande savanna	1954	Marcelli	Venezuela	U
I soliti ignoti	1958	Monicelli	Rome	Veneto, Sicily, et
The Magliari	1959	Rosi	Germany	Naples, Tuscany
Rocco and His Brothers	1960	Visconti	Milan	Lucania
La ragazza in vetrina	1961	Emmer	Holland	Veneto
A due passi dal confine	1961	Vernuccio	Milano	Sicily
Pelle viva	1962	Fina	Milan	Puglia
Mafioso	1962	Lattuada	Milan	Sicily
Uno sguardo dal ponte	1962	Lumet	N. America	Sicily
<b>I fidanzati</b>	<b>1963</b>	<b>Ormi</b>	<b>Sicily</b>	<b>Milan</b>
Un italiano in America	1967	Sordi	N. America	Rome
La ragazza con la pistola	1968	Monicelli	England	Sicily
Permette? Rocco Papaleo	1971	Scola	N. America	Sicily
La mortadella	1971	Monicelli	N. America	Southern Italy
Bello onesto emigrato australiano....	1972	Zampa	Australia	Southern Italy
The Seduction of Mimi.	1972	Wertmuller	Milan	Sicily



Trevico-Torino... Viaggio Fiat-Nam	1973	Scola	Turin	Campania
Little Funny Guy	1973	Campanile	N. America	Naples
Bread and Chocolate	1974	Brusati	Switzerland	Southern Italy
Delitto d'amore	1974	Comencini	Milan	Sicily
The Last Desperate Hours	1974	Stegani	Milan	Calabria
Romanzo popolare	1975	Monicelli	Milan	Campania
Vergine di nome Maria	1975	Nasca	Turin	Southern Italy
Come una rosa al naso	1976	Rossi	London	Sicily
Brutti sporchi e cattivi	1976	Scola	Rome	Puglia, Sicily
Il giorno dell'Assunta	1977	Russo	Rome	Southern Italy
Nel cerchio	1977	Minello	Venice	Sardinia

### Chapter 3: From Cinema of Immigration to Migrant Cinema

*“The social world is accumulated history, and if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles, one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital and with it, accumulation and all its effects.”*

- Pierre Bourdieu

Different notions of ‘realism’ have played an important role in the representation of persons of color in Italian cinema. From the realistic spectacles of early silent films, to the neorealist tropes in the post-Cold War era, they have been essential in mobilizing images of subaltern subjects in the media. Therefore, it should come as no surprise to learn that realism, or the ghost of Neorealism to be more precise, has been used to marshal the actual movies through complex systems of global distribution. After all, one should not forget that cinema is simultaneously an art form, a house of dreams, a complex system of symbols to be utilized for multiple socio-political exigencies, *and* a financial enterprise. We have already seen in the first chapter of this dissertation how commercial concerns influenced the aesthetics of early Italian cinema, which overcame the financial crisis of 1909 by carving of a market niche with the realistic spectacles of its historical epics. Cinema of immigration in the post-Cold War is no different, and manages to circulate through the international film festival circuit by using Italy’s neorealist legacy.

In this chapter, we will concentrate on the commercial aspects of cinema of immigration of the 1990s and new millennium, on financial and market forces that underlie its very conditions of possibility as an economic object. In short, the question we will address is not so much “why are they made?”, but once they are made, what mechanisms do they employ to increase their commercial viability? Conventional wisdom dictates that films follow a certain path from the time they are conceived as an idea, to the time they are long forgotten, and while there are variables along the way, the steps are quite simple: production, marketing, theatrical exhibition, video release, cable release, national TV. It is my argument that Italian films of immigration must often embark on a long trek around the world through the international film festival circuit, before they can be picked up for distribution of any kind. The dire economic conditions of the Italian film industry, along with the festival circuit’s ability to provide cultural capital, has made the voyage through the circuit a necessity for much of Italy’s cinematic product, particularly for Italian cinema of immigration.

Thus, I will analyze three intertwined subjects that will allow us to discern the trajectories followed by Italian cinema of immigration and the possible implications for Italian cinema in the long run. I will first focus on how the topography of the cinematic transnational network evolved overtime around the fluid concepts of art and commercial cinema. Then I will address the dire market conditions of the Italian film industry and the necessity for alternate modes of distribution. Finally, I will examine how the market conditions in the Italian industry, and the aesthetic codes often chosen for Italian cinema of immigration, have contributed to the necessity of traveling through the film festival circuit in order to survive as an economic product.

## Early Cinema, Transnational Cinema

In order to address importance of the international film festival circuit, and the necessity of accumulating cultural capital, it is necessary to unpack the history of cinema, vis-à-vis its transnational roots. This will contextualize within a historical framework the rhizomatic nature of cinema, and expose the recurring points of contact between different “national” industries, as well as locate the Italian industry within the larger network. Only then will it become clear why the process of accumulating cultural capital through the international film festival became a necessity in the last quarter of the 20th century for film products bearing certain aesthetic, and production values.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I mentioned that cinema was not born, but that in fact, it “became”. It is important to stress this fact for it allows us to see that cinema has always been a transnational affair, even before it became *Cinema*. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by technological innovations in many fields, including the field of photography, particularly concerning the possible incorporation of movement and sound to the still image. Inventors and innovators across Europe and North America explored the many technological possibilities of the photographic image in an atmosphere of open competition and exchange. Pioneers like Thomas Edison, Étienne-Jules Marey, Ottamar Anschütz and Eadweard Muybridge, worked in different countries and yet kept tabs on each other via scientific journals (like *Scientific American*) and world fairs such as the 1889 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris (Where Edison saw Marey’s Chronophotographic Gun) and the 1893 World Fair in Chicago. They borrowed each other’s ideas and concepts indiscriminately, informing each other’s projects and inventions, participating in a process that led to the Lumière’s *Cinématographe*.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, even though cinema as we know it (mainly as the projection of moving images upon a screen for the viewing pleasure of paying customers) made its entry into the world at a specific time and place (December 28, 1895), the technological processes that made it possible were quite clearly transnational in nature.<sup>2</sup>

Even though a film industry did not start in Italy until ten years after it developed in other countries, it soon became an important and innovative node in the cinematic transnational network.<sup>3</sup> Gian Piero Brunetta puts it succinctly when he writes that, “from 1905 to 1912, Italian film production went through an initial period of rapid development, then a period of crisis—partly due to the slump in the international economy—and, finally, a mature, innovative and

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<sup>1</sup> On February 13 1895, the brothers patented their *Cinématographe*, an apparatus that was simultaneously a portable recorder and a projector as well. On December 28 1895 they showed ten short films to paying customers at the *Salon Indien of the Grand Café*, located on *Boulevard des Capucines* in Paris, marking the first cinematic commercial event in history.

<sup>2</sup> For further details on Edison and his innovative contemporaries please see, Neil Baldwin, *Edison: Inventing the Century*, University of Chicago Press ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Randall E. Stross, *The Wizard of Menlo Park: How Thomas Alva Edison Invented the Modern World*, 1st ed (New York: Crown Publishers, 2007). For more emphasis on Marey and his French contemporaries see Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Cinema is itself a transnational network, sustained by economic, symbolic and social flows through relays and nodes, some of which are confused as points of origin and/or destination given their valence (i.e. Hollywood), but which are nonetheless part of an endless system of reciprocities and exchanges. I use the term “cinematic transnational network” rather than “cinema” to highlight this system of practices that make up what we know as Cinema.

competitive phase that helped it open European and American markets.”<sup>4</sup> Brunetta chooses 1912 as the beginning of Italy’s “mature, innovative and competitive phase” because in that year Cines’ *Quo Vadis?* (Guazzoni, 1912) became the first world blockbuster and raised the bar for production values worldwide. The film took 6 months to shoot; it used roughly 2,000 extras and 25 lions; it was shot on location in different parts of Italy in order to use authentic classical settings. The film was a spectacular production and received a spectacular transatlantic reception—there was no major American or Canadian city that did not show it for at least six days, and in New York, the film played for twenty-two weeks.<sup>5</sup> No other European film had known such international success at that time.

However, the film industry in Italy had been innovative and influential even before 1912, and would remain so until the end of WWI. As early as 1909, Italian comedies were distributed internationally, and characters such as Cretinetti, Robinet and Polidor were known not just in Europe, but in the Americas as well. Italian melodramas and historical films created one of the earliest star systems in the world of cinema; before there were Hollywood superstars there were Italian divas, such as Lyda Borelli and Francesca Bertini, and Italian heroes, such as Emilio Ghione and Bartolomeo Pagano—beacons of Italy’s international cinematic success. During this golden age of Italian cinema, the Italian film industry was a leading *actor* in the cinematic transnational network, introducing some innovative elements such as the first feature length film, the dolly shot and new marketing schemes, deeply influencing the cinematic industries of other countries as well.<sup>6</sup>

And yet the success of the Italian film industry would have not been possible were it not for the transnational nature of early cinema. Not only were Italian films doing quite well in international markets, but the Italian film industry was made up of international talents. Cretinetti and Robinet, two of the best well-known comedians in Italian silent cinema were, in fact, not Italian. Cretinetti (a.k.a. André Deed) was a French actor who had previously worked for Georges Méliès at Pathé. Robinet (a.k.a. Marcel Fabre) was a Spaniard acrobat and clown, who started his career in France at Pathé, made 135 films for Ambrosio (Italy) and then moved on to the American film industry. Even Cines, the most emblematic of Italy’s golden age in the silent era, relied on international talent such the director Gaston Velle, the set designers Dumesnil and Vasseur, and the special effect technician André Wauzele.<sup>7</sup> It seems that for the first twenty years of its existence, cinema was able to exist free of nationalistic constraints as a transnational network, whether be in its technological foundations, its narrative forms and imaginary referents, its production elements along with cast and crew, and finally, in its international circulation.

## Fixing National Labels

The aftermath of WWI deeply affected European film industries by partitioning the cinematic transnational network along national lines. World War I deeply disrupted European film productions. The American industry, which before the war had been oriented towards its domestic market, took advantage of the temporary absence of European film industries and

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<sup>4</sup> Brunetta, *The History of Italian Cinema*. 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Cabiria* (1914) deeply influenced Griffith, particularly in his production of *Intolerance* (1916). For further details on *Quo Vadis?*’s marketing scheme see Brunetta, *History of Italian Cinema*, 36. For a detailed listing of all the silent films produced in Italy between 1904 and 1915 consult Prolo, *Storia del cinema muto italiano*. 117-184.

<sup>7</sup> Prolo, *Storia del cinema*, 23.

established a dominant presence in the world, including Europe. At first, it was thought of as a temporary condition, but in the early 1920s European nations, particularly those that had fostered strong film industries before the war, started to realize that the situation was not temporary, and that the film market conditions were not returning to pre-war levels of exchange on their own. Economic concerns for ailing European film industries (the Italian industry was on the verge of extinction), and growing nationalism merged to bring about protectionist policies that sought to limit Hollywood's presence in Europe, through the implementation of quotas, tariffs and censorship.<sup>8</sup> This in turn led to a closer relationship between film industries and the state, creating for the first time the notion of national cinemas in Europe. Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, cinema became more than an economic sector in need of protection through government intervention, and was drafted into the complex politics of nation building and ideological machinations of Europe's increasingly chauvinistic nation-states.<sup>9</sup>

The end of WWII reset the European film landscape, much like the end of WWI had previously done. It redrew the map of production, distribution and exhibition for many European industries, knocking down the protectionist walls erected around certain nation-states and realigning them along the broader East and West dichotomy. The realignment of the cinematic map drew the Italian film industry into the global/Western marketplace, which was heavily dominated by Hollywood at this time (and continues to be). Furthermore, the Italian film industry was in complete disarray: the studio's equipment had been scattered throughout the peninsula or confiscated by the American army, and *Cinecittà* had been turned into a refugee camp—not to mention that the reorganization of a national film industry was actively opposed by Hollywood and the United States' government.<sup>10</sup> The Italian case was further complicated by the pressing political need to rebrand the country and purge it of its Fascist past. Under these circumstances, how was the Italian film industry to regroup and to compete with Hollywood, which completely flooded its national market in the first couple of years after the war?

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<sup>8</sup> Vasey, *The World according to Hollywood, 1918-1939*. The MPPDA internal memo Vasey cites, "Certain Factors and Conditions Affecting the European Market," written by the MPPDA's European representative Colonel Edward G. Lowry is particularly illuminating:

Broadly speaking, this is the condition our industry faces in Europe: virtually everywhere there is being made an effort to overcome the predominance of the American picture. These efforts spring from a variety of causes. One of them is the intense spirit of nationalism that now pervades all Europe. For patriotic and political reasons, governments of the several countries now seeking to restrict the importation of American pictures desire the establishment of a national picture industry in their own country that will serve as propaganda and that will reflect the life, the customs, and the habits of its own people (40).

For a detailed account of Italy's film industry in the interwar era please see, Gian Piero Brunetta, *Il Cinema Muto Italiano: De "La Presa Di Roma" a "Sole" 1905-1929* (Rome: Laterza, 2008); Gian Piero Brunetta, *Il cinema italiano di regime: da "La canzone dell'amore" a "Ossessione," 1929-1945* (Rome: Laterza, 2009). For a more explicit discussion about the relationship between Fascism and cinema see Steven Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922-1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*.

<sup>9</sup> I do not mean to imply that there were no "national" concerns in regard to cinema in the pre-WWI era, only that such discourse would reach their zenith in the inter-war era. For a discussion on some of the earliest discourses in regard to the "nation" and cinema, particularly in the American-French context, see Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). For a broader discussion on the topic see Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini, and Rob King, eds., *Early Cinema and the "National"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Brunetta, *History of Italian Cinema*, 108-112.

The answer to all of these questions and circumstances came with neorealism.<sup>11</sup> Even though neorealism was not the rebranding the political establishment wanted for Italy, it proved to be the most apt given the circumstances.<sup>12</sup> At the beginning of the war Italy had been on the wrong side of it, not on the side of Fascism but as Fascism, and even though the Italian state switched sides before the war was over, the need to reiterate an anti-Fascist narrative was needed. It is in this ideological space in which Rossellini's *Rome Open City* (1945) was released in September 1945, only months after the "liberation" of Italy. The film was soon taken as the ideological standard against Italy's fascist past, drawing a clear differentiating line between Fascism and the Italian people. Rossellini's second film, *Paisà* (1946) would further promote the 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."<sup>13</sup> I do not mean to imply that filmmakers and writers such as Rossellini, De Sica, and Calvino were cynically participating in a rebranding of Italy, but that in their overwhelming need to *express* their experiences of the war, they were nonetheless constructing narratives that fulfilled the political and ideological exigencies of the time. Furthermore, the poor production values of these films, coupled with their thematic subject, resonated with American audiences (as well as the government) and French critics who saw in its rawness "an aesthetic of reality", a shining light of truth against the obfuscating propaganda cinema of Fascism.<sup>14</sup> Neorealism became thus "the winning diplomatic card for Italy's rehabilitation...and its rapid reintegration into the international community," not to mention the paragon of Italian national cinema in the eyes of the world.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The material available on neorealism is quite extensive. For this chapter I drew specifically from the following sources: Brunetta, *History of Italian Cinema*, 2009; Celli, *New Guide to Italian Cinema*; Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s* (New York: Continuum, 2008); Rivi, *European Cinema After 1989*; Mark Shiel, *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City*, 31 (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006); Pierre Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies, 1939-1990* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Brunetta (*History of Italian Cinema*, 114), Celli (71), and Rivi (5) recount how Giulio Andreotti (minister of the De Gaspari government and architect of legislation that provided government subsidies for the Italian film industry) felt that it was rather shameful and inappropriate for neorealist films such as *Sciuscià*, *Bicycle Thief*, and *Umberto D* to wash Italy's dirty social linen in public. It is also noted that while Andreotti was a full supporter of a strong Italian film industry, he also used his position in government to discourage the funding of films that shed too much light on Italy's post-war social ills.

<sup>13</sup> Rivi, *European Cinema After 1989*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> The French intelligentsia were notoriously receptive of neorealism, from Jean-George Auriol, to Jean-Luc Godard, to the great André Bazin, who wrote "An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism (Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation)" in *Esprit*, January 1948. A French article from the newspaper *L'Humanité* (November 30, 1946) cited in Brunetta (*History of Italian Cinema*, 118) reflects the sense of redemption invested in neorealism: "Yes, when we saw *Paisà*, we saw the authentic Italy, the Italy that we love, not the Italy of hysteric braggarts, not the Italy of Mussolini and his castor oil... We saw the Italy of the people, the farmhands, the frontlines of factory workers, the Italy of beauty and misery."

<sup>15</sup> Brunetta, *History of Italian Cinema*, 109. Neorealism's success abroad also marks the beginning of the bifurcated itinerary of Italian cinema, which has since then been divided, if only discursively, between popular and art/festival cinema. I will discuss later this discursive division which privileges one side to travel abroad as the "proper" representative of Italian cinema while it relegates successful comedies and "low brow" films as inappropriate cinema to go abroad with the stamp of "made in Italy."

## Changing the Rules of Exchange

The impact of neorealist aesthetics on world cinema, whether in the subsequent European ‘waves’ or in the South American idea of Third Cinema, has been amply explored and documented in the traditional literature of cinema. However, the biggest impact neorealism had on cinema as a whole has less to do with aesthetics and more with helping to remap the cinematic transnational network. Since the 1990s, research on the traditional notion of “national cinema” (in particular the European ‘waves’ of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s) has convincingly underscored the double displacement often ignored within such traditional readings: not only is the category often the effect of a retrospective look that tries to find something essentially “national”, but also a label that is often conferred by others from without the nation. The double displacement of national cinemas is thus one of time and space, whereby the “label of national cinema has to be conferred on films by others, either by other national or ‘international’ audiences, or by national audiences, but at another point in time.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the temporal and spatial displacement of the national label also implies the erasing of the “here and now”, in so far that it shifts the attention away from what is actually seen, actually popular in the national market and towards the more “artistic” vein of any given national cinema, conflating them.<sup>17</sup> In turn this mechanism of legitimization created a history of mis-readings, of dichotomies in the post war era where on the one hand stood Europe for artistic, avant-garde, artisanal productions and socially aware cinema, while on the other stood Hollywood for escapist, commercial blockbusters films churned out from a production line.

However, such traditional dichotomies were more of an illusion (even if constitutive ones) than a reality in the post war era. Thomas Elsaesser, in his influential collection of essays named *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*, points out in great detail the fact that Hollywood, European avant-garde/art cinema and European popular cinema have worked with each other as part of one system, “existing in a space set up like a hall of mirrors, in which recognition, imaginary identity and mis-recognition enjoy equal status, creating value out of pure difference” (46). This is the postwar configuration that neorealism helped to establish, and one that helps to explain how the film festival circuit works within the cinematic transnational network, particularly in regard to its function of producing cultural capital.

In fact, neorealist films helped to establish the idea of European cinema as “art” cinema by moving through the art houses and independent theaters rather than the mainstream channels of distribution and exhibition in the U.S. When *Rome Open City* was first screened in the United

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*, Film Culture in Transition (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 40.

<sup>17</sup> This traditional tendency (pre 1990s mostly) has been generally pointed out by Higson, Bergfelder, Elsaesser, and Elizabeth Ezra—just to name a few. In regard to the Italian case, Luisa Rivi states:

Lastly, according to ‘a criticism-led approach,’ the tendency of critics and film historians to conflate Italian national cinema with art cinema of neorealism in the 1950s, has erased the voice of other popular desires and fantasies, expressed for example in the melodramas of Raffaello Matarazzo—his *Catene* (Chains) was one of the greatest box office successes of 1951-1952—and the comedic series of *Peppone and Don Camillo*: the first in this Franco-Italian series directed by the Frenchman Julien Duvivier was the most popular Italian film of the 1951-1952 season. (45)

With that in mind, it is interesting to note that when it comes to Italy, Pierre Sorlin’s *European Cinemas, European Societies*, which was published in 1991, mentions all the usual suspects—Rossellini, De Sica, Loren, Cardinale, Antonioni, Fellini, Mastroianni, etc. It does not mention Macario, Mattoli, Monicelli or Sordi for that matter. Sorlin does mention and discusses *Don Camillo* in a small section (99-110) dedicated to the popular French, German, British and Italian response to Hollywood in the 1950s, but only to show how derivative they were of Hollywood.

States in February 1946, the Majors had a monopoly on the main channels of distribution and exhibition in the U.S. In response to Hollywood's monopoly of exhibition venues and the shifting socio-economic realities of the postwar era, a small network of independent theaters and art houses developed (particularly in New York), and showed films from minor studios and independent producers as well as foreign films. Rather than trying to compete on the same level with the Majors, these venues started to cultivate an image *against* Hollywood's polished and rather bland cinema, taking advantage of the fact that they could bypass some of the censoring mechanism that were in place at the time. Their approach proved to be very successful for multiple reasons, one of which was that in the aftermath of WWII, the parameters of the field in which social and class distinctions were made shifted.

Barbara Wilinsky explores this phenomenon in her book, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art Cinema*, in which she argues that the rise of art cinema in the postwar era is explained, in part, by the immediate postwar economic boom and the cultural shifts it necessitated.<sup>18</sup> Before the war, the great economic gap between the upper classes and the poor set the social hierarchies along financial lines. The postwar economic boom blurred those lines by expanding the middle class enormously from the top down. The ballooning of the middle class by absorbing people from below created a highly stratified and heterogeneous middle class, and brought about the necessity of alternate modes of differentiation that were not economic in nature.<sup>19</sup> Using the social theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Herbert Gans, Wilinsky notes that under those circumstances, people who previously held a monopoly on all the markers of "high" culture, such as a college education, found themselves shifting,

[the] cultural boundaries to maintain their dominance in the cultural hierarchy, resulting in a reconsideration of the value of certain cultural products and activities...Leisure activities and taste replaced economic markers as the means of distinguishing class position, and art cinema, as a representation of high culture (and high class), could then offer people distinction.<sup>20</sup>

The appreciation of European films, particularly when shown in art houses, could provide that distinction for a growing discerning audience. Art houses as exhibition sites provided a sense of exclusivity from the very beginning, offering "a few tasteful paintings in the lobby and a maid [to] serve you a demitasse of coffee."<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, because they were not part of the MPAA, art houses and independent theaters could avoid some of the many censoring mechanisms that were in place at the time, allowing them to screen films that could be marketed as being more "realistic," "adult," and sophisticated.<sup>22</sup> This set-up was well suited for European films which

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<sup>18</sup> Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema*, Commerce and Mass Culture Series (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> The expansion of the middle class was also supported ideologically by the idealization of "middle class America" and a "classless society," which furthered the need to find a way to maintain social and class distinctions that was not economically based.

<sup>20</sup> Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters*, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley Frank, "Sure-seaters Discover an Audience," *Nation's Business*, January 1952, 69. As cited by Wilinsky in page 1. She goes back to this quote in chapter 4 in order to discuss the cultivation of an art house audience based upon associations of class and culture to art itself and its sites of exhibition.

<sup>22</sup> Wilinsky deftly locates the intersection where emerging attitudes towards previously taboo subjects, Hollywood's crisis and the divergent European production practices came together to the benefit of European films: This focus on realistic (or adult) themes and subjects (including sexuality) reflects the art films' shift from a focus on the mass audience to a concentration on the more selective (and select) adult audience. In 1939 foreign film distributor Joseph Burstyn wrote in *The New York Times*, 'The audience for foreign films is still comprised of movie-goers seeking an escape from Hollywood escapism, people interested in unusual



addressed certain issues, such as sexuality, in a more open and explicit manner than Hollywood allowed itself to during the era of the Production Code. Lastly, Italian films in the immediate postwar era offered completely different production values (as mentioned above) from those of classic Hollywood, while still maintaining the basic principles of narrative cinema, making them “different from Hollywood films, but not too different.”<sup>23</sup> Thus the cultivation of a “discerning” audience, the raw production values of *Rome Open City*, coupled with its relatively classical narrative elements, plus the traditional association of “culture” with Europe, coalesced into the most successful launching of a foreign language film in America—to the shock of Hollywood.<sup>24</sup>

*Rome Open City* went on to win the New York Film Critics Circle Award, *2 Nastro d'Argento*, and the *Palme d'Or* at Cannes in September 1946. The film's success helped to generate interests in European films in general, and Italian films in particular, such as *Paisà* (Rossellini, 1946), *Sciuscià* (De Sica, 1946) and *Bicycle Thief* (De Sica, 1948). All four films were nominated for Oscars in the Best Screenplay category, and both of De Sica's films won an Honorary Award, which in time would become its own category at the Oscars: the Best Foreign Film. Furthermore, all of them also travelled through the US market via the art house and independent theater network, solidifying the notion that European cinema equaled “art” cinema, and thus standing in direct opposition to the “commercial” cinema of Hollywood.

The shifting parameters of class distinction explains, in part, why European films, particularly Italian films like *Rome Open City* and *Bicycle Thief* found a receptive audience within a sector of the American public and why they were consecrated as “art”: by elevating Italian films as art cinema (thus giving birth to the very concept of “neorealism”), a certain “discerning” audience legitimized their own social status as mediators of culture. However, the receptiveness of a sector of the American audience does not explain how this system of legitimization managed to expand throughout the cinematic transnational network, particularly when said system is based upon a principle of exclusivity. In order to understand that next step we need to turn our attention to the status of the most important node within the network, Hollywood.

When George Kleine introduced *Quo Vadis?* (Guazzoni, 1912) and other Italian historical films to the American market, Hollywood was but one player among many. Not only did European and American industries compete on equal grounds in so far that they were relatively equal in strength, but competed on the same terms, whereby films were conceived simply as commercial product. That perception was further reinforced by the Supreme Court in

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stories, mature treatment and realistic performances.’ These perceptions lasted into the postwar period, as one New York magazine reported that foreign films’ ‘themes and treatment differ, but the one thing they have in common in a basic assumption that the average movie-goer thinks and feels like an adult instead of a child.’ This tendency toward ‘adult’ treatment at a time when critics, such as *The New York Times*’s Bosley Crowther, accused Hollywood of having ‘run dry of ideas,’ encouraged the belief that foreign films were ‘better’ than Hollywood films. Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters*, 24–25.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Trade papers like *Variety* did not usually report on the art circuit, unless there was something out of the ordinary: “Internationalized thinking obviously brought on by the war is sending one foreign language picture to better than an estimated \$1,000,000 U.S. gross for the first time in industry history. Film is the Italian-produced ‘Open City,’ which, in nine engagements, most of them still going strong, has turned in a distributor’s gross that will total \$100,000 by the end of the month. Previous high was the approximately \$225,000 in rentals garnered by the French-made ‘Mayerling’ a few years before the war... Surprisingly, the record take is being achieved by an independently-distributed (Mayer-Burstyn) picture playing art houses, rather than product going into circuits and important indie theatres under the sponsorship of Metro International.” “Italo ‘Open City’ Freak B.O. in U.S.,” *Variety*, June 19, 1946.

their 1915 Mutual Decision, in which they rejected the claim that films were like other media, and thus deserving of the protection of the First Amendment. Instead the court ruled that “the exhibition of moving pictures is a business pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit.”<sup>25</sup> The interwar period changed the power dynamics, and by the time WWII ended, Hollywood dominated the world market. However, in the immediate postwar era Hollywood experienced a major structural crisis at home, while changing political landscapes in Europe required Hollywood to constantly renegotiate its relationship with European film industries.

Denise Mann explains in her book, *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover*, some of the reasons that hasten the decline of the studio system and gave rise to what she calls the New Hollywood era.<sup>26</sup> The most salient event marking the shift between Old Hollywood and New Hollywood is the Paramount Decision of 1948, in which the Supreme Court effectively ended the Majors’ vertical integration of production, distribution and exhibition by forcing the Big Five to divest themselves of their movie theater chains and end certain monopolistic practices, like block booking. To this major structural shift we can add declining ticket sales, an increase in independent productions, and as explored above, a growing segmentation of viewing practices and audiences tastes. However, the restructuring of Hollywood led to a fluid period of renovation and creativity, to the rise of independent productions and foreign films, and to the infusion of heterogeneous influences into what once was a rather solid studio system. More importantly, it allowed for art cinema to become a constitutive part of the system rather than a fringe element.

The rise of independent productions, foreign films and art house exhibitions, kick started a slow but drastic change in the films Hollywood made, moving away from their A and B movie platform (and all the intermediary categories) and towards bifurcated system of art cinema and blockbusters.<sup>27</sup> While it may seemed like a small change, in truth it radically changed the way Hollywood produced its movies, essentially changing from a supply model to a demand model, one that embraces the changing topography of the field of exhibition. Rather than trying to suppress or deride the art film genre, Hollywood embraced it (albeit slowly and not easily at times) and absorbed elements of it. It willingly adapted to the idea that films were *more* than just

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<sup>25</sup> Garth S. Jowett, “‘A Capacity for Evil’: The 1915 Supreme Court Mutual Decision,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 9, no. 1 (1989): 68, doi:10.1080/01439688900260041. However, I do not mean to imply that the concept of cinema as art did not exist or would not exist in the interwar era, only that art as a platform for exchange and commerce would not truly exist until the post war era with the art house in the U.S. and the rise of the International Film Festival.

<sup>26</sup> Denise Mann, *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover*, Commerce and Mass Culture Series (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Mann gives a more detailed taxonomy in the following passage: “One of the defining features of the Old Hollywood studio system was a division of production into two basic categories, A and B films, typically separated according to budget, production values, types of stars, potential running time, and distribution strategy. A films, among the major studios, were further divided into so-called Specials and Super-Specials, the latter including Oscar-oriented ‘prestige’ films on the other hand and big-budget musicals and epic spectacles on the other. Another, in-between category consisted of ‘programmers’: low-end A films or high-end B films that could play either side of a double bill. In the New Hollywood era, with the drop in movie demand, the increase in independent production, and the emergence of exploitation film and TV markets for lower-budget fare, the A/B film system gave way to a more fluid, less rigorously defined structure derived, in large part, from the old Super-Special category. Out of this emerged the bifurcation delineated above [art cinema and blockbusters], between artistically ambitious films that experimented with classical norms and ever bigger-budget films compromised of highly marketable elements to attract a mass(ive) audience. The ‘programmers’ survived in the form of medium-budget ‘genre’ pictures (westerns, melodramas, crime thrillers), but increasing emphasis was places on the art film and blockbuster strands, both of which fit into an overall campaign to re-engage the ‘lost’ movie audience.” *Ibid.*, 12–13.

commercial products.<sup>28</sup> The notion was reinforced by the Miracle Decision of 1952, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the censoring of Rossellini's *The Miracle* in New York (revoking the 1915 Mutual Decision), establishing that films were an important medium for communicating ideas, and thus protected under the First Amendment's freedom of speech clause.<sup>29</sup> Over time Hollywood adapted to the more dynamic configuration of the cinematic transnational network, accepting and participating in the new modes of exchange, and thrived.

The introduction of "art" into the film industry's system of exchange transformed the topography of such system so that a niche was created, a site of conversion and capital exchange, which allows minor players to come up to the field of play by introducing cultural capital as an intermediary point between product and profit (economic capital). While the specific historical circumstances which gave rise to this system changed over time, the system remained and expanded over a global scale in the long haul, allowing Hollywood and other "national" cinemas to negotiate the fluctuating legal and economic landscapes that regulate the commerce of cinema. It allows minor (national) cinemas and independent players to compete with and against Hollywood by shifting the competition away from production values (among other markers of big blockbusters movies) towards the nebulous category of "art." By competing as "art" rather than "flicks", European and independent films disavowed commercial interests and profits up front, and gained and collected cultural value (i.e. prestige, recognition, etc.) instead, which, under certain conditions, could then be exchanged quietly for profits at a later date. As Pierre Bourdieu notes in his research, these cultural economies "function...only by virtue of constant, collective repression of narrowly 'economic' interest and of the real nature of the practices revealed by 'economic' analysis."<sup>30</sup>

The resulting dichotomy between "commercial" and "art", which on the surface seems detrimental for both camps, is in fact part of the very economy of exchange. The nebulous symbolic values of "commercial" and "art" are constantly calibrated through the incessant and constant tension between these categories, "it is the generative principle of most of the judgments which, in the theater, cinema, painting or literature, claim to establish the frontier between what is and what is not art."<sup>31</sup> And this tension works for both, Hollywood and the "challengers" because the seemingly subversive strategy of disavowing profits, of providing an alternative to Hollywood, works only if the challengers "succeed in overturning the hierarchy of the field without disturbing the principles on which the field is based. Thus their revolutions are

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<sup>28</sup> I emphasize the word "more" because in official trading agreements between the U.S. and Europe, films were classified simply as commercial products, as noted in the General Agreements on Tariff and Trade of 1947. There is no mention of any social or artistic value in that document. The broader mobilization of film as art did not come about until the 1990s, when Article 151 put the issue of "culture" as a defining factor in the new European Union, which opened the door for the "cultural exception" given to film and TV in the 1993 GATT accords. For a more detailed account see Rivi, *European Cinema After 1989*, 53–64.

<sup>29</sup> Mann, *Hollywood Independents*, 126; Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters*, 5. Wilinsky goes as far as saying that, "The 1950s court decisions, which elevated motion pictures to a form of art, reflected larger social changes in the values ascribed to film."

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," trans. Richard Nice, *Media, Culture & Society* 2, no. 3 (July 1, 1980): 261, doi:10.1177/016344378000200305. I am also indebted to the following article: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986). However, Bourdieu's research on the cultivation of taste for the reinforcement of notions of class goes as far back as the 1960s and 1970s. For further details see, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> Bourdieu, "Production of Belief," 268.

only ever partial ones, which displace the censorships and transgress the conventions but do so in the name of the same underlying principles.”<sup>32</sup> As we will see later, this means not only maintaining the notion of cinema as narrative cinema (experimental cinema is a good example of one that refuses to play by the rules and is thus excluded from the network), and the cult of the star and director/auteur, but ultimately the acceptance that profit (economic capital) is a necessary stop in the seemingly endless process of capital conversion.

## Film Festivals

As the notion of “art” entered and established itself within the system of exchange, the sites of negotiation expanded from the local American art house network to the nascent film festival circuit. In some ways, this was the natural move because, as Marijke de Valck notes in her book *Film Festivals from European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*, film festivals “have emphasized the notion of ‘cinema as art’ from the beginning.” She is referring to the fact that the first film festival organized on a regular basis was *La Mostra Internazionale d’Arte Cinematografica*, which was instituted as part of the Venice Arts Biennale, a well-established international exhibition of art since 1895. Valck further emphasizes that,

by explicitly adding cinema [1932]—the seventh art—to Abbé Batteau’s category of fine arts, it became a cultural practice that was worthy of being used as a national legitimization. The high status of the festival was underlined by its splendid organization, the selection of luxurious hotels on the Lido, and an elite leisure resort as the festival’s location. Cannes followed Venice’s example by choosing a festival format that corresponded with these high-society standards and cosmopolitan flair.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed it would seem that the film festivals of Venice and Cannes would be the ideal places for mobilizing artistic merit as the sole platform for exhibition.

However, as the very first sentence of that quote indicates, in the early stages of the history of film festivals, politics and art were heavily interlinked. Within five years, the political and ideological agenda of the Fascist regime dominated the *Mostra*, which led to its temporary delegitimization by the French, British and Americans, and the founding of competing Cannes Film Festival in 1939.<sup>34</sup> Even though the (European) film festivals that emerged in the first decade after the war “were all established for a combination of economic, political and cultural reasons,” the political realities of the cold war were always present.<sup>35</sup> The prioritization of political agendas was facilitated by the very structure of the film festivals themselves, which were organized somewhat like the world fairs of a previous era in so far that individual countries were invited to participate, leaving the choice of which films would compete in the hands of national selection committees. This structure made the first film festivals a showcase for national cinemas, national cultures, on top of the cold war dynamics of East and West already mentioned above. And yet aesthetics were not forgotten, it was just subsumed under political

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>33</sup> Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 128.

<sup>34</sup> The first Cannes Film Festival, which was scheduled to take place September 1-20 1939 in order to compete with Venice, was soon canceled due to the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany. Therefore the first complete Cannes did not occur until September 1946.

<sup>35</sup> Valck, *Film Festivals*, 49. Karlovy Vary (1946) would serve as a platform for Communist ideologies, and the Berlinale (1951) was initiated by the American film officer Oscar Martay as an ideological instrument in the heart of soviet eastern Germany.

concerns so that even though a group of films were first and foremost “national,” they were always the “best” from that nation. Certain horizons of expectations were beginning to be set at this junction, with different national film industries carving out their own niche, their own cinematic brand, of what could appropriately be considered their national cinema. The early film festivals thus served as a platform for nation building and diplomatic negotiations, where countries vaunted their national talents and where national cinemas were consecrated like neorealism, and the Nouvelle Vague.

Yet film festivals, even in this early stage (1946-1968), became the aforementioned alternate niche in the topography of cinema—the physical and temporal site(s) of conversion and capital exchange. The primacy of “art” may have been diluted temporarily, but the overall symbolic capital of film was augmented by the politics, the “splendid” locations, the glamorous participants, the short duration of each individual festival, and quite simply by the overall spectacle of the festival as an event. The cities of Venice and Cannes provided wonderful and beautiful backdrops for their respective festivals as the summer season was winding down, while benefiting from one last tourist boost brought on by the festival before winter. Likewise other festivals used sites where reciprocal gains could be cultivated, while those that could not due to their overly political beginnings—like the Berlinale—benefited from yet another source of glamour and exclusivity: Hollywood stars.<sup>36</sup> The end of WWII meant that Hollywood had the opportunity to access the large European market. While on the one hand Hollywood was already negotiating with individual countries and assiduously attempting to curtail all protectionist schemes, on the other hand it took very little effort for the studios to send their stars to the film festivals to promote their catalog backlog (in the beginning) and their new products. Lastly, the short duration of each festival, unlike the permanent sites of the art houses and independent theaters, provided an amplified sense of exclusivity and scarcity that made each festival a festive and glamorous event worth of intense media attention, which fed back into the cinema milieu of each participating country.

Therefore the raw materials for the cultivation of symbolic capital, both social and cultural, were present from the very beginning within the film festival phenomenon: glamour, exclusivity, difference, performance, etc. However, until 1951, there were many European festivals, but there was no system, no circuit. Symbolic capital was generated, but often squandered in the initial chaos of the field of production: festivals, such as Cannes and Venice, competed *against* each other rather than *with* each other, and in the festivals were less of a competition and more of a gathering.<sup>37</sup> The systematization of the festivals came in 1951, when the *Federation Internationale des Associations des Producteurs* (FIAPF) sought to bring order to the chaos and tried to implement a single festival event, an “Olympics of Film.” However, the officials in Cannes and Venice vetoed the idea and instead proposed “an alternate system of classification based on hierarchy.” This system divided the festivals into categories of prestige, where the “A” festivals (Cannes and Venice) would enjoy certain privileges that the others could not, such as being able to assemble an international jury to award prizes. More importantly, the FIAPF lay down the groundwork for the formation of the festival calendar, which is one of the

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<sup>36</sup> In fact, as Valck points out, “they relied heavily on the glamour and the presence of American (studio system) stars to make the events more attractive, prestigious, and popular...The Berlinale was glamorized by the appearances of stars like Gary Cooper, Billy Wilder, Bob Hope, Trevor Howard, Errol Flynn, and Patricia Wymore in the 1950s.” *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>37</sup> The fact that Cannes in 1946 was more of a rendezvous than a competition is highlighted by the fact that “almost every participating country received a prize of some kind.” *Ibid.*, 49.

most defining elements of the film festival circuit.<sup>38</sup> It made sure that only one major festival event would occur at any given time, and called for a certain amount of time to pass between events. The implementation of such rules meant that rather than dividing and exhausting all the elements that constitute the symbolic capital generated at each festival (media attention, films, glamorous participants, etc.), they were maximized at each festival event, and then passed on to the next one, with enough time in between festivals for said elements to regenerate.

Since 1951, the film festival circuit has gone through several changes, and each one has helped to refine the circuit as a self-sustaining system of capital conversion, and has strengthened its position as a constitutive niche in the cinematic transnational network. After serving as the *rendezvous* place for national cinemas and the glamorous Hollywood stars for two decades, pressure from young French auteurs in 1968 led to the restructuring of Cannes: participant films would no longer be submitted by national selection committees, but would be individually chosen by the festival itself based on artistic merit. The restructuring of Cannes reverberated throughout the system and soon all other festivals tuned into the new format, further cementing the concept that international film festivals were privilege sites for the cultivation of films as art and not for commercial concerns.<sup>39</sup> The reassessment of the festivals' *raison d'être* invited further changes to the system at large. It raised the figure of the auteur as the embodiment of artistic merit, making him/her the "gold standard" (in the words of Elsaesser) through which the value of "art" is preserved while still mobilizing other agendas, though from a distance.<sup>40</sup> Given the centrality of the auteur, parallel competitions were established to foster new young directors (The Director's Fortnight in Cannes and the International Forum of the Young Film in Berlin), while other competitions were consequently added to accommodate the various agendas at play, and growing social pressures.<sup>41</sup>

The formal decoupling of the festivals to the national film industries of the participating countries also meant that the festivals had to actively seek out new talent as much as it needed to stimulate it, which meant that in the 1970s world cinema started to be pumped through the festival circuit. New "national cinemas" were "discovered" and created, which fed back into their own national markets, creating a festival boom in the 1980s world-wide. The system kept

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<sup>38</sup> The position of any festival in the festival calendar is crucial: "When a festival [takes] place and how these dates position the festival in relation to other events on the calendar is of decisive importance for the festival's success, ranking, and profile." Ibid., 54.

<sup>39</sup> That is not to say that other concerns or agendas are not at play: see Kenneth Turan, *Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). In his book, Turan categorizes film festivals by what he perceives is the main agenda at play: business, geopolitics, and aesthetics. However, there are always multiple agendas at play, but even so the point of a film festival is to transform previously unknown films into a notorious one, which is nothing less than capital conversion. See also Daniel Dayan, "Looking for Sundance. The Social Construction of a Film Festival," in *Moving Images, Culture and the Mind* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 2000), 43–52. In his article Dayan mentions that Sundance (and by extension all other festival events), was a site of simultaneous activity of different sets of participants who were each acting their own unique performance.

<sup>40</sup> For example, if two or three auteurs come from a particular country, the agenda of nation building, which previously was openly embraced through the selection committee system, can still be activating by proclaiming the emergence of a new "wave", of a new national cinema, even though the auteurs themselves do not necessarily embrace the idea in any way. In this sense, national pride is mobilized through them, even if opposed directly by them.

<sup>41</sup> For example, even though business has always been conducted at Cannes, the *Marché du Film* was not incorporated into the festival and regulated until 1976. Other festivals were to follow. Other parallel competitions, or sidebars, were eventually incorporated to showcase world cinema, particularly in relation to social and political tensions in the world stage, such as *Un Certain Regard* at Cannes, *Horizons* at Venice and *Panorama* at Berlin.

growing and expanding, coming into contact with different national industries, and constantly restructuring to keep accommodating new agendas while maintaining its function as *the* site of conversion of symbolic capital; by adding new sidebars within each festival, plus new categories of festival accreditation (Competitive Specialized, Non-Competitive, plus Documentary and Short Film), the system created new forms of inclusions and exclusions, of new kinds hierarchies which is at the heart of creating, appropriating and distributing cultural capital.<sup>42</sup>

The international film festival circuit today is a vast system, a “circuit” in its temporal regularity and a “rhizome” in its spatial structuring, feeding in and out of different public spheres, national industries, geographical markets—with differentiated flows and nodes sustained by collective mis-recognition, which work as social alchemy in the consecration of film as a work of art.<sup>43</sup> It is, as Julian Stringer puts it, “a socially produced space unto itself, a unique cultural arena that acts as a contact zone for the working – through of unevenly differentiated power relations – not so much a parliament of national film industries as a series of diverse, sometimes competing, sometime cooperating, public spheres.”<sup>44</sup> So it should not be surprising that the international film festival circuit has become an important part within the distribution mechanism of the cinematic transnational network. Even though to this day the film festival is often posited in opposition to the Hollywood studios and the commercial industries of the world, the film festival in fact works with them rather than against them. It has become what Piers Handling, Director and CEO of the Toronto International Film Festival, “the research and development arm of the industry. It’s where new, young talent is found.”<sup>45</sup> It is a marketplace for large and small distributors, and a relay point for independent filmmakers, seeking the chance of converting their labor into capital—cultural first, economic second.

However, this is not a concern that preoccupies the blockbusters made by the Hollywood Majors, which not only spend almost half of their budgets in marketing and distribution, but also have at their disposal strong national and international distribution structures owned by the majors themselves. Nor does this scenario preoccupy the producers of popular genres in different countries, as is the case with comedies in Italy, which seem to always make a profit.<sup>46</sup> But this is a real concern for independent filmmakers, who may not have access to guaranteed distribution, or funds to launch a successful advertising campaign. When thinking of independent filmmakers, one may imagine a lone artist, struggling to do his/her craft and doing so on a shoestring budget. Indeed it is often the case that articles or books on the rise of American independent films in the 1990s often privilege such lone figures as the point of contact between film festivals and independent cinema. In fact, Steven Soderbergh’s *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989) is often seen

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, “Film Festival Networks: The New Topographies of Cinema in Europe,” in *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Bourdieu, “Production of Belief,” 267.

<sup>44</sup> Julian Stringer, “Global Cities and International Film Festival Economy,” in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 138.

<sup>45</sup> Deborah Caulfield Rybak, “Screen Play: The World’s Top Film Festival,” *Sky*, March 2012. *Sky* is the monthly magazine published by Delta Airlines and is offered to its passengers.

<sup>46</sup> A good case in point would be Italy’s *Cinepanettone* phenomenon of the first decade of the millennium. Though it is a Christmas slapstick comedy, almost always featuring Christian De Sica, this genre of film relies on exotic locales, simple narrative structures and blatant sexuality to great box office success though often dismissed by the film critics.

as emblematic of this fortuitous encounter between film festivals such as Sundance and Cannes, American independent filmmakers, and “independent” film distributors like Miramax.<sup>47</sup>

But “independent” is a category that encompasses much more than any given particular aesthetic code or the individual genius of any given director. As Thomas Elsaesser points out, “many of the world’s filmmakers are ‘independent’ in the sense that they often act as small-scale and one-off producers who have access to the ‘markets’ primarily and sometimes solely through festivals.”<sup>48</sup> Thus the concept of “independent” delineates not just a particular person or group, but a condition of exhibition and distribution, which affects most of the world’s cinema. It is a term that underscores not any particular aesthetic code (though one could argue that it does in the negative sense: independent is all that is not mainstream), but a relational stance with respect to the dominant cinema of any given economic market: a national market, a continental market, a world market. Given this description, it is obvious that “independent” in the European context, comes to mean all the cinematic production that is not commercial Hollywood, and not the national popular cinema, which can sometimes mean (sadly so) that most of the cinematic production of any given country can be considered “independent” – as is the case with Italy.

### Italian Markets: Perennial Struggle

The fact that the Italian film industry is and has been going through a rough patch for quite a while now is well known and has been bemoaned endlessly since the late 1980s by the industry as well as critics and politicians.<sup>49</sup> In the 1970s, Italian films had 70% of their own domestic market while foreign films (led by the United States) had the remaining 30%. In the 1980s the trend completely reversed, which the Italian government addressed in 1994 by amending Act No. 1213 of 1965 with Act No. 153, aptly named, “urgent measures in support of cinema.”<sup>50</sup> One of the most notable changes made in 1994 was that the financing cap for films considered of “national cultural interest,” and for first and second works done by first time directors, was raised up to 90%.<sup>51</sup> The law was amended and supplemented yet again in 2004 and 2008, which points to the continual struggle by the Italian state to promote its own cinematic industry in the face of American dominance.<sup>52</sup> Many reasons have been hypothesized for the continued state of decline of Italian cinema, divergent reasons that nonetheless share some elements of truth: the rise of home entertainment in TV, Cable and satellite dish; the inability of cinema to adapt in its exhibition practices from single screen theaters to the multiplex; the establishment of distribution networks around the world by the Majors in the 1970s; the lack of technological development in certain genres (CGI, special effects), state subsidies, lack of overall quality, lack of a healthy independent network of distributors, particularly outside of political influences (Mediaset and Rai), etc. Trying to unravel to what degree each claim is true

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<sup>47</sup> Peter Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance, and the Rise of Independent Film* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

<sup>48</sup> Elsaesser, “Film Festival Networks,” 89.

<sup>49</sup> A good example (among many) would be the well-known film scholar Gian Piero Brunetta’s chapter “once upon a time there was an Italian cinema” (translation mine) in his book *Il cinema italiano contemporaneo* (2007).

<sup>50</sup> “National Film Production Aid: Legislative Characters and Trends”. IRIS, Legal Observations of the European Audiovisual Observatory, Issue 2001-2004. [www.obs.coe.int/oea\\_publ/iris/iris\\_plus/iplus4\\_2001.pdf.en](http://www.obs.coe.int/oea_publ/iris/iris_plus/iplus4_2001.pdf.en)

<sup>51</sup> The percentage was reduced to 50% in 2004 with the Urbani law.

<sup>52</sup> It must be noted that every new amendment or law that seeks to help the industry is often received and considered as detrimental by industry insiders and critics.



or false is not the project of this chapter, but certain facts and trends need to be sketched in order to properly understand the situation in which the cinematic industry of Italy finds itself.<sup>53</sup>

While it would be inaccurate to pin point a single cause, the problem most often identified by the cinematic milieu of Italy is distribution. According to Vito Zagarrìo the complete lack of a viable distribution system in Italy dooms many projects, even before they are finished, while those that do make it to the theaters are always pulled off the screens prematurely, before the public is aware of their existence at the theaters.<sup>54</sup> Part of the problem, according to Barbara Corsi, lies in the disproportionate emphasis on production within the scheme of state funding, which covers up to 90% of production cost, and has the adverse effect of attracting producers that care little for the distribution of the finished product since the state bears all of the risks.<sup>55</sup> Carlo Tagliabue in “Sperduti nel buio” points out that at the time when he was writing his article (2006), there were 50 finished films (produced in great part with state funding) that were on the shelves, without any distribution whatsoever, a situation that is more a pattern than an isolated incident.<sup>56</sup>

The stagnation of film product at the distribution stage of so many projects has “accented” much of Italy’s auteur/independent cinema in so far as an artisanal milieu has formed as a response to the problem.<sup>57</sup> A way to deal with the problem of distribution has been the “*fai da te*” (do-it-yourself) phenomenon, a move towards self-sufficiency by vertically integrating different aspects of filmmaking like writing, directing, producing and (more importantly) distributing. Well established directors like Nanni Moretti do this habitually as a way to maintain the greatest amount of creative control.<sup>58</sup> Other directors with fewer resources, like Vittorio Moroni, create co-ops or share profit systems with the actors and the crew of a project in order to finance and distribute the film.<sup>59</sup> By and large, however, this “*fai da te*” system is not sustainable in the long run, and though it continues to operate in the interstitial spaces of the industry, the stagnation at the distribution stage continues to be an endemic problem, resulting in a highly commercialized and uneven cinematic landscape.

According to Riccardo Tozzi, ex CEO/founder of Cattleya and current head of ANICA’s producer section, between 1999 and 2004 the Italian industry experiences a bit of recovery,

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<sup>53</sup> For further reference please consult Barbara Corsi, *Con qualche dollaro in meno: Storia economica del cinema italiano*, 1. ed (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Vito Zagarrìo, “Certi bambini... I nuovi cineasti italiani,” in *La meglio gioventù: Nuovo cinema italiano 2000-2006*, ed. Vito Zagarrìo (Venice: Marsilio, 2006), 11–20.

<sup>55</sup> Barbara Corsi, “I modi di produzione,” in *La meglio gioventù: Nuovo cinema italiano 2000-2006*, ed. Vito Zagarrìo (Venice: Marsilio, 2006).

<sup>56</sup> Carlo Tagliabue, “Sperduti nel buio,” in *La meglio gioventù: Nuovo cinema italiano 2000-2006*, ed. Vito Zagarrìo (Venice: Marsilio, 2006), 56–61. Barbara Corsi points out that out of 13 state-funded films in 2000 only 4 were released, and none of 20 state-funded films in 2001 ever saw the light of day after being finished (71).

<sup>57</sup> In Naficy’s formulation of *accented cinema*, the artisanal and interstitial modes of production are foregrounded as constitutive of accented cinema. The importance of this formulation is that it establishes an uneven power relationship between the dominant industry and all practices at its margins, which nonetheless have a “minor” status in so far that their very existence helps to define the dominant role. In the Italian case, however, it has become extremely difficult to locate the “dominant” and the “minor” given the struggles of the Italian market. See chapter “Interstitial and Artisanal Mode of Production” in his *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001)

<sup>58</sup> Moretti co-founded a production company (Sacher Film), co-owns a movie theater (Sacher) and organizes a film festival (Sacher Film Festival).

<sup>59</sup> Moroni created MYSELF to produce and distribute *Tu devi essere il lupo* (2005). Other films done in the co-op fashion are Antonio Bocola’s *Fame chimica* (2003) and Libero De Rienzo’s *Sangue* (2005).

inching towards 30% of the national market.<sup>60</sup> And yet, during the good years, 90% of the box office receipts came from only 25 films out of 100, meaning that only 25 films in that period practically constituted the entirety of Italian cinema. These 25 films were made up of comedies, established auteurs and some new up and coming directors. The fact that the top 25 films account for 90% of the box office receipts in that five year period means that “the other 70-75 films produced annually in Italy divided among themselves the remaining 10% share of the market.” The gap between the top 25 and the lower 75 films become even more striking when considering that, according to Tozzi, “the films from this second group do not travel abroad, do not win prizes, don’t go to festivals and thus are pretty much irrelevant (with a few and rare exceptions).”<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, since Italian films are at best 30% of all the Italian market, the last 70-75 films aforementioned are but 10% of 30% of the national market. This means that 75% of the Italian annual output holds only 3% of the entire national market. If we take a look at the Italian box office just for the past year, we see that things remain very much the same. For the period of August 2008 to July 2009, of the top 50 grossing films at the box office, only eight are Italian (at #2, 6, 7, 12, 22, 24, 46, 47), and all but one (#47) are comedies.<sup>62</sup> If one looks at the top 50 films for every year for the past three years, the data bears the same result.

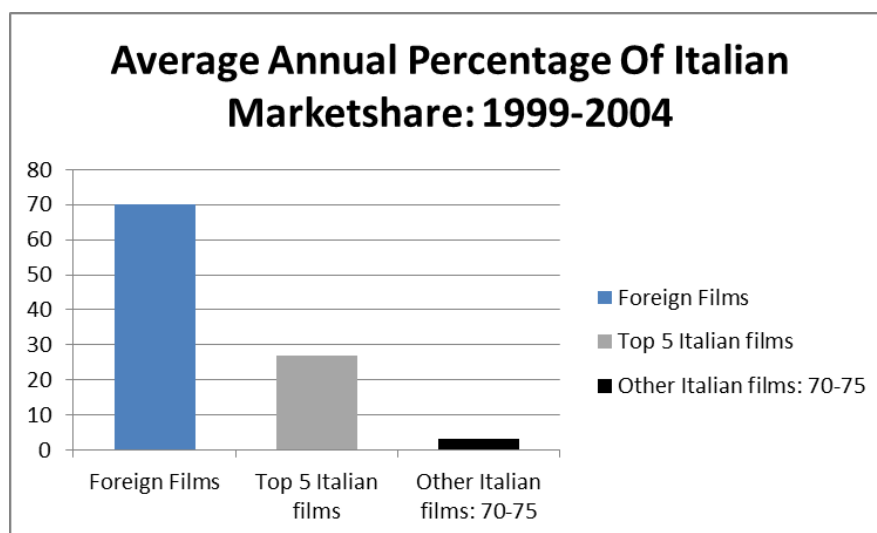


Figure 11

The fact that the great majority of commercially successful films are comedies points towards a historical pattern worth keeping in mind, particularly as this bears on our discussion of the Italian cinema of immigration: at the box office, comedies are king. The supremacy of comedies at the box office, particularly the unapologetically commercial *cine-panettone* of the Christmas season, has been bemoaned by critics for years, particularly by those who take it as symptomatic of the fallen state of the industry. Regardless of what this phenomenon says about the quality of Italian cinema in general, what it says about what is considered “proper” Italian cinema, or what can be appropriately showcased as the representative of Italian cinema to

<sup>60</sup> Riccardo Tozzi, “La produzione cinematografica: Una storia italiana,” in *Cinemitalia 2005: Sogni industria tecnologia mercato*, ed. Carlo Macchitella and Alberto Abruzzese (Venice: Marsilio, 2005), 71–84. ANICA stands for Associazione Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche Audiovisive e Multimediali ([www.anica.it](http://www.anica.it)), roughly the equivalent of MPAA. Cattleya is a TV/film production company.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 78. Translations mine.

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.mymovies.it/boxoffice/>

international audiences, is of great importance in the quest to triangulate the position of Italian cinema of immigration in relation to the entire industry.

The dichotomy between popular cinema and art cinema has its roots in the postwar era and, in particular, “in the tendency of critics and film historians to conflate Italian national cinema with the art cinema of neorealism in the 1950s,” which, as Rivi points out, “has erased the voice of other popular desires and fantasies” expressed in popular films.<sup>63</sup> The fact of the matter is that neorealist films, despite their international reception, were not very popular in Italy, constituting 10% of the films viewed by audiences, while melodramas and comedies were.<sup>64</sup> It was the added value of a successful reception at the European festival circuit and in America that consecrated neorealist films not just as “art cinema” (as discussed extensively in the previous section), but also as authentic, properly Italian cinema. Despite the objections by Andreotti in regard to the thematic inappropriateness of neorealist films, they proved to be ideologically and aesthetically appropriate for the times.<sup>65</sup> As neorealism accrued cultural capital internationally, it stopped being just a sample of Italian cinema and came to represent Italian cinema as a whole. Neorealism’s success abroad thus marks the beginning of the bifurcated itinerary of Italian cinema, which has since then been divided, if only discursively, between popular and art/festival cinema.

However, this process was not a singularly Italian phenomenon, but a result of the cultural capital mechanisms in the festival circuit which, invariably, calls for a distinction between “art” films and the mainstream national films of all participating European cinema.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, while the cinematic transnational network was reconfiguring itself in the postwar era, European national industries were seeking to stake a claim in the developing topography, and they did so by cultivating a national brand and promoting a horizon of expectation for their newly “national” cinema. Mariapia Comand and Roy Menarini have noted that as a result of the legitimization of certain types of cinematic practices or aesthetics as belonging to a particular country, a horizon of expectations was created in the international audience. Thus, Comand and Menarini point out, certain cinemas began to be constructed and packaged for the visual consumer who was taught to expect an existential film from France, a sexy film from Spain and a realist film from Italy.<sup>67</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, the legacy of Italy’s neorealist cinema and the expectation it created, gave rise to the *cinema politico* of Bellocchio, Bertolucci and

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<sup>63</sup> Rivi, *European Cinema After 1989*, 45.

<sup>64</sup> *Roma, città aperta* was the exception to the rule.

<sup>65</sup> See note 12 and 15.

<sup>66</sup> This was the same process that created a distinction between “art” cinema and mainstream Hollywood, as discussed in the previous section. Symbolic capital (social and cultural) is based upon the principle of exclusion and scarcity as much as it is on collective misrecognition and dissimulation, or actually accumulated labor. Bourdieu, “Forms of Capital,” 245.

<sup>67</sup> Mariapia Comand and Roy Menarini, *Il Cinema Europeo*, 1. ed, Biblioteca Universale Laterza 585 (Rome: Laterza, 2006), 7. However, this national branding can also be a double-edged sword: “Quanto alla visibilità oltre confine dei nostri film, il caso di *Respiro* non si è più ripetuto; nel 2004 [...] sul finire dell’anno nelle sale di New York venivano proiettati solo due film italiani, *Callas Forever* di Zeffirelli e *Ossessione* di Visconti, che è sì un’opera prima, ma risale, com’è noto, al 1943, a dimostrazione che all’estero continuiamo a essere prigionieri del nostro passato...quasi a certificare in anticipo le parole di Gianni Cavina, che ne *Il regista di matrimoni* ricopre il ruolo di Smamma, l’autore che si finge morto per vincere un David, poiché nel cinema italiano trionfano i morti.” Callisto Cosulich, “Dopo lo tsunami. Scenari politici,” in *La meglio gioventù: Nuovo cinema italiano 2000-2006*, ed. Vito Zagarrìo (Venice: Marsilio, 2006), 50.

Pontecorvo.<sup>68</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s the international market legitimized a cinema of nostalgia that tapped into American stereotypes of “Italianness” by revisiting and romanticizing the immediate post war era while recalling neorealist films.<sup>69</sup> Thus the legacy of neorealism, while manifesting itself in different ways and at different times, remains a strong reference point to what is internationally considered to be proper Italian cinema. Comedies, despite the success they achieved in the 1960s and 1970s, are considered improper, unsuitably low brow to represent “Italian” cinema abroad.<sup>70</sup> Thus “realist” cinema that engages in social issues (*cinema d'impegno*) such as immigration, is ignored at home from a market point of view, and yet given the existing international expectations of what Italian cinema should be, it is the perfect choice to send as the representative of Italian cinema at the festival circuit.

The final result is that on average 100 films are being produced in Italy every year, of which only 25% will make a profit, most of which will be commercial-grade comedies and the works of extremely well-known directors with a lot of cultural capital like Tornatore or Giordana. The remaining 75% will be mostly “cinema d'auteur”, many of which are funded almost entirely by the state, but without any commercial distribution. Some directors and actors of this later group of films will either try to personally (and quite often physically) distribute their own product at movie theaters, and some will go on the “sotto-circuito” (sub-circuit) of regional and local film festivals and cineclubs. However, some of these films will find a new lease in the international film festival circuit, and gather enough added cultural value to make them commercially viable in the home market. Given such circumstances, it becomes easy to understand why, since the 1990s, the festival circuit has become a proper-alternate mode of film distribution for many Italian films, particularly for cinema of immigration, which are rarely shot in popular genres.<sup>71</sup> Exhibition at international festivals allows Italian cinema of immigration to become visible to a much larger audience, one that transcends national borders. Furthermore, depending on the success it has on the circuit, Italian films may gain traction for a wider distribution at home or/and abroad, a fact not lost on Thomas Elsaesser who writes that, “a film comes to a festival, in order to be catapulted beyond the festival.”<sup>72</sup> The major film festivals of today, with their *Marché du film*, their *Der European Film Market*, director’s workshops and industry pavilions, are as much about showcasing talent as they are about marketing a product.

### Landscape of Films on Immigration

Films dealing explicitly with the phenomenon of immigration into Italy began to be made in the 1990s. It could be said that this cinematic trend started with Michele Placido’s *Tomato*, which premiered at Cannes Film Festival within the *Un Certain Regard* section on May 13,

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<sup>68</sup> Robert Sklar, “Una prospettiva statunitense,” in *La meglio gioventù: Nuovo cinema italiano 2000-2006*, ed. Vito Zagarrò (Venice: Marsilio, 2006), 275.

<sup>69</sup> Italian nostalgic cinema forms part of a much wider trend of heritage films that appeared throughout Europe in those two decades. For further discussion on the topic see Rosalind Galt, *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map*, Film and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>70</sup> Ironically, in the age when the local is often used as a marketing tool, comedies are also charged with being too cultural specific to travel abroad. This phenomenon is by no means solely an Italian affair as the formulation/conception of comedy as a genre that is only intelligible to a national audience and thus unable to travel abroad has been widely articulated in other European countries. See Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

<sup>71</sup> Of the 27 films that are under our consideration, only two are comedies and were not produced until 2007.

<sup>72</sup> Elsaesser, “Film Festival Networks,” 97.

1990.<sup>73</sup> The film was well received by the audience and the international press, as well as the Italian press in which the film had generated a bit of a buzz well in advance of the festival. In fact, as early as October of 1989 there had been articles on the up-coming film, focusing on the famous actor-turned-director and the theme of the film, using a language couched in the milieu of the art (not a commercial film) and resonating the ever legitimizing language of neorealism—“feeling a need to express something...he chooses *impegno*.”<sup>74</sup>

Of course, *Tomato* was not exactly the first Italian film to show immigrants, or foreigners, on the screen. In the 1980s there had been a few comedies like *Tesoro mio* (Paradisi, 1979), or *Delitto al ristorante cinese* (Corbucci, 1981). It could not even be said that it was the first dramatic film with immigrants, for there had already been *Il colore dell'odio* (Squitieri, 1989). However, the first two films did not address immigration or integration—or immigrants for that matter—choosing instead to use them as props for other purposes. Despite the fact that Zeudi Araya plays a COLF in *Tesoro mio*, the social reference is purely circumstantial, and the film privileges instead the actor's exotic body.<sup>75</sup> *Delitto al ristorante cinese* lacks any social awareness in regards to immigration beyond conceding the fact that there were Chinese restaurants in Rome, and offensively mobilizes stereotypes about Chinese culture through posing. *Il colore dell'odio* is the first film that posits race, immigration and integration at the center of its narrative, but the film barely registered anywhere: it lasted only three days at the theaters in Rome, earning a little more than 2,000 Euro.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, even though there had been Italian films showing people of color within Italy, sometimes at the center of the frame and sometimes just in passing, surely as far back as the 1970s, a visible cinema of immigration did not start until 1990 with Placido's *Tomato*.<sup>77</sup>

As a result of my research, I have compiled a list of all the films that can be considered Italian cinema of immigration.<sup>78</sup> There are 29 films in this list, and all the films were produced between the years of 1990 to 2008. Out of those 29 films, 5 could also be considered *cinema de métissage* since their directors are nationals from Tunisia (Bivona and Melliti) or Algeria

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<sup>73</sup> Original title is *Pummarò*. Whenever there is an official English title, it will be used. Otherwise the original Italian title will be given.

<sup>74</sup> The full quote runs as follows: “Marco Tullio Giordana, Bellocchio, and many others that are working on films that may not be very commercially viable, have something in common, which is the desire to express something. Does it mean that after riding the wave of popularity, they are choosing *impegno*? If by *impegno* we mean opening one's eyes to reality and choosing social themes against which to measure one's self, then yes. The first fruit of this new path... will be *Pummarò*, a film which Placido will start shooting in ten days: it is a story of a journey, the journey of an emigrant, a Black man, who comes from Africa to Italy looking for his brother Pummarò, who works at Villa Literno where he does seasonal field work.” Laura Delli Colli, “Michele Placido senza ‘Piovra’ fa il regista con ‘Pummarò,’” *La Repubblica*, October 8, 1989.

<sup>75</sup> COLF = domestic worker, often hired to help the elderly.

<sup>76</sup> Franco Montini, “Un Anno D'oro per Il Cinema,” *La Repubblica*, February 2, 1990, sec. Spettacoli.

<sup>77</sup> From the 1970s I recall a scene from Scola's *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* (1976), in which Beryl Cunningham plays a “baraccata negra” who appears on and off a few times in the film, and who gets confused for a southerner when a Sicilian girl asks her, “ma tu non sei delle parti nostre?” and she answers, “no, so' romana!”

<sup>78</sup> I define films “Italian” if the main language spoken in the film is Italian and/or if the film's main production company is listed as Italian. For a full list see the Filmography. As of March 2012, it has come to my attention that Professor Bonsaver of Oxford University, and principal investigator for the research project, “Destination Italy: Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative”, identifies over 80 “migrant films”, including shorts and documentaries/experimental. However, his criterion is much broader than mine, and does not seem to differentiate between sub-state and supra-state migrants, thus including films like *Pani e tulipani* (Soldini, 2000) to be included in his filmography.

(Benhadj).<sup>79</sup> The genres of these films vary from documentary style to drama, art, noir and even in recent years, comedy. These films have budgets ranging from 50,000 to 8,000,000 Euros, and are the product of semi-unknown directors and actors, as well as internationally acclaimed ones like Tornatore and Giordana. The unifying factor, which brings all of these films together, is that they all deal thematically with the issue of Italy’s migrant population. The ones that do not take on the issue of immigration directly do so tangentially and in a manner that is visible and important enough thematically to warrant inclusion in the list I have compiled. Of course this list is not perfect, and apart from the issue that it may not include every film ever made that fits the criteria used (no film after 2008 is considered), there is the issue that the criteria itself is based upon my own understandings of what constitutes cinema of immigration. However, my choices are not arbitrary, for beyond commonsense, I also based my decisions on how third parties such as film critics in books, articles from print and digital media, as well as internet databases (i.e. Netflix) tag, classify or define these films.

Despite the given diversity of these films, be it in budget, genre or star power, there is a discernible pattern that cuts across diachronically: over time the number of migrant films per year is increasing quickly and they are traveling much more widely around the world, becoming themselves migrant cultural and economic products. From 1990 to 1999, one film per year was made on average, while in the new millennium this number doubled. The pattern becomes even more impressive when we consider that out of the 18 films that have been made since 2000, 15 of them were completed between 2004 and 2008, evenly spread out at 3 films per year.

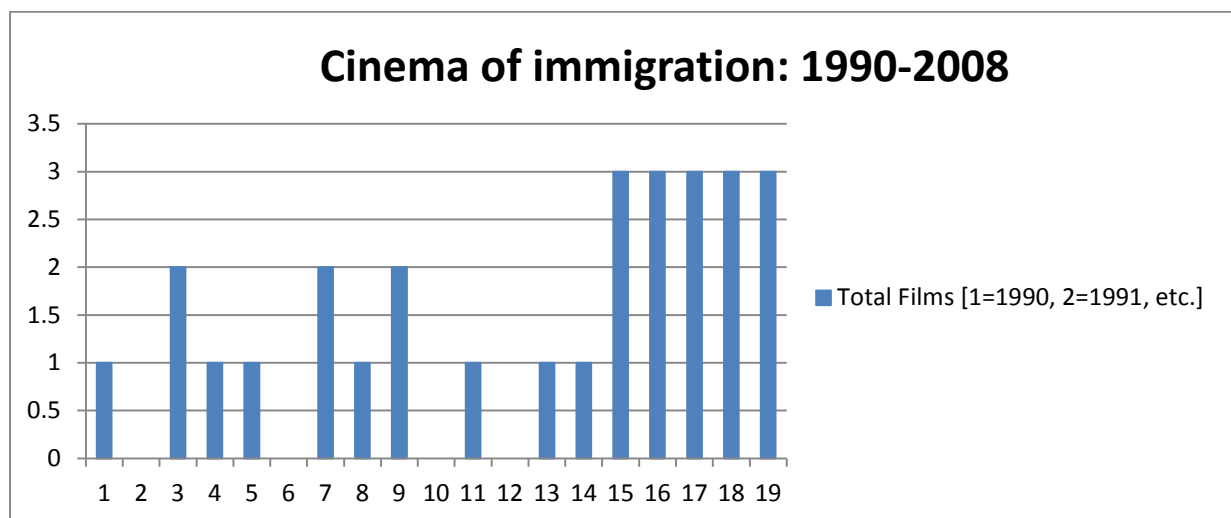


Figure 12

<sup>79</sup> *Cinema de métissage* is described as “the work of directors who live and work in the West but who come from other countries, particularly the ‘global south’ and the East. Such work expresses the problems associated with the experience (directly or indirectly, traumatic or not) of immigration.” Giovanni Spagnoletti, ed., *Il Cinema Europeo Del Métissage: XXXVI Mostra Internazionale Del Nuovo Cinema: Pesaro, 23 Giugno-1 Luglio 2000*, Pesaro nuovo cinema (Milan: Il castoro, 2000). Translation mine. Given this definition, I had to exclude (for the time being) Ferzan Özpetek from my list. Though his professional itinerary is somewhat analogous to that of Benhadj, his work lacks any emphasis on the problems associated with the experience of migration. However, as my next chapter shows, Özpetek is considered an accented Italian filmmaker. It is worth noting that Benhadj is an Italian citizen while Melliti is not. (Giovanna Grassi, *Corriere della Sera*, 3/4/2000, “Depardieu contro la violenza più atroce”)

Oddly enough, alongside the pattern of increasing number of films made that deal with Italy's sub-state migrant others, there is a converse pattern of a decreasing number of films made by migrant directors. In the period from 1990 to 1999, four films were made: Bivona's *Clandestini nella città* (1992) and *Ritorno a Tunisi* (1997) and Benhadj's *L'albero dei destini sospesi* (1997) and *Mirka* (made in 1999, but released in 2000). In the new millennium, Budina directed *Lettere al vento* (2003), Benhadj made *Pane Nudo* (2005) and newcomer Mohsen Melliti directed *Io, l'altro* (2007).<sup>80</sup> The latter two films were distributed (DVD) within 7 months of their theatrical release, which is quite impressive when one considers that none of the films made by migrant directors in the 1990s currently has commercial DVD distribution. Both of Bivona's films were, at one point, distributed in VHS but they are no longer available for purchase through mainstream commercial venues.<sup>81</sup> The copies I found in Italy are located for the most part in libraries, within specialized collections of "African Cinema", which not only highlights how these films are being mobilized today, but also how these films could have been received by the audience of the time. Benhadj's *Mirka*, despite the director's lasting presence in the Italian film industry, has not been picked up for commercial DVD distribution through vendors like the media store *Feltrinelli*, [www.bol.it](http://www.bol.it), or [www.ibs.it](http://www.ibs.it).<sup>82</sup> However, it seems that the film was released in VHS format in October 2000 and is currently available through the NGO *Centro Orientamento Educativo*. Given that Gérard Depardieu and Vanessa Redgrave acted in the film, it is still feasible that it might find wider DVD distribution in the future, a prospect that seems more likely when considering that the film was aired in Italy's public channel La7 on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, 2003.

Although the broader Italian cinema of immigration has fared much better, half of the films produced in the 1990s have disappeared from circulation, leaving only traces behind in book passages or newspaper reviews. For example, Carlo Mazzacurati's *Another Life* (1992), Maurizio Zaccaro's *Article 2* (1994) and Luigi Faccini's *Giamaica* (1998) are all currently unavailable for purchase. *Another Life* and *Giamaica* both had home video releases when they came out, the first one in VHS and the second one in DVD, but no further reissues in later years. I do not think that *Article 2* had ever a home video release.<sup>83</sup> Matteo Garrone's *Terra di mezzo*

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<sup>80</sup> *Pane nudo*'s original title is, *El Khoubz El Hafî*. Dialogue is in Arabic; however, it was produced, distributed, and to a large extent crewed as well, by Italians.

<sup>81</sup> Bivona's films, as well as Benhadj's *Mirka*, are available through the NGO *Associazione Centro Orientamento Educativo* ([www.coeweb.org](http://www.coeweb.org)), which is active in Italy as well as in certain African and Latin American countries. One of their main goals in Italy, according to their website, is to help in the "formation of a new multicultural mentality as well as solidarity" (translation mine). The library Salaborsa of Bologna bought copies of Bivona's films from COE for their selections of "African Films."

<sup>82</sup> Rachid Benhadj been living in Rome since the mid-1990s, has directed several films and documentaries with Italian co-production and Italian government funds (*Mirka*, *Film di Interesse Culturale Nazionale*, 900.000 Euro). Benhadj has also been teaching directing at Rome's *Cinecittà* since 2006 and has served as a jury member for Roma Independent Film Festival in 2009. He is an Italian citizen.

<sup>83</sup> In the summer of 2009, I was able to see Mazzacurati's *Un'altra vita* at the video club *Videobuco* in Rome (<http://nuke.videobuco.it/Home/tabid/36/Default.aspx>). Since the film was in VHS, they provided a VCR and a TV to watch the film on the premises. Needless to say, without a DVD re-print and wide distribution, opportunities to view these films will only get scarcer.

As late as 2012, Maurizio Zaccaro kept a website (<http://mauriziozaccaro.myblog.it/>) showcasing his work. Through the website one could stream, via YouTube, *L'articolo 2*, bearing the time code reading (TCR) in the frame, which implies that the digital copy was made from the director's master copy. As of March 2013, Zaccaro's website no longer exists, but the movie can still be found in YouTube ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfhY3b-OGds&list=UUo\\_1aXKOGtk2\\_c1viJimGrQ&index=20](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfhY3b-OGds&list=UUo_1aXKOGtk2_c1viJimGrQ&index=20)), where it has been since 2010 according to the YouTube time stamp. According to the clip's view counter, the film has only been seen by less than 200 people in its entirety.

(1996) was not distributed until 2009, after Garrone had won the much coveted *Palme d'Or* at Cannes for *Gomorra*. However, Michele Placido's *Tomato* (1990), Silvio Soldini's *A Soul Divided in Two* (1993), Carlo Mazzacurati's *Vesna Goes Fast* (1996) and Matteo Garrone's *Guests* (1998) have all been picked up for DVD distribution by the Cecchi Gori Group since 2005.

Given the data, it is not unreasonable to ask why these last four films found DVD distribution when the previous four did not, particularly considering that there is at least one director with films in both groups (Mazzacurati)—not to mention that *Tomato* is the oldest film of all the 8.<sup>84</sup> The fact that films made in the 1990s are being released for the first time for home distribution only since 2005 could be understood as part of the growing Italian sensitivity and concern with issues of race and multiculturalism, a fact supported by the overall increase in films that deal with immigration. As to why some and not others obtained video distribution in the mid-2000s can be explained by the transitive properties of cultural capital, which does not simply flow in a linear trajectory. Film festivals, academies and associations are the holders of cultural capital in its institutionalized state, guaranteeing the value of their prizes and awards by the monopoly they hold on a certain perceived exclusivity. Through a form of “social alchemy” and “collective magic”, these institutions consecrate films and directors, producing cultural capital in its objectified and embodied form:<sup>85</sup> a major prize confirms that a film is not a “flick,” and a group of *films* confirm that an *auteur* is not simply a director. Once a director has been consecrated and confirmed, the cultural capital that s/he embodies through prestige and fame is able to not only facilitate future projects, but is also able to recuperate previously ignored projects by making them commercially viable.

Matteo Garrone's films are a great example of this process. Garrone started his career through the festival system by winning the *Sacher d'Oro* for his short *Silhouette* in 1996. He used the prize money to complete other shorts, which he then put together as one episodic documentary, *Terra di Mezzo*, which premiered that same year at *Festival Internazionale Cinema Giovane di Torino*, where it wins the Ciputti Award. With his own production company, Archimide, Garrone directs and produces *Guests* in 1998, a film about two young immigrants from Albania in Rome. The film premieres at Venice to good reviews and winning a minor prize at Venice and at other (minor) film festivals as well. While *Terra di Mezzo* and *Guests* were not huge commercial successes, they earned Garrone enough cultural capital to get the attention of bigger production companies. His next project, *Roman Summer* (2000), a comedy, was produced by Bianca Film, Tele+ and Istituto Luce. The film premiered at the *Mostra* in Venice, in the official competition, though it did not win any prizes.

However, Garrone's next two films (produced by the much larger production company Fandango), earned the rising director a great deal of recognition. Garrone premiered his *The Embalmer* (2002) at Cannes, in the *Quinzane des Realisateurs* section and received great reviews. The film went on to win 2 *David di Donatello* and 1 *Nastro d'Argento*, among other awards. His next film, *Primo amore* (2004) won a Silver Bear at the Berlinale, plus 1 *David di Donatello* and 1 *Nastro d'Argento*. It is at this point that Cecchi Gori decides to reissue Garrone's *Guests*, but not *Terra di Mezzo* or *Roman Summer*. Garrone's fame was strong enough to recuperate *Guests*, which was a feature film addressing serious issues. *Roman Summer* was a

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<sup>84</sup> It worth mentioning that the film sample of this research goes from 1990 to 2008, and therefore at the beginning of my research, Garrone's documentary *Terra di mezzo* (1996) was without DVD distribution. Its subsequent release highlights the very redeeming qualities of cultural capital, which is at the heart of this chapter.

<sup>85</sup> Bourdieu, “Forms of Capital,” 243–248.



feature film, but a comedy, while *Terra di mezzo* was a serious film, but a documentary. Garrone's prestige was not strong enough in 2005 to make those two projects commercially viable for DVD distribution. However, after Garrone won the *Palme d'Or* in 2008, all of his previous projects were re-released.<sup>86</sup>

This process also explains quite well why *Tomato*, *A Soul Divided in Two*, and *Vesna Goes Fast* were re-issued in 2005. Even in 1990, Michele Placido was a well-known and famous TV personality, and his fame has only increased since then.<sup>87</sup> Silvio Soldini has also become a well-respected and established director, with a modest international prestige, since his first feature films in the early 1990s. The director, of course, is not the only person in a film bearing cultural capital in its embodied state, for there are the actors, composers, screenwriters, etc. Sometimes the prestige of the director alone is not enough to recuperate older projects, but in conjunction with other agents of the project, enough cultural capital may be aggregated to make a project commercially viable. That is the case of Mazzacurati's *Vesna Goes Fast*. While Mazzacurati is a well-respected director in Italy, he is simply not famous enough to have all of his films reissued on the strength of his fame alone. However, *Vesna Goes Fast* had the fortune of featuring Antonio Albanese and a young Stefano Accorsi, an actor that was at the height of his popularity after *The Last Kiss* (Muccino, 2001), *His Secret Life* (Ozpetek, 2001) and *Santa Maradona* (Ponti, 2001). Zaccaro and Faccini never became well known as feature film directors and thus their work is forgotten by the general public.

### Voyage through the Festival Circuit

#### Films in the 1990s

In the 1990s, films addressing issues of immigration and Italian racism as social problems came to be established as a film category. The films that I have identified as belonging to this category from that decade are the following:

*Tomato* (Placido, 1990), *Another Life* (Mazzacurati, 1992), *Clandestini nella città* (Bivona, 1992), *A Soul Divided in Two* (Soldini, 1993), *Article 2* (Zaccaro, 1993), *Portami via* (Tavarelli, 1994), *Terra di mezzo* (Garrone, 1996), *Vesna Goes Fast* (Mazzacurati, 1996), *Guests* (Garrone, 1998), *Giamaica* (Faccini, 1998), and *Mirka* (Benhadj, 2000).

A cursory glance at this list reveals some well-known directors and some recognizable film titles, as well as some titles that are almost unheard of. Given the theme of these films, one may wonder why Amelio's much lauded *Lamerica* (1994) and Nanni Moretti's *April* (1998) are not in the list. The reason is because these two films, despite their iconic valence, do not deal directly with immigration in Italy.<sup>88</sup> One may even wonder about omissions, film titles that may have

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<sup>86</sup> In 2008, Garrone's film *Gomorra* won Cannes' top prize as well as 5 EFAs, and picked up 7 Davide – not to mention 7 other minor prizes.

<sup>87</sup> Michele Placido was best known for his role in the mini-series *La Piovra* (The Octopus, 1984), which deals with organized crime. The original mini-series were so successful that different versions of it were revived in 1985, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1997, 1998 and 1999.

<sup>88</sup> *Lamerica*, while referencing the mass exodus of Albanians towards Italy, particularly through the iconic image of the "carrette del mare" at the very end of the film, basically displaces the contact zone from Italy to Albania. It shows Italian swindlers that go to Albania at the end of the regime to take advantage of certain EU economic initiatives. *April* is mostly concerned with the political crisis of the Italian Left in the mid-1990s and the ascent of the Right. It is within this political framework that once again the iconic images of the "carrette del mare" are

been lost to the annals of time and memory.<sup>89</sup> However, their absence is not the result of a simple oversight on my part, but rather it highlights certain questions that are at the heart of this chapter: why are some Italian films of immigration absent from our collective memory and why are others so present, if not within our individual memory, at least within the intuitional memory of cinema through its literature?

To begin addressing this question we must return once again to the issues of exhibition, theatrical distribution and cultural capital. Typically, the lifespan of a film has a few important relay points where a certain amount of momentum needs to be accumulated in order for the product to be launched successfully through the next section of the circuit: a good premiere gets you critical attention and time on the theaters, good critical reviews get you to the major prize competitions within the domestic national market, prizes and a good reception at national competitions get you enough momentum for strong sales of video and media rights. Each step builds upon the previous one, and yet everything can change at each relay stop. Until a couple of decades ago, international sales and exhibitions were not a particularly important aspect of the lifespan of a film as an economic commodity, even though the entire European avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s would have not existed without it. This is, of course, a rather simplified and linear shorthand for the complex mechanisms that either make or break a film as an economic product, but it suffices to highlight certain patterns that begin to emerge when we take a closer look at the Italian films of immigration of the 1990s.

The eleven film titles presented here can easily be divided into three groups. The first group is composed of those films that were relatively successful, films that, though not considered classics or blockbusters, are remembered in the marketplace through DVD sales, and in the institutional memory of cinema through its literature: *Tomato*, *A Soul Divided in Two*, *Vesna Goes Fast*, *Guests*, and *Terra di mezzo*. Then there are the films that are marginally remembered by the institutional memory of cinema because of the artistic talent involved, but lack current DVD distribution, films such as *Article 2* by Zaccaro, *Another Life* by Mazzacurati, and *Giamaica* by Faccini.<sup>90</sup> The last group is composed of those films that are simply unavailable to most film scholars and completely unknown to the average film spectator. In this case I am speaking of Bivona's *Clandestini nella città*, Benhadj's *Mirka*, and Taverelli's *Portami via*. These last few films are as close as you get to being completely forgotten, found only in one or two newspaper articles written when the films were released, or in a couple of isolated

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visited, but only in a very tangential manner. Mazzacurati's *Il toro* (1994), the second film of his "trilogy of the East", is another film that displaces the contact zone between East and West into Eastern Europe.

<sup>89</sup> Films that were not produced to be released at the theaters, or "made for TV" films, are not included in the list either, given that their trajectory as an object of exhibition was predetermined. These films include Bertolucci's *L'assedio* (1998), and the four films produced by Filmalbatros and commissioned by Rai in 1997 as part of their immigration series, *Un altro paese nei occhi miei: Di cielo in cielo, l'appartamento, L'albero dei destini sospesi* and *Torino boys* For an in depth analysis of these films see Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*, Toronto Italian Studies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 104–141.

<sup>90</sup> Brunetta mentions Luigi Faccini no fewer than ten times in, Gian Piero Brunetta, *Il cinema italiano contemporaneo: Da "La dolce vita" a "Centochiodi"* (Rome: Laterza, 2007), 12, 206, 344, 438, 449, 459, 460, 500, 581, 729. Even though Brunetta often puts Faccini's name in lists alongside some of the greatest Italian directors, and once compares him explicitly with Pier Paolo Pasolini, Brunetta dedicates only four paragraphs to him, and does not mention either of the two films he made in the 1990s. Maurizio Zaccaro is mentioned 11 times by Brunetta, highlighting his role as a collaborator of Olmi and Avati. *L'articolo 2* is mentioned by name, but not described or discussed.

scholarly works written not too long after.<sup>91</sup> As far as IMDB is concerned, Marcello Bivona does not even exist.

TABLE 1

Film	Premiere date	Theatrical Release	Nominations	Wins	Film Festivals
Tomato (1990) Placido	May 13 1990 Cannes (Un Certain Regard)	Sept 7 1990	DAVID: June 2 1991 Best Director.  NASTRI: June 1991 Best Actress, Best Director		Edinburgh (8/1990), Montreal (8/1990)
Clandestini nella città (1992) Soldini	March 14 1992 Milano. Free screening	None.	None	None	None
Another Life (1992) Mazzacurati	Sept 5 1992 Venice (Vetrina del Cinema Italiano)	Sept 1992	DAVID: June 2 1993 Best Sup Actor, Best Actor  NASTRI: March 1993 Best Actor, Best Supporting, Best director.	David: Best Actor  Grollo d'Oro: Valle d'Aosta Nov 1992	LA Film Festival on European Immigration (3/1993)  NICE NYC (11/1992)
Article 2	Nov 11 1993 Rome and Milano, two screens total.	Nov 11 1993	Karlovy Vary Film Festival Crystal Globe		Berlinale: Feb 1994 Panorama Karlovy: July 1994 Trento: July 1994 Annecy: July 1994
A Soul Divided in Two (1993) Soldini	Sept 3 1993 Venice, Competition	Sept 1993	DAVID: June 18 1994 Best Cinematography  NASTRI: June 1994 Best Actor, Best Director, Best Supporting Actor	<b>Venice:</b> 1993 Pasinetti Award: Best Actor.  <b>Volpi Cup:</b> Best Actor	Valladolid, Villerupt (France)  NICE NY (Nov 93)
Portami via (1994) Tavarelli	Sept 1 1994 Venice Panorama Italiano				Venice:1994 Panorama Italiano
Terra di Mezzo (1996) Garrone	Nov 1996 Festival Intern. Cinema Giovane di Torino.	2 -15 May 1997 (70 copies) <sup>92</sup>	Nastri: 1998, Best New Director.	Torino: Nov 1996, Ciputti Award.	Sacher Film Festival: May 2 1997  Torino: Nov 1996
Vesna di veloce (1996) Mazzacurati	Sept 4 1996 Venice, Competition	Sept 1996	Venice: 1996 Golden Lion  DAVID: 1997 Best Supporting Actor  NASTRI: 1997 Best Actor	Venice (Out of competition): Pasinetti Award for Best Actress	Toronto: Sep 1996  Belgrade: Jan 1997  Palic: July 1997 (Yugoslavia)
Guests (1998) Garrone	Aug 1998 Venice (Perspectives)				Rotterdam (competition)
Giamaica (1998) Faccini	Aug 1998 Locarno Film Festival	March 19 1999 Teatro Don Orione. Rome.			Street FF Milano: 1999 Med FF Rome: Nov 1999 Messina FF: 1999 24 German cities: 2000 Stockholm: 2000
Mirka (2000) Benhadj	March 2000	March 2000	Golden Globe: Best New Actor, Best Cinematography, Best Screenplay	Golden Globe: 2000 Best New Actor	Thessaloniki International Film Festival 2005

<sup>91</sup> Spagnoletti, *Il Cinema Europeo Del Métissage*.

<sup>92</sup> *Terra di mezzo* was distributed by Mikado and Sacher through an event of five “quality” films, called Playbill. Moretti had been selected for the jury at Cannes.

One of the first things we must consider in order to understand why some films of immigration are still in circulation, while other are not, is the film's launching event: when and where does a film premiere. To begin with, in the 1990s successful Italian films of immigration had a tendency to premier at a major film festival such as Cannes or Venice. In fact, if we look closely at Table 1, we see that with the exception of *Tomato*, which premiered at Cannes, every successful film (and one that was not) in our list was launched at Venice's *Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica*. For a group of films that were not considered (or even conceived as) popular commercial films but rather *film d'auteur*, Venice was the perfect place for them to premiere because it is as much a prestigious international festival, as it is a local event.

As the oldest film festival in the world, taking place in one of the most spectacular (and somewhat mythical) cities of Europe, the *Mostra* wields a lot of international attention and cultural prestige. It is one of the three most important festivals in Europe, dividing the festival calendar with Cannes and Berlin and thus occupying a prestigious position in the international film festival circuit. Furthermore, over time the *Mostra* has sought to establish its own individual identity in order to differentiate itself from Cannes and Berlin, and it has done so by highlighting its historical importance as the first premier festival, its historical setting, and by focusing on the artistic aspect of film. Its very name, *Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica*, signals its commitment to art cinema, making it a perfect place for first time Italian directors who want to earn the title of *auteur*.<sup>93</sup>

Yet it is also a "local" event for its Italian participants. The *Mostra* marks the beginning of the film calendar in Italy, which ends in late spring with Italy's two main award ceremonies: the *David di Donatello* and the *Nastri d'Argento*.<sup>94</sup> As an Italian film festival, the *Mostra* has developed close ties with Italy's media, often selling exclusive rights for television broadcast to RAI, Italy's largest and state-owned television network. Given that "a common precondition for being allowed into one of the press junket interview sessions...is that the movie must have been distributed in the country where the program will be broadcast or the story published," the Italian print press is amply represented at the Festival as well.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, like any other major festival, the *Mostra* allows and encourages parallel competitions and awards that augment the overall impact of the festival as a cinematic event. To that end, the National Association of Italian Film Critics gives the Pasinetti award to what the association considers to be the best film

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<sup>93</sup> The *Mostra's* relational valence within the festival circuit is made clear by Valck: "When business considerations prevail - as in the case of IN THE CUT - Toronto has a better reputation than Venice. In Castells's [sic] terms, the function demand of the festival as market place is best covered by Toronto, whereas the historical specificity of the *Mostra* gives Venice the advantage of high cultural status, which is more important for a first feature director." Valck, *Film Festivals*, 138.

<sup>94</sup> Established in 1946, the *Nastro d'Argento* (Silver Ribbon) is oldest movie award in Europe, and second oldest in the world. The Academy Awards are the oldest in the world. The *Nastro* is an award given by the *Sindacato nazionale dei giornalisti cinematografici italiani*, or the National Association of Italian Film Critics. Traditionally, the summer is considered the low season for Italian cinema, making the *Nastri* the most important event in the summer in preparation for Venice:

Particularly after its return to Taormina and its success as a televised event in the last few years, the *Nastri* is increasingly becoming a memorable event for the public as well, providing great visibility for the titles presented and awarded at the event. But above all else, the *Nastri* successfully accomplishes the elongation of the season exactly when the conditions are least favorable during the year, that is during the summer: it constitutes, at least from a media perspective, a bridge that sustains the attention of the public on cinema and its main protagonist while the main opening event of the cinema season arrives after the summer: the *Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica di Venezia*. ([http://www.cinegiornalisti.com/premi\\_new.asp](http://www.cinegiornalisti.com/premi_new.asp))

<sup>95</sup> Valck, *Film Festivals*, 143.

at the festival. The combined effect of the reciprocal relationship between the Italian media and the festival makes the *Mostra* as much a popular spectacle as a rarified artistic event, thus maximizing the exposure and the cultural capital for its participants in the Italian market.

It is thus easy to understand why the successful Italian films of immigration in the 1990s not only premiered at Venice, but were released almost concurrently at the movie theaters. By doing so, producers and directors sought to immediately capitalize on the “buzz” created every day at the festival as celebrities, media and organized events came together to create news that were constantly disseminated through newspaper articles and television programming. Buzz can therefore be defined as the discursive energy that emerges “in the space between the iterative and the irruption – the twin poles of a festival’s consistency as event, which explains the obsession with new-ness: empty signifier of the compromise struck at any festival between the same and the different, the expected and the expected surprise.”<sup>96</sup> Interviews, photo ops, gossip and scandals all form part of the buzz, the recursive discursive energy that puts the name of the film in the public’s mind, and serves as an informal advertising campaign for films that could not afford to spend much money in advertising. The creation of buzz for Italian films of immigration in the 1990s was facilitated by the fact that these films included stars and directors that, while not international figures (and if that were the case, the necessity of the film festival would be moot), were known and appreciated in the industry: Michele Placido, Carlo Mazzacurati, Silvio Soldini, Silvio Orlando, Fabrizio Bentivoglio, Claudio Amendola, and Antonio Albanese.

Lastly, over the long haul these films were able to turn the buzz from the festival and the positive reviews while at the movie theaters into nominations for Italy’s major prizes at the end of the following spring: the *David di Donatello* and *Nastri d’Argento*. The bestowing of these prestigious awards, with all the pomp and fair of any major festival, brings to a close the film season and thus ends the normal trajectory for a film in Italy. It also serves as the last relay point to launch the films, or strengthen their position if already released, in the ancillary markets such as DVDs, national TV and Cable. The award ceremonies remind the audience of the films’ existence as film products to purchase, and reassure the public that indeed this is a film worth buying or consuming for a second time (or first time if missed at the theaters). A quick look at Table 1 shows that every film that started its trajectory at Venice (or Cannes for *Tomato*) and then managed successfully the cultural capital it gained along the way by converting it into nominations and awards at the end of the year, gained further distribution in cinema’s ancillary markets. These are the successful films, albeit limited in their success compared to blockbusters, which earned a place in the institutional memory of cinema.

On the other hand Tavarelli’s *Portami via* (1994) is a good example of a film that could not gather enough cultural capital at its premiere, and at the end of the year it was completely forgotten by the committees at the David and the Nastri. This can be explained in part by the fact that there is only so much cultural and social capital that one can create and access at any given event. In 1994, *Portami via* premiered at Venice, but unfortunately it was not the only film at the *Mostra* that dealt with the issue of immigration in some respect. That was the year Amelio’s *Lamerica* premiered at Venice as well. From the beginning it hoarded the attention of the press since it was competing at the main event, whereas *Portami via* was shown at the out-of-competition section *Panorama Italiano*. Furthermore, while Tavarelli was an unknown, first-time director, Amelio was already a rising star, having recently won the much coveted *Palme*

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<sup>96</sup> Elsaesser, “Film Festival Networks,” 95.

*d'Or*.<sup>97</sup> His name thus carried an accumulated social and cultural capital which, by its mere existence, carried the potential “to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form,” – i.e. more attention and fame.<sup>98</sup> In fact, on September 6 1994, the day after *Lamerica* screened at Venice, three articles had already been published on the film in *La Repubblica* alone, praising it as having “a greatness of vision and an intensity of feeling”, a film that, while motivated by very specific and intimate reasons, was able to touch upon “the universal value of the human condition”, and so on.<sup>99</sup>

Contemporaneously, Tavarelli’s name featured mostly in newspaper articles that simply listed the films that were going to be screened at the *Mostra* that year, and when his film was reviewed by Paolo D’Agostini of *La Repubblica* on September 9 1994, it was simply to point out that despite its social value, the film was extremely derivative of previous films on the same topic:

Perhaps such oddly fast-paced sequence is what allows a certain prejudice against *Portami via*. And yet the characters and the plotline are there – even if there could be more “present,” to say the least – as well as the necessary ambiance. It will seem, however, that the storyline is one we have already heard, because following in the steps of Mazzacurati, Rubini and Soldini, this is yet another story of commingling of worlds that the famous fall of the Wall has made more communicable but in terms that are contradictory, dramatic, and hard. Specially because it is a another story of confused tensions, of unexpressed searchings, of an impatient – and partially conscious – desire for ‘another life’ [Another Life]: just as the title of a previous film indicated. Furthermore, the mirage appears in this film once again dressed in the garments of a woman from Eastern Europe. Not one, actually, but two women.<sup>100</sup>

Perhaps *Portami via* was derivative, and in many ways mimicked Mazzacurati and Soldini, but that would not have been uncommon in the film industry, nor would it have been enough reason to be automatically dismissed.<sup>101</sup> Afterall, *Vesna Goes Fast* in 1996 taps once again into the same thematic thread (women from the former eastern bloc caught up in prostitution in Italy), and yet it fared well. Perhaps Amelio’s film was the more relevant film, meditating not only on the recent mass Albanian exodus into Italy, but also touching upon cinematic discourses that were

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<sup>97</sup> Amelio had been a writer and director for TV films since the early 1970s, and made his debut in cinema at the end of the 1980s. His previous film, *Il ladro di bambini* (1992), was nominated for a *Palme d’Or* at Cannes where it won the Grand Prize of the Jury and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury. It went on to win multiple awards in Italy and the rest of Europe.

<sup>98</sup> In fact, capital’s tendency to persist and reproduce itself, is what makes many social practices possible: Capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains the tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible. And the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represent the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constrains, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices. Bourdieu, “Forms of Capital,” 242.

<sup>99</sup> Fusco, “Il mio film ad un alto costo umano.” Bignardi, “Emigranti, faccendieri, gli albanesi siamo noi.”

<sup>100</sup> Paolo D’Agostini, “Scommessa Tavarelli L’importante È Crederci,” *La Repubblica*, September 9, 1994.

<sup>101</sup> In fact, the frantic mimicking of successful films (in their story lines, narrative structure, aesthetic codes, etc.), accounts for some of the most successful periods in Italian cinema, creating *a posteriori* genres: the historical films of the 1910s, neorealism in the 1940s, peplums in the 1950s, spaghetti westerns in the 1960s, sex farces in the 1970s, etc.

relevant at the time.<sup>102</sup> Or possibly the storyline of *Lamerica* allowed more acceptable forms of identification, buttressed by the colonial history between Albania and Italy, while any form of identification with Tavarelli's characters would have been problematic for Italian audiences.<sup>103</sup> However, in the final analysis, Tavarelli's *Portami via* simply could not compete for the media's attention with Amelio's *Lamerica* in more ways than one, and its inability to compete formally and informally, inhibited its ability to gather the necessary cultural capital to sustain it throughout the cinematic year.

Likewise the other "forgotten films" are films that failed to accumulate the cultural capital necessary to remain relevant as economic products. Some never managed to get off the ground, like Bivona, whose film projects (including *Ritorno a Tunisi*, 1997) were completely artisanal enterprises, opening for free in a handful of venues and then mobilized as cultural elements within the discourse of multiculturalism.<sup>104</sup> Zoccaro hoped to get his film *Article 2* into Venice, acknowledging openly that Venice would serve as a "springboard" while the film was still in post-production.<sup>105</sup> However, the film was not admitted to any sections, and when it premiered in November of 1993, it did so in only two screens: one in Rome and one in Milan. *Giamaica* and *Mirka*, while still considered "forgotten films", managed a certain amount of success for a short while, even achieving DVD distribution, but they did so through different trajectories. While *Mirka* adhered to the traditional mode of exhibition and distribution, *Giamaica* was already adapting to the new modes that would be prevalent in the new millennium.

Despite the fact that *Mirka* was directed by a migrant director, it was not an artisanal project.<sup>106</sup> The project had the backing of several production and distribution companies from Italy, Great Britain, France and Spain, as well as funding from the European Union through its Euroimages program.<sup>107</sup> It boasted an international cast as well, with Gerard Depardieu, Vanessa

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<sup>102</sup> For further discussion on the emergence of heritage films in the 1990s as a way to investigate the ongoing political crisis, see "The Dialectic of Landscape in Italian Popular Melodrama" in Galt, *The New European Cinema*, 26–87.

<sup>103</sup> The title of Bignardi's article (see note 99) could be translated as "Migrants and Wheeler-Dealers: We are the Albanians," which creates a form of identification that, while morally ambiguous, is still heteronormative. An equivalent title for an article on *Portami via* would have been, "Migrants and Prostitutes: We are the Slavic Women," which would have created a form of identification that would be morally negative (prostitute), but more importantly, gendered feminine.

<sup>104</sup> By *artisanal* I am invoking not just a mode of production but also the motivation for it. The artisanal mode of production is usually characterized by limited resources, and often relies on irregular and unstable structures for its finances, distribution and exhibition. Given the often precarious conditions in which the artisanal mode operates, and the odds against making a profit, the artisanal mode of production is often motivated by ideological and aesthetic reasons rather than commercial ones: it puts special emphasis on the aesthetic merit of the product rather than its commercial value. Discursively, it stands in direct contrast to the established industry, even when it takes place within that established industry, like when an "indie" production company is owned by (or works with) an established studio. Naficy's forges a strong connection between the artisanal mode of production and *cinema de métissage* by claiming that it "derives its accent from its artisanal and collective production modes and from the filmmakers' and audiences' deterritorialized locations." Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 23.

<sup>105</sup> Mariolina Iossa, "Imputato, Sfratti La Seconda Moglie," *Corriere Della Sera*, July 17, 1993. "Due miliardi e mezzo di spesa complessiva, è alla fase finale di montaggio. A settembre c'è la Mostra di Venezia: regista e produttori sperano in quel trampolino di lancio."

<sup>106</sup> Rachid Benhadj was born in Algeria, educated in Paris in architecture and cinematography, and an Italian citizen since 1989.

<sup>107</sup> From Variety: A Mikado release (in Italy) of a Filmart, Bongiorno Prods., David Prods. (Italy)/DD Prods. (France)/Enrique Cerezo PC Prod. (Spain) production, in association with RAI, Canal Plus, Arcapix, Capitol Films.

Redgrave, Barbora Bobulova, Sergio Rubini and Franco Nero. *Mirka* also had the rare privilege of having among its crew the three-time Oscar winner Vittorio Storaro, who had been responsible for the cinematography of such classics as *1900*, *The Conformist*, *Last Tango in Paris*, *The Last Emperor* and *Apocalypse Now*. Needless to say, *Mirka* was not an indie project and as such it was released in Rome at the movie theaters in March 2000, a premiere that was attended by Gerard Depardieu (despite the fact that his role in the film is minuscule) and reviewed by every major Italian newspaper. It even had the support of Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Vatican's Council of Culture, who wrote an op-ed in the national newspaper *Corriere della Sera* praising the film.<sup>108</sup> And yet, it was ignored by the public and was soon forgotten.<sup>109</sup> It is also worth noting that it made its first appearance in a film festival in 2005, five years after its release at the theaters.

*Giamaica* was in many ways the opposite of *Mirka*, though in the end they shared a similar fate. *Giamaica* was directed by Luigi Faccini, a well-known and respected figure in Italian cinema for the last thirty years.<sup>110</sup> He was an auteur but not a very famous director. His film was a small budget project based on the real homicide of Auro Bruni, and activist for the *Centro Sociale Corto Circuito*, who died in 1991 when a right-wing group set fire to the Centro Sociale. The film was done without any famous actors, and produced by Reic, a small production company, though it was supported in part by Rai and the state's *Fondo di Garanzia*. Like the other *films d'auteur* previously discussed, it premiered at a film festival, but not at the much coveted *Mostra*. Instead it premiered at Locarno, a respectable level festival, but of lesser standing than the *Mostra*, Cannes or the Berlinale. However, unlike all the films previously discussed which premiered at a festival, *Giamaica* was not launched simultaneously at the movie

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(International sales: Capitol, London.) Produced by Paolo Boccio, Annamaria Gallone. Executive producers, Jean-Pierre Guerin, Veronique Marchat, Jane Barclay, Sharon Harel. Directed, written by Rachid Benhadj. Camera (color, Technovision Univisium 1: 2 widescreen), Vittorio Storaro; editor, Anna Napoli; music, Safy Boutella; production designer, Gianni Quaranta; costume designer, Mario Carlini; sound (Dolby Digital), Andre Hervee. Reviewed at Quattro Fontane, Rome, March 3, 2000. Running time: 107 MIN.

<sup>108</sup> Paul Poupard, "Il Cardinal Poupard: Commuove Questo Miracolo D'amore," *Corriere Della Sera*, March 4, 2000.

<sup>109</sup> Already a week later a newspaper article in *Corriere della Sera* was making the appeal to the public to see the film given its many worthy qualities at a time when in Italy the issue of multiculturalism was extremely important: Appello per il film sugli stupri etnici, finora snobbato[...] Qual è il problema? Che questi generi di film, specie sotto carnevale, li vanno a vedere in pochi. E *Mirka*, programmato da giorni al cinema Plinius, rischia di restare in sala fino a domani quindi – se non ci sar...[sic] un'inversione di tendenza – sparire per sempre per distrazione del pubblico. E come spiega il Cardinale Paul Poupard, presidente del Consiglio pontificio della cultura, questo sarebbe un peccato: perché, questo è un film che dovrebbero vedere tutti. Specialmente i giovani." "Mirka, Il Figlio Della Guerra Chiede Aiuto," *Corriere Della Sera*, March 15, 2000.

This is not to say that the film did not make money for the companies involved in its production and distribution. Given its international co-production status, the film benefited from many different state contributions and tax exemptions in different countries, not to mention that a large amount of its productions came from Euroimages. Like mass market books, the film's rights were sold to different European markets where the name of Gerard Depardieu and Vanessa Redgrave on the front cover of the DVD was enough to guarantee a return, however modest, in the investment of its DVD distribution. A quick glance at the different DVD covers from the UK, Spain, Spain, Hungary and Turkey shows Depardieu's image or name featuring prominently despite the fact that his role was negligible.

<sup>110</sup> Co-founder of the film journal "Cinema & Film" in 1965, he was a well-respected critic who, according to Brunetta, tried to introduce into Italy modes, poetics, hypothesis and categories in the style of *Cahier du cinéma* (Brunetta, 459). He was also a fiction writer and eventually a director of serious films, which include a documentary on Enrico Berlinguer, a film on the poet Dino Campana and another one on the writer Elio Vittorini.



theaters for it lacked any distribution deals previous to its participation in the festival. It was its presence at the festival, the limited cultural capital it gained there due to its aesthetic properties, its thematic relevance and the already present (however limited) cachet that the name of Luigi Faccini carried that allowed it to get a distribution deal seven months later.<sup>111</sup> In the meantime, Faccini took his film to different local film festivals within Italy (Milan, Rome and Messina) in an attempt to create and sustain a visibility that would allow it to get a distribution deal, and once obtained, to maintain a presence at the theaters. The following year the film was taken to Germany and Sweden, and since then Faccini has shown his film whenever it was possible, whether at cultural events or retrospectives on his works, in a continuing (but ultimately futile) attempt to keep the film from disappearance into oblivion.



Figure 13: Posters of *Mirka* featuring Gerard Depardieu.

## The New Millennium

The example of *Giamaica* highlights a trend that was already visible in the mid-1990s for artisanal film projects in general and Italian films of immigration in particular: in the absence of star power and/or guaranteed wide theatrical distribution, the only way for a film to have any chance of survival (and sometimes even to simply appear) in the Italian market, it had to first gather enough cultural capital in the major and minor film festival circuits. This marks the latest shift away from the traditional and centrifugal movement of film, in which a film would be first released at movie theaters nationwide, where critical and public acclaim would propel the film to national award competition, after which the best films would be chosen to represent the nation at international competitions, such as Cannes or the Academy Awards. I call the movement centrifugal in so far that exhibition practices required the premiere of a film to be local, or in any case national, and only if success was gained was it allowed to move out towards the international arena. Furthermore, traditionally there has been the assumption that success for a film means, first and foremost, financial viability, and while international markets have always been taken into consideration, they have usually been considered ancillary at best.

In part this had to do with the rather limited ways in which film, in its celluloid form, could be distributed. The rise of cable TV and later the video tape, which once again altered the trajectory of a film's exhibition and distribution, rendered international markets more important

<sup>111</sup> Mikado at the movie theaters and Medusa for DVD. A very limited distribution without any re-releases to date.

than they had previously been as the possibility of profits increased. Even so, festival prizes were considered (within the traditional paradigm) surplus added-value rather than constitutive added-value for the lifespan of a film. The *David of Donatello* and the *Nastri d'Argento* were by far more important for the film's home video and TV distribution prospects than appearing at international film festivals. This explains why, in the early to mid-1990s, Italian cinema of immigration was making rather few and choice appearances in the film festival circuit, and only at certain A-level festivals like Venice, Cannes, Berlin, Karlovy, etc.

This is not to say that the effect a prestigious, A-level festival could have on the very lifespan of an Italian film was not known then. A good case in point is Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso* (1988). The film initially came out in Italy in November of 1988 with a weak publicity campaign and was received with tepid reviews. According to a New York Times article, "it lasted only a few days in the four or five cities where it was released, and was summarily yanked to make room for the blockbuster 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit'".<sup>112</sup> The film was released for a second time, with 30 minutes of running time edited out, at theaters in March 1989, but even then "it brought in only about \$150,000". What rescued the film was Cannes, where it won the Grand Jury Prize. The film was released after that for the third time in Italy, performing "respectably and pulling in \$2.5 million at the box office". From there it went on to win an Oscar, 2 EFA Felix, a Golden Globe, a David (to name the most important ones) and went through A-level and B-level festival circuits, making it to little known festivals like Palm Springs. Much could be said at this point about the Oscars, and the role of Miramax in promoting the nostalgic Italian cinema of the 90s - which prompted the rallying cry in Italy at that time of *habemus cinema* - but that would go beyond the point of my argument.<sup>113</sup> Mainly, that besides the sporadic Cinderella story, by and large the Italian film industry did not think of the festival circuit as one of its primary modes of distribution as late as the 1980s.

In the mid-1990s that began to change. Perhaps the change was part of a general trend in Europe, or perhaps it was a consequence of the 1994 legislation, which under Article 28 provided state funding for up to 90% of the production cost, but in the mid-1990s the film festival circuit became indispensable for Italian cinema. In fact, Elsaesser points out that "certainly since the mid-1990s, there have been few films without a festival prize or extensive exposure on the annual festival circuit that could expect to attain either general or even limited release in the cinema."<sup>114</sup> As we have seen, certain films are more than capable of turning a profit in the national market, be it because of the genre or the star power behind them (in Italy comedians have always been particularly successful: Totò, Verdone, Troisi, Benigni). However, by and large that is not the case for the great majority of films that are produced by first time directors, without any well-known actors/actresses and on topics that do not fit into the commercial formula of comedies. For those films, the festival circuit has become of enormous importance, a fact that affects the entire project. Elsaesser argues that independent filmmakers, conscious of the importance of the festival circuit, make their films with them in mind:

Films are now made for festivals, in the way that Hollywood during the studio era made its films for the exclusivity release date of first run picture palaces. Considered as a global network, the festival circuit constitutes the exhibition dates of most independent films in the first-run venues of the world market, where they can gather the cultural

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<sup>112</sup> Clyde Haberman, "'Cinema Paradiso' Blows a Kiss To the Movies," *New York Times*, January 28, 1990.

<sup>113</sup> For more information on Miramax and its influence in the dissemination of Italian films in the US in the 1990s, see Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures*.

<sup>114</sup> Elsaesser, "Film Festival Networks," 91.

capital and critical prowess necessary to subsequently enter the national or local exhibition markets on the strength of their accumulated festival successes. No poster of an independent film can do without the logo of one of the world's prime festivals, as prominently displayed as Hollywood productions carry their studio logo.<sup>115</sup>

While in these lines a dichotomy is created between the dominant Hollywood studios with their lion's share of the market, and the minoritarian independents that are seeking to carve a niche for themselves, in the Italian case almost all of its national production must be thought of as being within the "independent" side of the equation, given its minoritarian status within its own market.

Thus we see in the late 1990s a tendency of Italian cinema (of immigration) not only of timing its release date with the start of the A-level film festival circuit (Berlin in February), but also to begin moving within the exponentially expanding B-level circuits. This marks a shift from a centrifugal movement to a centripetal one, where films must start at the outer edges (film



Figure 14: *Shelter Me* poster privileging its most prominent festival participation, the Berlinale.

festivals) of traditionally conceived cinescapes in order to move back to the center (the national territory). A good case in point is Puccioni's *Shelter Me*, a film dealing with a lesbian couple that unknowingly smuggle into Italy a young Tunisian man in the back of their car as they returned from vacation in Tunisia. The film's budget was of 1,300,000 euro, of which 900,000 euro came from the *Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali* because it was deemed a film of "national cultural interest". The rest of its funding came from Programma Media Unione Europea, Euroimages and Friuli Venezia Giulia Film Commission (funding from regional government to promote the region). Shooting of the film began on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2006 and lasted for seven weeks. The film premiered at the Berlinale in February 2007 in the Panorama section.<sup>116</sup> In March it appeared at New York's New Directors – New Film Festival. In April, it appeared at the Torino International GLBT Film Festival [Turin, Italy], at the *Festival del Cinema Europeo di Lecce* (Italy, where it won its first prize) and the Berlinale in Athens (Greece). In May, it was screened at Salerno's Festival delle Culture, Seattle's International Film Festival and at Toronto's Inside Out – Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival. By the end of 2007, it had appeared in 49 festivals in over 20 different countries all over the world, including Israel, Japan, South Africa and Australia, and winning one prize at the *Festival del Cinema Europeo di Lecce* and two at *Anney Cinema Italien* (France).

Without a doubt it was because of this international exposure, and the prizes it won at Anney, that in January 2008 the film was picked up by Movimento Film for theatrical release. By then the film had acquired enough cultural capital to be worth investing in its distribution, but to a very limited extent: on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January of 2008, it opened with only ten copies. By comparison, that year's "cinepanettone", or Christmas comedy, opened with 592 copies.<sup>117</sup> Yet despite its scarce presence at the theaters, the cultural capital acquired from the festival circuit

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>116</sup> According to the Berlinale website, the films for the Panorama section are chosen for the following reason: "The selection of films gives an overview of trends in art-house world cinema. It attempts to bridge the divide between artistic vision and commercial interests... films with controversial subjects of unconventional aesthetic style." [http://www.berlinale.de/en/das\\_festival/festival\\_sektionen/panorama/index.html](http://www.berlinale.de/en/das_festival/festival_sektionen/panorama/index.html)

<sup>117</sup> That year's Cinepanettone was *Natale a rio* (Neri Parenti, 2008). *Shelter Me* also opened in Spain in February of 2008.

and the favorable critical reception in Italy launched the film towards Italy's top movie awards: in June, it picked up a *Nastro d'Argento* and, in July, a Golden Globe (Best New Actress), not to mention that it went on to win two more minor festival prizes. That year it was also nominated for a *David di Donatello* (Best Actress) and for a second Golden Globe (Best Actress). To date, the film has appeared in 92 film festivals, it has been mobilized as a GLBT film, an Italian Film, a European film, an Independent/Art House film, and a film of controversial issues, thus exploring as many of its facets of identity as possible to gain as much exposure as possible.<sup>118</sup> To that effect, the film has many titles, which not only speak to the international markets it moved through, but also to the different inflections the film wanted to create for itself. The alternate titles are: *Anis Tra di Noi* (Anis among/between us), *Ritorno* (return), *Shelter Me*, *Zuflucht*, *L'abri*, *Abrigo*, *Úkryt* and *Anis Entre Nós*. It is also worth noting that most of its nominations and prizes were for the actress Antonia Liskova, a fact that reinforces the autopoiesis aspect of the film festival circuit which Elsaesser identified; by awarding/rewarding the same aspect of a film, the festival network shows the internal consensus that simultaneously confers value on the film as well as on the festival circuit.<sup>119</sup>

Another film that follows the same pattern is Carmine Amoroso's *Cover Boy: L'ultima rivoluzione*. The film, which deals with the story of a Rumanian immigrant, his friendship with a closeted Italian man, and his subsequent rise to fame as a visual product for the consumption of Western capitalism, was produced in 2006 (like *Shelter Me*). It premiered at a minor festival in October 2006 and continued on to 40 more festivals before its theatrical release date in Italy; March 21 2008. Before its theatrical release, it won 14 film festival prizes and traveled to different parts of the world. Since its premiere in 2006, the film has appeared in 81 film festivals all over the world (though in none of the premiere festivals), has won 32 prizes and has been nominated for 6 awards, including one Silver Ribbon, 2 Golden Globes and 2 *David di Donatello*. It was picked up for DVD distribution by Medusa and the DVD has been on sale since July 2 2008. The film has also been aired in pay per view channels since January 2009 at the modest average of two times a month, none of which would have been possible without the film festival circuit.<sup>120</sup>

Even though it is obvious that its relative success at the film festival circuit is what allowed this film to be distributed at the movie theaters two years after it was made, it would be erroneous to claim wide theatrical success. The cultural capital the film was able to accumulate was relatively modest, particularly in comparison with Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso*. Even compared with *Shelter Me* - which appeared at the Berlinale and Karlovy, and won two Ancecy prizes, one Silver Ribbon and one Golden Globe - it didn't do as well. Thus when it came out at the theaters, it did so in only three screens nationwide, achieving a maximum of 8 screens. This fact highlights the reality of Italy's migrant films (whether it deals thematically about im/migrants or not), which is that the migratory itineraries taken along the film festival circuits and networks are mostly a matter of necessity, of survival.

At this point I hope it has become clear that though the term cinema of immigration calls forth specific thematic concerns and points towards evolving social and political realities in Italy, it does not and cannot stand for a rigid cinematic genre, and that its movement is subject to patterns that affect the entire film industry in Italy. However, conventions that tie certain

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<sup>118</sup> [http://www.cinemaitaliano.info/film/00503/festival/Shelter Me.html](http://www.cinemaitaliano.info/film/00503/festival/Shelter%20Me.html)

<sup>119</sup> Elsaesser, "Film Festival Networks," 101-102.

<sup>120</sup> In 2010 it aired 7 times, in 2011 it aired 2 times, in 2012 it aired once. It must be noted that it always did so in *terza visione*, or between 11pm and 6am.

plotlines and themes with certain cinematic styles, have in the past (particularly in the 1990s) built a strong association between cinema of immigration with *cinema d'impegno*, thus in practice determining its early itineraries. Over time, this "tie" has loosened, allowing cinema of immigration to be presented in different styles and in different genres, including the profitable genre of comedy. Cristina Comencini's *Black and White* (2008) is a good example of the capacity of cinema of immigration to branch over more popular cinematic genres and thus achieve a wide national audience.<sup>121</sup> Released in January 11 2008, all over Italy with 208 copies, the film stayed on screens until October of that year. By then it had picked up 2 *David di Donatello* nominations (Best Director, Best Sound), 3 *Nastri d'Argento* nominations (Best Producer, Best Sound and Best Supporting Actress) and had been picked up for DVD distribution by O1 Distribution . It even appeared in 20 minor festivals for good measure, though any added-value it picked up there was rather a surplus than constitutive given its success in the national market. While its commercial success can be attributed to different factors, the fact that it was a comedy is perhaps the most significant for the discourse of multiculturalism in Italy, for it may indicate that Italian culture is reaching a point of being able to engage the topic of immigration from different angles.<sup>122</sup> However, conventions are strong, and though comedies like *Black and White* and *Lezione di Cioccolato* (2007) have appeared recently, the political climate of Italy continues to perpetuate the link between immigration and *cinema d'impegno* as it continues to treat the phenomenon as an "issue", a problem to be dealt with in today's Italy. This means that by and large cinema of immigration will continue to travel to the outer rims of the cinema universe, traveling in a centripetal pattern through the film festival circuits, in the hope of gathering enough momentum to have a successful run in the national market.

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<sup>121</sup> In a manner that is indicative of the early stage of development of the discourse of multiculturalism in Italy, the title stands for "Black and White;" a title that is not particularly sophisticated and one that unwittingly mobilizes problematic dichotomies.

<sup>122</sup> Other factors to consider are the notoriety of the director, and the fact that its producer was Ricardo Tozzi – a giant in the industry in general and in distribution in particular (founder of Cattleya) – who also happens to be the husband of the director.

TABLE 2:

Film	Theatrical Release Italy	Film Festival	DVD
Pummaro (Placido, 1990)		Cannes (Un Certain Regard: May 13 1990), Edinburgh (Aug 1990), Montreal (Cinema of Today and Tomorrow: Aug-Sep 1990).	December 1, 2005, Cecchi Gori (Italia)
Another Life (Mazzacurati, 1992)	September 8 1992	Shown at Venice Film Festival (Window on Italian Cinema) September 1-12, 1992.	None
Clandestini nella Citta (Bivona, 1992)		None.	VHS, DVD special order from COE
A Soul Divided in Two (Soldini, 1993)	Italy: Sept 8 1993, Netherlands: Sept 1 1994, Sweden: Oct 7 1994, Germany: Nov 1995	Venice (Competition: Aug 13-Sep 11 1993) WON Volpi Cup and Premio Pasinetti, Toronto (Sept 14 1993).	Nov 4 2008, Dolmen Home Video, PAL
Article 2 (Zaccaro, 1994)	No known distributor: Date Nov 11 1993 provided by ANICA: poss end of prod.	Berlin Film Festival (Panorama section, Feb 10 1994), Karlovy (Czech Rep, July 1994), Trento (July 1994) Annecy 1994 (in concorso, July 1994).	None
Terra di Mezzo (Garrone, 1996)		Torino International Festival of Young Cinema (Nov 1996: Ciputti Award and Special Jury). Sacher Film Festival (May 2 1997).	October 20 2009, Fandango (Italy)
Vesna Goes Fast (Mazzacurati, 1996)		Venice (Competition, August 1996), Toronto (Sept 11 1996), Belgrade (Jan 1997), Palic (Yugoslavia, July 1997)	PAL (out of print)
Ritorno a Tunisi (Bivona, 1997)		N/A	VHS, DVD special order from COE
Guests (Garrone, 1998)		Venice (Perspectives, August 1998), Rotterdam International (Main Program, January 1999), Angers European First Film Festival (?).	October 20 2009, Fandango (Italy)
Giamaica (Faccini, 1998)	April 16 1999	Locarno Film Festival (August 1998).	PAL (out of print)
Mirka (Benhadj, 2000)		Thessaloniki (Greece).	Special Order COE (Ita), STREAM IN SPAIN
Bell'Amico (D'Ascanio, 2002)	<b>May 16 2003</b>	Torino FF (Nov 2002), Monte Carlo Comedy FF (11/02, WON), Visione Italiane (Feb '03) Grosseto (2/03), Vieste FF (7/'03), Bimbi Belli (7/03) New Mediterranean Cinema (Montpellier, 10/'03), Officinema (2/04), Clorofilla FF (8/04) N.I.C.E. (SF, 11/'04), Tallin Black Night FF (Estonia, 11/06).	Oct 28 2003, Cecchi Gori Home Video
Saimir (Munzi, 2004)	April 29 2005: 16 prints x 2weeks, then 7 for 2x. August 26 2005: 1 print WON 6 Festival Prizes by release date, 14 total	<b>50 Festivals, 20 Prizes (Nastri, Venice), 12 Nominations (4 Nastri, 2 David, EFA, Golden Globe):</b> Grosseto (2/2004, Wins). Venice FF (8/2004, Wins), Sulmona Cinema (11/04, Wins), Salerno (11/04, Wins), Cape Town World Cinema (11/04), Angers (fr, 1/05 Wins), Berlinale (2/2005), Buster Children's (Den), Annecy Italien (9/05, Wins 2 prizes), (fr), Annonay (2/06, Wins), N.I.C.E. (Russia, New York, SF).	April 12 2006, 01 Distr. PAL
Lettere dal Sahara (Da Seta, 2004)	Sept 1 2006: 4 Prints, up to 9 Prints a week later; never more. Oct: 3 prints, Nov: 2 prints 2 weeks. Dic: 1, Feb/March: 1 print x 1week each month	<b>32 Festivals, 3 Prizes (Venice), 2 Nominations:</b> Venice (August 2006, Out of Competition/Special Event, <b>Wins</b> ), Sao Paolo (Oct 2006, <b>Wins</b> ), Mar de la Plata, Midnight Sun (Finland), MedFilm (Rome), Cape Town, Jerusalem, Annecy, Marseille, Zagabria (Slovenia), Bosnia, Istanbul, Atlanta, Bangalore.	March 21 2007, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment (Italia)
Il Tramite (Reali, 2004)	Never Has	Giornate Professioni di Cinema (12/2003), Cannes Film MARKET (May14 2004), Salento International Film Festival (Sep 16 2004).	October 25 2005, Picture This! (USA)
Pane Nudo (Benhadj, 2005)	May 26 2006: unknown # prints	Montreal World Film Festiva (September 3 2005), Montpellier Mediterranean Film Festival (October 23 2005).	Nov 7 2006, Millennium Storm (Italy)
Quando Sei Nato (Giordana, 2005)	May 13 2005: 231 Prints. Lasted until September on theaters.	<b>37 Festivals, 8 Prizes, 8 Nominations (David, 2 Nastri, Globo d'Oro):</b> Cannes (May 2005, Wins Francois Chalais Prize), Chicago, Paris, Rio, Tokyo, Mexico, Seattle, Annecy, Villerupt, Jerusalem...	Nov 16 2005, 01 Distribution (Ita), July 3 2006, Studio Canal (Fra), NTSC Region 1 & 4 (latinamerica)

Il Segreto di Rahil (Bomoll, 2005)	Never Has	<b>6 Festivals:</b> Syracuse International FF (October 2005), Accade Domani: Nuovo Cinema Italiano (June 2006), Raindance (London, Sept 2006), Maremitraggio (Trieste, June 2007), Med Film Festival (Rome, Nov 2007), Tropea Film Festival (Sept 2009).	August 21 2007, Vanguard Cinema (USA), Available on Netflix
La Sconosciuta (Tornatore, 2006)	October 20 2006: 297 Prints. Lasted until October 2007 on theaters.	<b>47 Festivals/awards, 23 prizes, 30 other nominations (Oscars, 3 EFA, 4 Nastri, 8 David):</b> Festival Internazionale del Film di Roma (October 2006), Capri, Brussels, Taormina, Moscow, Annecy, Sao Paulo, Villerupt, Bergen, MittleCinema, Paris, JamesonDublin, Miami, Minneapolis, Seattle, Jerusalem, Italian Australian, Cathay, St. Louis, Grenoble, Italian FF in India.	April 18 2007, Medusa, (Ita), July 21 2009, Image Entertainment, USA, Novem 10 2008, Universum Film (Germ) March 24 2010, Medusa, Bluray (It)
Lezioni di Volo (Archibugi, 2007)	March 16 2007: 147 Prints. Lasts until August.	<b>16 Festivals, 2 prizes, 5 nominations (Nastri e David):</b> Bolzano (April 2007), Accade Domani, Giffoni, Tagliacozzo, Molise, Montreal, Haifa, MittelCinemaFest (Hgry), L.A., Istanbul, Tokyo, Stockholm, N.I.C.E.(SF & NYC), India, UK.	October 24 2007, 01 Distribution.
Io, L'altro (Melliti, 2007)	May 18 2007: 60 Prints. Lasted until August	<b>36 Festivals, 12 Prizes, 3 Nominations:</b> <u>Grauman's Chinese Theater @ L.A. (Feb 22 2007)</u> Cannes (Film Market, 5/17/2007), EU Market (Ger), Cambridge, San Luis Cine (Arg), SF, NYC, Moscow, Rome, Annecy, Heifa, South Africa, Denver, India, Dubai.	January 16 2008, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment
Lezioni di Cioccolato (Cupellini, 2007)	Nov 23 2007: 209 Prints. Lasts until May 2008.	<b>31 Festivals to date, 9 Prizes, 8 nominations (Globi d'Oro e Annacy):</b> Montecarlo (11/2007), Montpellier, Villerupt, Annecy, Italian Australian, N.I.C.E. (SF, NYC), LA, Tunis, New Zealand, SF/NYC. MOST of them are local Italian Fest or French ones. Did not travel much.	March 17 2008, Universal Pictures Video
Shelter Me (Puccioni, 2006)	January 18 2008: 10 Prints. Jan, Feb, May, July, August. Last 3 months only 1 print available	<b>86 Festivals, 7 Prizes, 2 nominations (David and Golden Globe):</b> <b>Berlinale</b> (2/2007), New Directors (NYC, 3/07), Torino Intern GLBT (5/07), Lecce (Wins 1, 4/07), Athens, (4/07), Seattle, Toronto Lgay FF (5/07), Sidney, SF, NYC, Milano (6/07), Philadelphia, LA, <b>Karlovy</b> , Durban (S.Africa) [7/07]. Vancouver, Norway, (8/07). Raindance (UK), German, Rio de Janeiro, Barcelona, <b>Annecy</b> (9/07). Tampa, Seattle, Washington DC, Albuquerque, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Sao Paulo, Turkey, Rochester, Haifa (Israel), Madrid, Villerupt, Copenhagen, Montellier [Oct 2007].	Oct 7, 2008, Wolfe Video, USA. Oct 22 2008, 01 Distribution (Italy). June 24 2008, Salzgeber & Co (Germany). Feb 16 2010, Arcades Video (France).
Black and White (Comencini, 2008)	January 11 2008: 280 Prints. Lasted until Octer 2008	<b>26 Festivals to date, 1 prize, 8 nomins (3 Nastri and 2 David):</b> La Primavera del Cinema Italiano (4/08), Grande Cinema Italiano, Ciname di Barriera, Accade Domani, [6/08], Haifa (Israel), talian Australian (Sydney,9/08), San Luis Cine (Arg), [10/08], Mostra del Cinema a Zagabria (Slovenia, 11/08), European Union FF (Singapore, 5/09)	July 2 2008, 01 Distribution, PAL
Cover Boy (Amoroso, 2006)	March 21 2008: 3 prints. Up to 8 prints in April (4th-10th). Lasted until October 2008. Re-released for 2 weeks Jan 2009	<b>81 Festivals to date, 32 prizes, 6 nominations (Nastri, 2 Golden Globes, 2 David):</b> Rome (Sept/Oct-2006), Salerno (11/06), Grosseto (11/06), Rotterdam (1/07), Palm Springs (1/07), Turin, Transilvania (Rom), Moscow, Naples, Krakowski (poland), Durban (S.Afr), Festroia (Port), Barcelona, Warsaw, Valencia, Braunschweig, Argentina (LGTB), Sao Paulo, Zagabria (Slovenia), Belgrade, Istanbul.	Jul 2 2008, Medusa Home Ent, PAL
Il Resto della Notte (Munzi, 2008)	July 11 2008: 61 prints. Lasts until January 2009.	<b>39 Festivals to date, 4 prizes:</b> Cannes (5/2008, Quinzaines des Realisateurs), Castiglioncello (6/08), Cinema da Cannes a Roma (6/08), Accade a Domani: Nuovo Cinema Italiano (6/08), Toronto, Sydney, Annecy, , Annecy, Sao Paulo, Mexico city, Haifa, Flanders, Villerupt, LA, Paris, Madrid, Dubai, N.I.C.E (SF, NYC), Hong Kong, New Zeland.	Dec 3 2008, 01 Distribution, PAL
Mar Nero (Bondi, 2008)	January 2009: opens with 4 prints. Reaches max 10 prints (20-26/feb). Lasts until Oct with 1 or 2 prints.	<b>68 Festivals to date, 15 prizes, 5 Nominations (Nastri e David):</b> <b>Locarno (Aug 2008, Wins 3 prizes)</b> 2008: Giornate del Cin Eu, Warszawski FF, BFI London, Villerupt (Wins 2x), Montpellier, Denver (Wins 1), Med FF (Rome, Wins 1), Salerno, Madrid, Cinema Miracolo (paris), Costa Iblea (Sicily, Wins 1). 2009: Palm Springs, N.I.C.E. (SF & NYC), Dublin, Cleveland, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Transilvania, Munich, Montova, Haifa, Mumbai, Istanbul, Atlanta	Dec 2 2009, 20th Century Fox Home Ent, PAL

## Epilogue: Beyond the Festival, Digital Media

Though it is true that in relation to the "home" country, films that go on the film festival circuit follow a centripetal pattern, ultimately hoping to gather enough cultural capital to have a successful theatrical run and DVD release in the home country (i.e. Italy), it would be erroneous to think that this is the only effect the festival has on the distribution of a film. If truly "a film comes to a festival, in order to be catapulted beyond the festival,"<sup>123</sup> then that "beyond" reaches farther than the country of production and further than the national theatrical and DVD release. Let us look at the film *Shelter Me* once again as an example.

Given the limited theatrical release the film *Shelter Me* obtained in Italy, it is best to look at its other distribution modes to fully grasp the effects the film festival circuit had on its lifespan. According to a news article posted on February 16, 2007 on the Italian film website [www.cinemaitaliano.info](http://www.cinemaitaliano.info), at the European Film Market of the Berlinale, Wide Management of Loic Magneron sold the American distribution rights to Wolfe Releasing. The information is corroborated by the film information posted at Amazon.com for the DVD, now under the English title *Shelter Me*, which was released on October 7, 2008, as well as by the website [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com). That same year the film was released in Germany by Salzgeber & Co. Medien GmbH on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June under the title *Shelter Me: Zuhause*. In Spain the DVD was released by Eurocines on July 8, 2008. In Italy the DVD was distributed by 01 Distribution Home Video and released on the October 22, 2008, and is currently available through all major commercial vendors. In France it was released by Arcades Video, and though the information provided by Amazon.fr specifies that its DVD release-date is February 16, 2010, it is very likely that it was released much earlier and that the 2010 is a second print. In the UK the film is available through Amazon.co.uk, but oddly enough it is the American/Canadian version (NTSC) and not a British or even a European one.



Figure 6: German, French and America Posters for *Shelter Me*.

<sup>123</sup> Elsaesser, "Film Festival Networks," 97.



Another format to consider is web-based. In the US, *Shelter Me* is available as a DVD through Netflix, the largest web-based DVD rental company in the world.<sup>124</sup> However, on top of offering the film in DVD format, it also allows its members to directly stream the film into their Netflix ready devices such as their computer, Xbox, SPS 3, and Wii (to name the best known ones).<sup>125</sup> Netflix chooses its titles based upon a multi-prong approach which at the most basic level can be broken down into two categories: awards and critics. A third option should be considered, which is popularity at the box-office. This third option is perhaps the most common-sense, but also the most invisible one in so far that one would just expect a film like *The Amazing Spiderman* (Webb, 2012) to be offered by Netflix (currently at #12 in Netflix Top 100 films) because it was so immensely popular even though it did not make much of an impression with critics or awards.<sup>126</sup> However, when it comes to picking films via critics and awards, Netflix is much more methodical, and more importantly, it mobilizes the very selecting mechanisms it uses to pick films as promotional tools as well. In other words, Netflix quite explicitly embraces the cultural capital a film acquires through its reception in film festivals and newspapers reviews, and uses it simultaneously as criteria for purchasing the product and as a promotional tool.

Within the Netflix interface one can click on a tab labeled “browse DVDs”. Within it there are several tabs that mark different ways one could browse through their collection: Genres, New Releases, Netflix Top 100, Critics’ Picks and Award Winners. Critics’ Picks allows you to browse films that have been reviewed by critics from the following major American publications: Boston Globe, Entertainment Weekly, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle, The New York Times and USA Today. All of these publications review not only films at the theater, but also films shown at the various film festivals that take place in those metropolitan areas. Some of the highest rated films are offered right away, but within the Critics’ Picks space, there is right away the possibility of browsing by Featured Critic, Major Publication, Online Review Sites and by Genre. Under the Genre tab, and quite visible from the moment one enters the Critics’ Picks is “foreign”. While there is much to be said about the underlying nation-building mechanisms that are in place once one enters the *foreign* tab, at the very least this system of categorization allows for such films to be distinctly accessible, and not be lost among the main body of films. Every film under the Critics’ Picks rubric has underneath the name of the film and the stars received, the name of the critic and the name of the publication where it was reviewed (which works as a link to it). The Award Winners tab groups films according to eight distinct awards: Academy Awards, AFI, Sundance Film Festival, Independent Spirit Awards, Razzie Awards TIME Magazine List, BAFTA and Golden Globe Awards. Within each Award, there is the option to browse films based upon individual categories, such as Best Picture.

While it is not clear which itinerary brought *Shelter Me* to Netflix (was it a review in the San Francisco Chronicle or the New York Times?), it is important to acknowledge the possibility for wide American distribution that is potentially attainable through this Critic-Awards-Netflix

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<sup>124</sup> According to their website, “Netflix is the world’s leading Internet television network with more than 33 million members in 40 countries enjoying more than one billion hours of TV shows and movies per month, including original series.” As of August 2010, Netflix had surpassed the two billionth DVD shipping mark. <https://signup.netflix.com/MediaCenter>

<sup>125</sup> The ability to stream the film is not permanent. It seems that Netflix buys the right to stream certain movies for a specific period of time. At this time, March 2013, the film is no longer available via their streaming services, though one can still get the DVD via mail.

<sup>126</sup> *The Amazing Spiderman* (Webb, 2012) held the #12 spot in Netflix Top 100 films for the period of August 2012—January 2013.

connection. Though it is not a new phenomenon for films that win an Oscars to do well in retail, or for traditional movie rental businesses to have a “foreign” or “Oscars” section, the multiple-prong approach Netflix uses opens up the possibility for little known films to enter the largest DVD distribution venue in the United States. Furthermore, Netflix’s system of recommendation, based upon the viewing practices of its patrons, allows Netflix titles to be continually visible to potential consumers. *Shelter Me* will continually be suggested to people who have seen or love to see the actors Maria de Medeiros, Antonia Liskova, Mounir Ouadi, the director Marco Puccioni or the genres of Foreign, Foreign Dramas, Foreign Gay & Lesbian, Italian Language, Italy, Foreign Languages and Foreign Regions.

And yet the recommendation system adopted by Netflix, similar to other internet distributors like Amazon, also points to certain limitations: recommendations tend to involve certain keywords, such as “foreign” and “Italian”. Like film festivals, which tend to cater to a particular “film festival audience”, Netflix seems to cater to a perceived audience of foreign-film lovers. It could be said that this system perpetuates the dichotomy between “commercial” and “art” cinema, between Hollywood studios and foreign cinema. It could even be said, with great indignation, that such discursive practices ghettoize non-English-speaking films. However, that very discursive “ghetto” is what keeps these films visible by buffering them against the relentless waves of the free market, which are inundated with American products. For better *and* for worse, this is an extension of Elsaesser’s “hall of mirrors, in which recognition, imaginary identity and mis-recognition enjoy equal status, creating value out of pure difference,” creating commercial viability out of labels.<sup>127</sup>

The last place to consider, and perhaps the richest source for future research as it has immense potential, is the world of free (and perhaps illegal) streaming of content over the internet.<sup>128</sup> This is a vast topic that deserves its own paper, as multiple lines of inquiries and implications are deeply imbricated within it: legal, spectatorship, production, financial, authorship, etc. At the time of this chapter, I am not familiar with any streaming system other than the ones in place for American consumption, where the visual product is mostly in English, with the notable exception of Anime (which comes with English subtitles). Keeping the limits of my current knowledge about this sector in mind, it is worth noting that *Shelter Me* was viewable in its entirety via YouTube for at least a year, and that by August 2010 it had accumulated over 5,000 views. By the same date, the film had received 3,402 reviews in Netflix, a number that is indicative of the many times the film was rented since not everyone that rents the film reviews it, however it does provide with a base number. As of March 2013, the film’s reviews on Netflix have jumped to 7,550. It is obvious that the numbers of both Netflix and YouTube are in themselves not sufficient to claim that this film has reached a worldwide success, yet they are indicative of the deep impact the film festival circuit can have on the visibility of an independent Italian film.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, 46.

<sup>128</sup> *Shelter Me* can be downloaded as a torrent from sites like PirateBay ([http://thepiratebay.se/torrent/4365825/Shelter\\_Me\\_Shelter\\_Me\\_-\\_Anis\\_tra\\_di\\_noi](http://thepiratebay.se/torrent/4365825/Shelter_Me_Shelter_Me_-_Anis_tra_di_noi)), which curiously enough, never fail to include the film festival pedigree of the film in the file’s description.

<sup>129</sup> In comparison, *The Amazing Spiderman* (Webb, 2012), obtained over 43,000 views in less than six days, from February 25 to March 3 2013. Given the profile of the film, it is likely that this particular link (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLMw6GxkY0k>) won’t be live for much longer—days really—but major Hollywood blockbusters are engaged in a constant game of cat and mouse so that as soon as one link is taken down, another one goes up.

For better or for worse, Hollywood continues to be the dominant force in cinema, the point of reference whether in the positive or negative sense as the 2005 title of Elsaesser's book insinuates - *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*. In the face of this economic giant, a giant that takes the lion's share of many European national markets, alternative structures of production, distribution and exhibition have evolved, the film festival circuit being perhaps one of the most important ones. Its effects are far reaching, and to the world of independent cinema it has become the most important venue of gathering visibility and thus the best chance they have for success. In the Italian case, it has become the most viable route for the survival of most of its national output. This includes the growing 'genre' of cinema of immigration, which has benefited from its close association with Italy's *cinema d'impegno* - a political, realist cinema that traces its origins to Italian neorealism. In the light of these economic realities, apart from the successful comedies and other films that succeed based on their star power, the only chance most Italian (independent) films have is to become migrants themselves, exploiting the good name and conventions inherited from their neorealist forefathers as they seek to gather enough cultural added-value to be allowed to come home.

## Filmography

Film	Director	Year	Producers
<i>Tomato</i>	Placido, Michele	1990	Cineuropa 92, Numero Uno ('84-'92), Rai.
<i>Another Life</i>	Mazzacurati, Carlo	1992	Erre Produzione, RaiDue.
<i>Clandestini nella città</i>	Bivona, Marcello	1992	Oltremaraudiovisivi, Maker Group-COE. Not found at IMDB.
<i>A Soul Divided in Two</i>	Soldini, Silvio	1993	Aran, Mod (France), PiC. Film (Switzerland), Euroimages Fund, Departement Federal de L'interieur, Televisione Svizzera Italiana, Television Suisse-Romande, Reteitalia.
<i>Article 2</i>	Zaccaro, Maurizio	1994	Bambu, SIRE production. RetelItalia, Mikado. (Int sales: Italtoons Corp., N.Y.), contribution by Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo.
<i>Terra di mezzo</i>	Garrone, Matteo	1996	Archimede.
<i>Vesna Goes Fast</i>	Mazzacurati, Carlo	1996	Cecchi Gori Group, IMA (Fr).
<i>Ritorno a Tunisi</i>	Bivona, Marcello	1997	M.B. C.O.E
<i>Guests</i>	Garrone, Matteo	1998	Archimede.
<i>Giamaica</i>	Faccini, Luigi	1998	Rai, Reiac, <u>MiBAC</u> .
<i>Mirka</i>	Benhadj, Rachid	2000	D.D (Fr), Bongiorno(It), Filmart, Enrique Cerezo (Spain), <u>MiBAC</u> , Euroimages.
<i>Bell'amico</i>	D'Ascanio, Luca	2002	Sorpasso, Buskin.
<i>Saimir</i>	Munzi, Francesco	2004	Orisa, Pablo, <u>MiBAC</u> , Programma Media Unione Europea.
<i>Lettere dal Sahara</i>	Da Seta, Vittorio	2004	Metafilm, A.S.P., <u>MiBAC</u> .
<i>Il tramite</i>	Reali, Stefano	2004	Lantia Cinema & Audiovisivi, Rai, Gianlo's Film - Tv, <u>MiBAC</u> .
<i>Pane nudo (El Khoubz el hafi)</i>	Benhadj, Rachid	2005	A.E. Media, Paladin, Progetto Visivo, Esse&Bi Cinematografica, <u>MiBAC</u> .
<i>Quando sei nato</i>	Giordana, Marco Tullio	2005	Cattleya, Babe (Fr), Aquarius, ONCE YOU ARE BORN FILMS (U.K.), Rai.
<i>Il segreto di Rahil</i>	Bomoll, Cinzia	2005	Self-produced by Cinzia Bomoll.
<i>La sconosciuta</i>	Tornatore, Giuseppe	2006	Medusa, Manigolda (Fr), Sky (Financing), Sky Cinema.
<i>Lezioni di volo</i>	Archibugi, Francesca	2007	Cattleya, Babe(Fr), Rai, Aquarius(UK), Khussro (India), <u>MiBAC</u> .
<i>Io, l'altro</i>	Melliti, Mohsen	2007	Sanmarco, Treepictures, Pulp Video, Passworld.
<i>Lezioni di cioccolato</i>	Cupellini, Claudio	2007	Cattleya, FaroFilm.
<i>Shelter Me</i>	Puccioni, Marco Simon	2006	Adesifn (Fr), Intel film, Eurimages, MEDIA Programme, Friuli Venezia Giulia Film Commission, <u>MiBAC</u> (9,000,000 Euro).
<i>Black and White</i>	Comencini, Cristina	2008	Cattleya, RaiCinema, <u>MiBAC</u> .
<i>Cover Boy</i>	Amoroso, Carmine	2006	Paco, Filand, Lombardia Film Commission, Roma/Lazio FC, <u>MiBAC</u> .
<i>Il resto della notte</i>	Munzi, Francesco	2008	Bianca, Rai, Torino Piemonte Film Commission, <u>MiBAC</u> .
<i>Mar nero</i>	Bondi, Federico	2008	Kairos, Rai, HiFilm(Rom), Manigolda, <u>MiBAC</u> , Programma Media, Toscana F.C., Centrul Național al Cinematografiei România, Televiziunea Română.



## Chapter 4: Accented Italian Cinema

*“Nell’ascoltare il supplemento del silenzio – quello che una volta era considerata non senso, inintelligibile e indecifrabile – posso iniziare a capire che il mio linguaggio, la mia identità, la mia storia, la mia voce hanno sempre richiesto l’espulsione violenta verso l’oblio di qualsiasi oggetto di disturbo. Ora, poiché non posso parlare per questo silenzio, per questo ‘altro’, posso però lasciare un posto per esso: come lo spazio tra il respiro delle mie parole – essenziale ma solitamente dimenticato”*

- Iain Chambers

Is there such a thing as accented Italian cinema? Ever since the premiere of Michele Placido’s *Tomato* (1990), films dealing explicitly with the immigrant experience have steadily grown in numbers and in accordance with broader trends in the international film festival circuit, and the politics of multiculturalism in the West.<sup>1</sup> They have become a constant, if minor, category in Italian cinema. Over the years, different terms have been used to describe this growing body of films, such as *cinema sull’immigrazione* (cinema on immigration), *cinema del métissage*, or even de/counter-colonization cinema.<sup>2</sup> All of these terms have been used sporadically and without any real consistency, and because they are theme based, they have not created a discursive patrimony that accounts for anything more than the contact zone between immigrants and native Italians. Specifically, there has been no attempt to account for the production of immigrant filmmakers the way *Beur* and *Banlieu* did in France, or Black Cinema in Britain. Beyond the thematic designation of ‘cinema of immigration,’ no appellation has evolved that would account for the social position of the migrant filmmaker. There is no name that simultaneously sets apart the filmmaking practices of immigrants from the Italian cinematic mainstream, while unifying them with similar filmmaking practices in other European countries. At most, individual films have been singled out, dealt with in piecemeal for the sake of tangential, though related, agendas such as Mediterranean studies, the African diaspora, European road movies, post-Cold War politics, without teasing out broader patterns.

In this chapter, I look at Hamid Naficy’s work, and use his notion of “accented cinema” as an organizing principle to break apart the thematic umbrella of ‘cinema of immigration’ along the lines of authorship, and articulate a division with deep political and aesthetic implications. I keep “cinema of immigration” as the general catch-all phrase for films that foreground immigration or multiculturalism, and suggest “accented Italian cinema” to highlight the work, regardless of the topic, produced by migrant filmmakers. In this manner, we can leave behind terms like *métissage*, which focus too much on thematic concerns, and instead we can focus on

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter “From Cinema of Immigration to Migrant Cinema” in this dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> The term *métissage* was used, in fact, to refer to all European productions either by or about ethnic/migrant minorities during the Pesaro Film Festival in 2000, and was only applied to the Italian case in passing. In fact, out of the 15 articles published from the festival, five focus on France while only one focuses on Italy. It is worth mentioning that according to Rob Burns, in 2002 Georg Seeßlen “assigned the generic label of ‘Kino der Métissage’ to films foregrounding ...intracultural tensions, win which the family frequently appears as the site where battle is waged between the old and the new culture.” This divergent understanding of *métissage* highlights the difficulties of naming this type of cinema. Alberto Zambenedetti’s “de/counter-colonization cinema”

an evolving accented sensibility that is encoded in the aesthetics of accented cinema. However, in order to map out the evolution of Italian accented cinema, it is necessary to contextualize it within a larger European/Western framework. To that end I look at other Accented European cinemas, such as Black British, *Beur* and Turkish German for patterns that can help us understand the Italian situation, and help us answer the following question: what sort of perspective does accented Italian cinema provide?

### Accented Cinema

In 2001, Hamid Naficy published *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, in which he focuses on the cinematic production of first and second-generation migrants residing in the West.<sup>3</sup> His project expands from the postwar period in the 1950s up to the new millennium, accounting for filmmakers coming from different parts of the world at different times, under divergent circumstances, and settling in different western countries. The heterogeneity of said filmmakers infuses Naficy's categorization project with certain tensions from the start, from the very first sentence of his book: "The exilic and diasporic filmmakers discussed here are 'situated but universal' figures who work in the interstices of social formation and cinematic practices".<sup>4</sup> *Situated but universal* points to the difficult balancing act between opposite forces that constantly stress Naficy's theoretical concept, forces that, on the one hand, pull towards a specificity of time and place (particularly in relation to other times and places), while, on the other, push towards broader social and historical phenomena that encompass accented cinema itself. To be more precise, accented cinema refers to socially and historically specific filmmaking practices, which nonetheless communicate, through certain tropes, much broader postmodern structures of feeling regarding exile, diaspora or ethnic existence.<sup>5</sup>

That very first sentence also highlights the centrality of the filmmaker – prior to the film or its production practices – to accented cinema. While recognizing that the state of tension in which exilic, diasporic and ethnic filmmakers has historically existed in their host countries has prevented them from becoming a "homogeneous group or a film movement," Naficy uses that very tension to characterize those filmmakers and their films by making the authorial experience of (dis)placement a constitutive aspect of their cinematic practice:

My project in this book is precisely to put the locatedness and the historicity of the authors back into authorship. To that extent, accented cinema theory is an extension of the authorship theory, and it runs counter to much of the postmodern theory that attempts to either deny authorship altogether or multiply the authoring parentage to the point of 'de-originating the utterance' ... [however] Any discussion of authorship in exile needs to take into consideration not only the individuality, originality, and personality of unique individuals as expressive film authors but also, and more important, their (dis)location as interstitial subjects within social formations and cinematic practices.<sup>6</sup>

Under such a formulation, the filmmaker emerges once again as a constitutive element to be considered when analyzing films. However, s/he emerges not as an "autonomous, transcendental being," but as a social and historical subject, whose very existence (and by extension, her/his

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<sup>3</sup> Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term "tropes" as it is used in film studies, which would be the equivalent of "topoi" in literature. It designates patterns and repetitions in characterizations, composition, mise-en-scene, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 34.

films) bear traces of postcolonial displacement and postmodern scattering. It is these traces which Naficy sees as a *style*, an accented style, based on certain structures of feeling that are “rooted in the filmmakers’ profound experiences of deterritorialization, which oscillate between dysphoria and euphoria, celibacy and celebration.”<sup>7</sup> This stylistic approach allows Naficy to simultaneously “discover common features among disparate products of differently situated displaced filmmakers from varied national origins who are living and making films in the interstices of divergent host societies,” while cutting across different groupings and categories that have separated them, such as national designations, artistic evaluations, genres or themes.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the concept of accented cinema remains rather abstract and ambiguous. Given that “the accented style is not a programmatic, already formed style” but rather an emergent structure of feeling, limited, latent, and based upon autobiographical inscription, Naficy created a list of certain tropes and aesthetic codes drawn from the vast body of films he analyses in order to give the concept specificity.<sup>9</sup> It is through these tropes and aesthetic codes that the exilic, diasporic and/or ethnic accent resonates in the films. Among the most important characteristics of accented cinema are authorial inscription, epistolary narratives, chronotopes of an idealized homeland and a repressively claustrophobic life in exile. Other major characteristics include journeying, border crossing, and identity misrecognition, multilingualism - just to name a few. These categories are also part of a broader postmodern sensibility, which is why Naficy states that though “not all postmodernist films are diasporically or exilically accented [...] accented films are to some extent postmodernist.”<sup>10</sup>

However, for those of us who work with the cinematic representation of the migrant experience and multiculturalism in Europe, the term “accented cinema” often serves as a distant point of reference. It is soon abandoned for more nation-specific terms that illustrate particular social relations between diasporic communities and their host country and culture, such as Black British, *Beur* and Turkish German Cinema. These terms have histories of their own, and in fact, they were well established by the early 2000s, when Naficy published his research. In their respective national and cultural contexts, these terms have undergone multiple phases of growth,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 26–27. Naficy counters Roland Barthes’ “death of the author” and poststructuralist theories that “privileges spectatorial reading over that of authoring,” by invoking Bordwell’s concept of “style,” particularly “group style.” According to Bordwell, a “film’s style results from a combination of historical constraints and deliberate choice,” and when the techniques resulting from such ‘combination’ expands to the works of several filmmakers, then it becomes a “group style.” In the case of accented cinema, the ‘historical constrains’ reference not so much the absolute technical possibility of cinema at any given time, but rather the relative possibility available to accented filmmakers given the social and economic realities that restrict their access to the means of cinematic production. By identifying accented cinema as a style rather than a genre, Naficy is able to put the filmmaker at the center of the discussion, but only in so far as the filmmaker is articulated as a social and historical subject, and always in relation to social and cinematic practices. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 355–357.

<sup>8</sup> Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 27. It is important to underscore that by “accented,” Naficy references the specific accent found in the works of exilic, diasporic or postcolonial ethnic filmmakers. The term is used not only because it is a term that is easy to associate with these postmodern (and mostly postcolonial) mobile bodies who are often identified not only by the way they look but also by the way they speak in contrast to some idealized national self. It is also used because it references a relationship rather than a noun or object: an accent cannot exist without the notion of a standard language against which it is measured. These filmmakers are accented in relationship to their host countries as well as standard cinematic practices. Finally, given that accented cinema references filmmakers that are part of communities in transition, the accent is not static but rather dynamic, changing as the relationships between individual, community, state, cinema, spectators, etc., evolve over time.



contestation, and evolution. For example, the term *Beur*, coined in the early 1980s, over time became *Le Rebeus*, and later still *Maghrebi*. With every name change, a symbolic point of contestation is signaled against the system's reductive tendencies, and towards a more complex notion of diasporic identity.<sup>11</sup>

### Cinema of Duty

These changes in nomenclature not only signal symbolic points of contestation, but also highlight the fact that accented cinema in the West has undergone different evolutionary phases in its filmmaking practices. Though the accented cinemas of Britain and Germany have not changed names as often as that of France, and even though each deals with specific social configurations between ethnic minorities and the dominant culture of each host country, configurations through which completely different historical power relations are mediated, their trajectories still share some common evolutionary markers. One of the earliest and most prominent modalities of accented cinema is the stage Cameron Bailey defined as "cinema of duty", which he recaps in a 1992 article as follows:

What I have previously called "cinema of duty" – social issue in content, documentary-realist in style, firmly *responsible* in intention – positions its subjects in direct relation to social crisis, and attempts to articulate 'problems' and 'solutions to problems' within a framework of center and margin, white and non-white communities. The goal is often to tell buried or forgotten stories, to write unwritten histories, to 'correct' the misinterpretations of the mainstream.<sup>12</sup>

On the one hand, what Bailey calls cinema of duty is, essentially, a cinema of contestation. Its content, style and intention challenges directly pre-existing and deeply ingrained stereotypes about ethnic or migrant communities by shifting the narrative's perspective from the dominant culture to that of the ethnic communities. Depending on the national context, the act of "talking back", of "protesting," of "countering," takes different narrative forms, but the spirit to set the record straight, to describe the real social conditions of accented individuals and communities, of giving voice to previously silenced members of society, is a common thread across the board. Cinema of duty is not necessarily accented cinema, as its defining characteristics are content, style and intention, and not authorship, but it is a (Black, *Beur*, Turkish, Chicano, African Canadian, or even progressive Left) rebuttal to the well-established and dominant discourse on race and immigration that traditionally had only talked *about* minorities, rather than *for* them, and much less *by* them.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, though cinema of duty was one of the earliest permutations of accented cinema in the West, it was also one that was abandoned as quickly as possible by

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<sup>11</sup> Carrie Tarr, "Maghrebi-French (Beur) Filmmaking in Context," *Cineaste* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 32–37.

<sup>12</sup> Cameron Bailey, "What Is the Story: An Interview with Srinivas Krishna," *CineAction* 28, no. Spring (1992): 38. Bailey's article references specifically Canadian accented cinema and cinema of duty, however, the process he describes applies to other forms of accented cinema in western countries, as the next few paragraphs point out. I would also like to point out that even though Bailey's quote implies that he has explicitly defined "cinema of duty" in a previous work, no such work is found. In fact, most literature erroneously attributes this quote to the following article: Cameron Bailey, "A Cinema of Duty: The Films of Jennifer Hodge de Silva," *CineAction* 23, no. Winter (1991 1990): 4–12.

<sup>13</sup> Not all cinema of duty is accented cinema, for often times the need to tell the story of the subaltern preceded the subaltern's access to the means of cinematic representation, and often proceeded it as well. This will be a crucial differentiation later on when discussing the specificities of Italian accented cinema.

accented filmmakers. Given its reactive and descriptive tendencies, the modality of contestation embedded within cinema of duty became a discursive and stylistic ghetto. First of all, cinema of duty aimed to correct the misinterpretations of mainstream society by *reacting* to pre-existing stereotypes of minorities as agents of (civil, social, national, religious, etcetera) disruption, as signs of social decay and perpetrators of criminality. They did so by constantly *describing* how, in reality, they were often the victims of such systems. True, compared to traditional mainstream films, they provided a more sympathetic and complex picture of the social structures in which such communities functioned as marginalized subjects, caught “in-between” worlds.<sup>14</sup> However, its unwavering focus on ethnic “subjects in direct relation to social crisis,” only served to strengthen the association between the two in the national imaginary in each respective country. While cinema of duty inverts the values of perpetrator and victim, the structure of social crisis remains intact.

Secondly, cinema of duty’s style follows its social engagement, and in its drive to “correct” misinterpretations, it relies almost exclusively on a documentary realist mode. Cinematically speaking, this choice was not an arbitrary one, but one that followed in the footsteps of Third Cinema and, further back still, Italian neorealism. By the time cinema of duty started to emerge in the West in the 1970s, particularly when made by accented filmmakers, the association between social issues, the fight for the rights of subaltern subjects, and realism had long been established, an association that in turn was further reinforced by accented cinemas. Beyond the point at which there seems to be an almost obvious association between ‘realism’ and reality, between documentary and unveiling hidden abuses of power, the cultural milieu in which cinema of duty emerged prescribed a realist style that over time became stifling to accented filmmakers who wanted to explore alternate modes of representation.<sup>15</sup> Fantasy, comedy, surrealism, action, sci-fi, etcetera, are all modes of cinematic representation that could afford different possibilities, but were barred by the perceived “seriousness” of the endeavor at hand.

Finally, the discursive and stylistic tendencies of cinema of duty tends to essentialize the migrant community it seeks to defend. For the sake of coherence, its message is often streamlined into one form of victimhood or another, erasing the complexities and contradictions experienced by ethnic individuals, as well as those of ethnic communities residing in the West.

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<sup>14</sup> The trope of multiplicity is common in the discussion of European multiculturalism, though different articulations of it allow for a different focus and thus a different conversation. For example, “double absence” allows us to focus on the trauma of migration, though an excessive focus on that absence can also lead to further isolation, or a permanent state of “in-between.” Inversely, the topic of “double occupancy,” or “hybridity,” focuses more on asserting one’s presence, and often leads to a conversation of pleasure and the positive reinforcement of multiple belongings. Abdelmalek Sayad, *La double absence: des illusions de l’émigré aux souffrances de l’immigré*, Collection Liber (Paris: Seuil, 1999); Leslie Adelson, “Against Between: A Manifesto,” in *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration 1955-2005*, ed. Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). Thomas Elsaesser, “Double Occupancy and Small Adjustments: Space, Place and Policy in the New European Cinema since the 1990s,” in *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005); Sarita Malik, “Beyond ‘The Cinema of Duty’? The Pleasures of Hybridity: Black British Film of the 1980s and 1990s,” in *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, ed. Andrew Higson (London: Cassell, 1996), 202–15.

<sup>15</sup> Of course, there were always exceptions. Jim Pines points to at least one early Black film, *Death May Be Your Santa Claus* (Dymon, 1969), which uses non-realist aesthetics, proving that “early black filmmaking was not only inventive in its approach to political (racial) themes, but also sensitive to the creative film process itself.” However, these exceptions only highlight the rule. Jim Pines, “The Cultural Context of Black British Cinema,” in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth Lindeborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 188.

In its quest, particularly in the earliest stages, to be as comprehensive as possible in representing the struggle of minorities, cinema of duty synthesizes broad heterogeneous experiences into narrow markers of ethnic identity; it turns all Black English people into Caribbean immigrants and all Turks in Germany into Muslims.<sup>16</sup> While documentaries or fiction films showing the victimization of an individual or a community by the state are necessary to counter systematic erasures and demonization, a symbolic system that lacks alternative narrative models soon becomes reductive, and the source of further stereotypes. This, in turn, facilitates the dismissal of such narratives by conservative entities as inflammatory and over simplistic, and thus loses its effectiveness in generating a dialogue between all interested parties.<sup>17</sup>

However, it would be a mistake to think of social engagement and realism, as ‘naturally’ reductive and essentialist. The tendency of cinema of duty towards homogenous narratives with a constant focus on victimization, particularly in the 1980s, is the result of historically specific pressures applied to it over time and from different points of origin in society, pressures best understood as burdens of representation and expectation.

Cinema of duty in the West has its roots in the process of decolonization and the civil rights movements it engendered in Europe and North America. It springs out of the counter culture of protest and contestation from the left side of the mainstream and within minority communities of the 1950s and 1960s. As such, and particularly when practiced by accented filmmakers, cinema of duty in the 1970s and early 1980s was a grassroots, bottom-up, movement which was forged, on the one hand, by the imperative to speak up, and on the other hand, by the difficulty of accessing the means of cinematic production. The ensuing sense of urgency generated by the clash of these opposing forces led to what became, in time, the burden of representation, as was the case in Black British Cinema:

What is at issue in this problematic is the question of power, as Judith Williamson argues in her review of *The Passion of Remembrance*: “The more power any group has to create and wield representation, the less it is required to *be* representative.” Where access and opportunity are rationed, so that black films tend to get made only one-at-a-time, each film is burdened with an ordinate pressure to be “representative” and to act, as a delegate does, as a statement that “speaks” for the black communities as a whole. Martina Attile, producer of the film, suggests that the “sense of urgency to say it all” stems less from the artistic choices made by black filmmakers and more from the materials constraints in which “sometimes we only get the *one* chance to make ourselves heard” (1986,101).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>In fact, Deniz Göktürk, Isaac Julien, and Kobena Mercer have even theorized that under certain circumstances, the constant pitting of “colored” communities and “white” culture not only helps to reinforce the “ethnicisation of minorities”, but fix the notion of ethnicity “as something that ‘belongs’ to the other alone” while leaving “white” ethnicity unquestioned and centered, as the universal point of reference. Deniz Göktürk, “Beyond Paternalism: Turkish German Traffic in Cinema,” in *The German Cinema Book*, ed. Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter, and Deniz Göktürk (London: BFI, 2002), 100–122; Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer, “De Margin and De Center,” in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth Lindeborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 194–209.

<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the constant victimization of minorities has the insidious effect of turning social awareness into a dismissive pathos, or more specifically, a condescending and patronizing attitude that passes for sympathy, fueling some of the essentializing attitudes cinema of duty set out to counter in the first place. By constantly victimizing ethnic minorities, cinema of duty locks them into a subject position whereby they are to be pitied and helped, because they are pitiful, and cannot help themselves due to their unmistakable otherness. The solution to this problem is often the divestiture of cultural otherness through a process of westernization.

<sup>18</sup> Julien and Mercer, “De Margin and De Center,” 197–198. The same point and quote is cited by Malik, “Beyond ‘The Cinema of Duty,’” 206–207. While this quote references Black British cinema, the same process

The burden of representation is thus, in the first place, the internal pressure felt by accented filmmakers in their subaltern and interstitial position in society, a pressure to bear upon their shoulders the “duty” of standing for the entire collective. Or to be more precise, to make their work speak for the whole ethnic community as it is the only voice, or one of few, that has managed to be in a position of speaking to society at large.

This bottom-up pressure is what gave these films their immediacy in the first place, but once that burden of representation became institutionalized by the politics of multiculturalism, it became a subsidy prison. Although the civil rights movements and the counter culture of the 1950s and 1960s were initially met with oppressive measures by western governments, over time the politics of the state changed from violent repression to one of accommodation. These politics of multiculturalism opened up some top-down discursive spaces and created funding mechanisms that not only welcomed, but solicited alternative and experimental cultural productions.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, the institutionalization of these representation practices also resulted in their sedimentation, as the guidelines that governed the politics of multiculturalism leaned towards static and easily recognizable forms. In fact, agencies that had the task of promoting multiculturalism in the visual arts, simply adapted already existing models of representation, i.e. cinema of duty, as their template to set up their criteria for funding projects. This means that the politics of multiculturalism in England, France and Germany were conditioned by a limited focus on the problems of integration, and continued to promote it even when the constituencies it sought to serve no longer benefited from it.<sup>20</sup>

### Black British, Beur and Turkish German Cinema

If Bailey’s cinema of duty seems to overlap greatly with Naficy’s account of accented cinema, this is because of the historical limitations of Naficy’s 2001 text, which analyses films from the 1980s and early 1990s. Though Naficy’s concept of accented cinema is rooted in the ever-changing relationship between the filmmaker and the social frameworks/networks in which s/he operates, the necessity to give his concept specificity led to a taxonomy of “components” drawn from films that were in their cinema of duty stage or barely transitioning out of it.<sup>21</sup> However, despite the fact that they overlap in matters regarding content, style and intention,

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appears in other national cinemas, such as Turkish German cinema, *Beur* and African Canadian. Emphasis in the original. The term, “burden of representation” was first appeared in Kobena Mercer, “Black Art and the Burden of Representation,” *Third Text* 4, no. 10 (March 1, 1990): 61–78.

<sup>19</sup> The convergence of grassroots film initiatives by accented filmmakers/cooperatives with emerging, state-sponsored, structures of funding is what often gave us the first feature-length films by accented filmmakers in the West.

<sup>20</sup> Cameron Bailey and Jim Pines have come to similar conclusions regarding the accommodations of the state via their politics of multiculturalism: given their limited scope and funds, it comes to be nothing more than a “management of dissent” because it succeeds only in “accommodating certain elements of change, without really altering the fundamental structures in their thinking and in their institutional practices.” This management of dissent is reminiscent of what Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino had already pointed out in 1969 regarding the relationship between the cinema of “challenge” and the system it challenged: “even anti-System art can be absorbed and utilized by the System, as both a brake and a necessary self-correction.” Bailey, “A Cinema of Duty: The Films of Jennifer Hodge de Silva,” 7; Pines, “The Cultural Context of Black British Cinema,” 184. And Irwin Silber quoted in Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, “Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema in the Third World,” *Tricontinental*, no. 14 (October 1969): 118.

<sup>21</sup> Table A.1 of *Accented Cinema* lists the components with their constituting elements. The list is three pages long. Of particular interests when it comes to the stated overlap are the chronotopes of the homeland and host country.

cinema of duty can only be a phase of accented cinema, one rooted on specific social relations and institutions that are historically determined. As circumstances change, and the relationship between accented subjects and society mutates (or evolves, depending on one's perspective), new forms of representations are explored that can no longer be called cinema of duty though they continue to be accented cinema. One's sense of duty born out of a certain burden of representation may pass, be abandoned, or even more tightly embraced, but the fact that one is accented does not change – even when the accent does. A quick look at the trajectories of Black British, *Beur* and Turkish German cinema will provide a point of reference to frame our analysis of Italian cinema.

Black British cinema emerged in the 1960s when “a handful of ‘practicing’ Black filmmakers who, with little public funding, made films such as *Jemima and Johnny* (Lionel Ngakane, 1963), *Ten Bob in Winter* (Lloyd Reckord, 1963), *Baldwin's Nigger* (Horace Ové, 1969) and *Reggae* (Horace Ové, 1970).”<sup>22</sup> During this period, most Black films were shorts or documentaries. The first feature-length Black films by both accented and non-accented filmmakers did not appear until the mid-1970s. Films such as *Pressure* (Horace Ové, 1975) and *A Private Enterprise* (Peter Smith, 1975), countered the “official race relation narrative” by providing alternative examinations of British Caribbean and British Asian identities and experiences, but were, nonetheless, perfect examples of cinema of duty.<sup>23</sup> They focused on “race relations” between blacks and whites, and often emphasized institutional (i.e. police) oppression, and at times echoed some of the identity concerns first articulated by the civil rights movement from across the Atlantic.

Even though both *Pressure* and *A Private Enterprise* were fully funded by the British Film Institute, it would be a mistake to assume that a specific mechanism to fund Black cinema was in place in the 1970s. Cinema is legally categorized as a form of art in Western Europe, and as such it is heavily subsidized. A funding mechanism aimed specifically at Black British cinema emerged only in the 1980s, and only after the issue of Black representation was brought to the fore of the political and social arena.<sup>24</sup> The new politics of multiculturalism allowed a culture of alternative film production to thrive under workshops, collectives and co-ops. This small, grant-aided industry experimented with narrative models and produced films that could continue to challenge the traditional representation of Black people. However, the fact that these groups depended financially on government agencies meant that their freedom to explore was limited, and they often battled against the system's expectations of what a Black film was supposed to be: for example, according to Sarita Malik, “it was easier to get the money to make a 16mm documentary about race than for a 35mm fictional feature.”<sup>25</sup> A shift in the mode of representation did not take place until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when films like *Handworth's Songs* (1987), opened the possibility of pleasure by subverting the form of the documentary, and more importantly, when *Bhaji at the Beach* (Chadha, 1993) obliterated generic

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<sup>22</sup> Malik, “Beyond ‘The Cinema of Duty,’” 203.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>24</sup> The publication of Nasseem Khan's influential report in 1976, “The Arts Britain Ignores,” launched Black cinema into the broader political and cultural discussion on multiculturalism, and led to the establishment of the Minority Arts Advisory Service. The “race riots” that erupted across England in the spring of 1981, further motivated the establishing of funding mechanism through preexisting film institutions (i.e. the BFI), or new venues such as Channel 4. In fact, it is at this point when the term Black emerges as a self-ascribed political designation by people of color in England.

<sup>25</sup> Malik, “Beyond ‘The Cinema of Duty,’” 206.

boundaries by incorporating “comedy, irony, pastiche and self-conscious masquerade,” turning thus away from the aesthetics of cinema of duty.<sup>26</sup>

*Beur* cinema follows a similar trajectory as Black British, but ten years later. According to Alison J. Murray Levine, “the existence of *Beur* cinema dates back to the early 1980s, when young filmmakers of Maghrebi descent began making videos and Super 8 films as part of the Mohammed Collective.”<sup>27</sup> Examples of such films include *C’est Madame la France que tu préfères?* (1981), and *Le Départ du père* (1983) by Farida Belghoul, as well as *La Vago* (1983) by Aïssa Djabri. Other films worth mentioning are Roger Le Péron’s *Laisse béton* (1983) and Abdelkrim Bahloul’s *Le thé à la menthe* (1984), films that focus on the lives of second generation North African immigrants, and are better understood as part of the social movements of the early 1980s, exemplified by the 100,000-strong ‘*Marche pour l’Egalité*’ of 1983.<sup>28</sup> However, *Beur* cinema did not come into its own until the launch of Mehdi Charef’s *Le thé au harem d’Archimède* in 1985. When the film won the prestigious Jean Vigo Prize, it drew critical attention to the production of *Beur* filmmakers, opening up channels of production and distribution that paved the way for “twenty more filmmakers of North African descent to direct a first film between 1994 and 2003.”<sup>29</sup> In many ways, *Beur* cinema has found more success in its home market than Black British cinema, and yet the problems of representation are quite similar.<sup>30</sup>

As in Black British cinema, the first generation of *Beur* films were very much cinema of duty. *Beur*’s cinema of duty phase emphasizes life in the housing projects known as *banlieues*, and puts a strong focus on the disaffected, unemployed youth of the second generation who are “conventionally represented as a generation which had lost its bearings, with no roots, no hope, no future.”<sup>31</sup> The *Beur* films made from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s are complex, and explore different forms of social interactions between immigrants of the first generation and second generation, between French society and ethnic communities, between living in the now, and the nostalgia of an idealized home. However, the films’ emphasis on the contemporary social

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<sup>26</sup> Regarding *Handsworth Songs*, Malik points out that the film, “complicated the traditional race relations documentary form by interweaving news footage from the 1985 Handsworth riots with archival newsreel of Black historiography... In developing several non-linear narratives, alternative viewpoints to those we are familiar with from the traditional riot documentaries, and an overall ‘cut’ n’ mix’ style, the film offers an unsettling yet pleasurable viewing experience... With *Handsworth Songs* and other films of the period... were trying to bring pleasure to the documentary.” This documentary foreshadows the pleasures of hybridity that comedies, such as *Bhaji at the Beach*, will bring to fiction cinema. *Ibid.*, 207. Deniz Göktürk, “Turkish Delight - German Fright: Migrant Identities in Transnational Cinema,” in *Mediated Identities*, ed. Deniz Derman, Karen Ross, and Nevena Dakovic (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Alison J. Murray Levine, “Mapping *Beur* Cinema in the New Millennium,” *Journal of Film and Video* 60, no. 3–4 (2008): 44.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Bloom, “*Beur* Cinema and the Politics of Location: French Immigration Politics and the Naming of a Film Movement,” *Social Identities* 5, no. 4 (1999): 472.

<sup>29</sup> Levine, “Mapping *Beur* Cinema in the New Millennium,” 44.

<sup>30</sup> Success is, of course, relative. *Beur* directors are more visible and perhaps in larger number than Black ones, but the relationship between accented filmmakers and mainstream film industry is still precarious. Case in point is the visibility of films of accented vs. white French filmmakers: “As indicated in the filmography, some of their films have attracted fewer than 5000 spectators in France, whereas films on similar topics by majority white filmmakers (with few exceptions) then to achieve higher viewing figures.” Carrie Tarr, *Reframing Difference: *Beur* and *Banlieue* Filmmaking in France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

realities of ethnic minorities (usually Maghreb), through a dramatic and realist mode of cinematic representation keeps them within the confines of cinema of duty.<sup>32</sup>

Then in the mid-1990s, *Beur* films started to leave behind their sad grittiness and began to explore alternate modes of representation. Even the term *Beur*, too closely associated with the thematic of cinema of duty, became a problematic term for accented filmmakers who wanted to avoid the ghettoization of such association, and turned to specific designations (such as Maghrebi and Algerian), or turned completely away from them.<sup>33</sup> Starting with Merzak Allouache's *Salut Cousin!* in 1996, Maghrebi filmmakers and writers started to use comedy as a vehicle to explore complex questions of belonging, and to look not only at the present and past, but also at the future.<sup>34</sup> Other forms of filmmaking were explored as well, such as big-budget spectacle, not to mention themes and topics that avoided the question of ethnic integration directly, but still focused on larger issues of marginalization and exclusion. However, comedy, with its power to confuse and transgress, to interpellate subjects into communities of laughter, became an important venue for accented cinema in its post cinema of duty stage.<sup>35</sup>

Like Black British and *Beur* cinemas, Turkish German cinema emerged out of a long social struggle for equality and visibility.<sup>36</sup> According to Rob Burns, Turkish German cinema has its roots in two areas of cultural practice.<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, there were the "guest-worker" (*Gastarbeiter*) focused films during the New German Cinema era of the 1970s, which include Fassbinder's classic *Angst essen Seele auf* (Ali: Fear Eats the Soul, 1974), and the lesser known *Shirins Hochzeit* (Shirin's Wedding, 1975) by Helma Sanders-Brahms. This fact puts Turkish German cinema closer to Italian cinema of immigration in so far as the work of countering the historical misrepresentation of minorities was first embraced by native progressive filmmakers, before accented filmmakers had gained access to the means of film production. On the other hand, the politics of multiculturalism was not an exclusively German cultural trend as our discussion on Black British and *Beur* cinema has made clear by now. In fact, in all three cases the general move goes from independent documentary/short projects on shoestring budgets, to feature films facilitated by various initiatives set in place to promote multiculturalism at the national level.<sup>38</sup> In Germany, according to Rob Burns, funding mechanisms were established in

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<sup>32</sup> As in Black British, and Turkish German, accented films existed alongside non-accented films, and are often grouped together as cinema of duty due their content, style and intention.

<sup>33</sup> Tarr, "Maghrebi-French (Beur) Filmmaking in Context," 32–33. The term *Beur* at first was used as thematic category to group together films about the problems of identity and integration facing second-generation immigrants from the Maghreb. Then, in a move that echoes accented cinema, the term was used more narrowly to refer just to films made by Maghrebi-French filmmakers. In the new millennium, the term has almost disappeared from cinematic discourse in France, though it is still used in academic circles in the US due to its historic specificity.

<sup>34</sup> Dinah Stillman, "Cinema Beur Comes into Its Own," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 42, no. 1/2 (Summer/Winter) (2008): 71–77. Tarr, *Reframing Difference*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> Tarr, *Reframing Difference*, 168–169. Comedies have been extremely important for individual Maghrebi actors, such as Jamel Debbouze, allowing them to flourish and become household names in a manner that problematizes the common associations between ethnic identities and film genres.

<sup>36</sup> For an in depth view of Germany and immigration through primary texts, see Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes, eds., *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Rob Burns, "Turkish-German Cinema: From Cultural Resistance to Transnational Cinema," in *German Cinema: Since Unification*, ed. David Clarke (London: Continuum, 2006), 127–50.

<sup>38</sup> Similar programs were later set in place under the auspices of the European Union in the 1990s, of particular relevance are the Eurimages and the MEDIA Programme, both of which support European film and audiovisual industries in projects that showcase broader a European culture, a scope that is multicultural in its very definition.

the 1980s to help facilitate the production of “guest-worker literature.”<sup>39</sup> This particular type of literature, according to Burns, gave priority to the authenticity of personal experience, and in doing so became a ‘literature of the affected’.<sup>40</sup> Such initiatives laid down the groundwork for the active promotion of works by migrants as well as an aesthetic framework within which Turkish German cinema could begin to operate. The first Turkish German feature film, *40 qm Deutschland (40 Square Meters of Germany)*, by filmmaker Tevfik Baser, premiered 1986, followed by Baser’s second film, *Abschied vom falschen Paradies (Goodbye to a False Paradise)*, in 1988. These films, along with other German productions focusing on ‘*ausländer*,’ helped to establish the themes and tropes of the first generation of Turkish German cinema, which in many ways were not that different from those explored (almost concurrently) by Black British and *Beur* films in their cinema of duty stage.<sup>41</sup>

In time, Turkish German cinema, like the aforementioned accented European cinemas, also managed to shift away from the cinema of duty to the “pleasures of hybridity”. Deniz Göktürk locates this shift in the early 1990s, identifying Sinan Çetin’s *Berlin in Berlin* (1993) as one of the earliest examples of such change.<sup>42</sup> Building on the work of Sarita Malik, Ella Shohat, Robert Stam and other scholars of cultural representation and transnational cinema, Göktürk identifies anarchic humor as the site of a new form of self-representation, and as a “source of strength and pleasure, rather than lack and trouble” that moves “beyond dutiful performances of multiculturalism and community bonding grounded in restrictive notions” of the homeland and essentialist notions of ethnic identity. In the irreverence of humor, in its ironic distancing mechanism such as masquerading and role-playing, Göktürk sees the possibility of mutual mimicry rather than the one sided colonial mimicry of the past. In the anarchic humor of films such as *Berlin in Berlin*, *Me Boss, You Sneaker* (Hussi Kutlucan, 1998) and *In Juli* (Fatih Akin, 2000), emerges a way to counter the patronizing compassion of cinema of duty, while enacting a fluid form of identity that is more in line with the transnational sentiment of our times.<sup>43</sup>

These are the trajectories of three different, and yet similar, accented European cinemas. All three go through a similar initial phase, in which they share the content, style and intention of Bailey’s cinema of duty, made visible through many of Naficy’s “components of accented style:” interstitial modes of production, stress on linguistic difference, chronotopes of the homeland,

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<sup>39</sup> Burns, “Turkish-German Cinema,” 128.

<sup>40</sup> Burns introduces the terms in order to borrow the concept and coin his own term for film, ‘The cinema of the affected,’ which is cinema of duty by another name. The term ‘Literature of the Affected’ (*Literatur der Betroffenheit*), along with ‘Guest-Worker Literature’ (*Gastarbeiterliteratur*) was coined by Franco Biondi and Rafik Schami in the early 1980s through the Polynational Literature and Art Association they founded in 1980. For further details see, Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 113.

<sup>41</sup> Baser’s films are particularly notorious for using a female protagonist to showcase this sense of ‘in-betweenness’: in his first film the leading protagonist is a Turkish woman locked in her flat during the day by her husband so that she does not come in contact with the indecent German culture, while his second film features a Turkish woman in a German prison for the crime of killing her husband. The same rhetorical move is seen in some early Black British cinema, such as *Mirror Mirror* (1980) and *Majdhar* (1983), where the leading female protagonist are initially caught between cultures, but gains greater self-determination as she becomes more westernized, thus “reiterating racist ideologies which aligns the East with oppression and the West with freedom.” Malik, “Beyond ‘The Cinema of Duty,’” 208.

<sup>42</sup> Burns, “Turkish-German Cinema.”

<sup>43</sup> Göktürk, “Turkish Delight - German Fright”; Göktürk, “Beyond Paternalism: Turkish German Traffic in Cinema”; Deniz Göktürk, “Strangers in Disguise: Role-Play beyond Identity Politics in Anarchic Film Comedy,” *New German Critique*, no. 92 (April 1, 2004): 100–122.



claustrophobic spaces in the west, social awareness, etcetera. However, despite the fact that all three partook in the same “components,” each mobilized them in slightly different configurations, producing different dominant tropes: for example, the militant Black man, incarceration of Turkish women, and the disaffected *Beur* youth of the banlieues. These differences and similarities point towards “situated but universal” elements that separate and unite accented European cinemas.

For example, different historical power relations and social configurations determined the “when” and “how” migrant communities in specific countries gained access to the means of cinematic production and distribution. These situated circumstances are the reason why Black British emerged in the 1960s while Turkish German emerged in the mid-1980s: different chronologies reflect different histories of struggle and accommodations in each individual country. On the other hand, however, accented European filmmakers started to turn away from cinema of duty roughly at the same time. Motivated by general frustrations towards prevalent forms of “multiculturalism” in the 1980s, and inspired by ongoing transnational discourses on social equality, Accented European cinemas started to explore alternative modes of representation in the early to mid-1990s. As mentioned earlier, Bailey identifies Srinivas Krishna debut feature *Masala* in 1992 as the first of a “second generation of Canadian subaltern cinema.”<sup>44</sup> Not too far behind were Gurinder Chadha’s *Bhaji on the Beach* (UK, 1993), Sinan Çetin’s *Berlin in Berlin* (Germany, 1993) or Merzak Allouache’s *Salut Cousin!* (France, 1996), films identified by different scholars as marking a definite shift within their own, (trans)national, context.<sup>45</sup> Though not a cogent cinema school, the synchronicity of these cinematic shifts away from cinema of duty points, nonetheless, towards a certain amount of echoing and awareness in the part of accented filmmakers in the West. While such shift does not herald the end of cinema of duty by any means, it does show that within the milieu of accented filmmakers, the need for alternate forms of representation was not only felt, but acted upon.

### Italian Cinema of Immigration

The tensions I have delineated between specific national circumstances and broader structures of feelings, between the simplifying tendencies of 1980s multiculturalism and the need for evolving forms of representation, and between society’s need to tell the story of subalterns and the subalterns’ need to tell their own stories, shaped the landscape upon which Italian films of immigration emerged in 1990s. Of course, Italy had tensions of its very own.

Italian sociologist Alessandro Dal Lago, has remarked that when it comes to multiculturalism, Italy suffered from a discursive delay.<sup>46</sup> The facts that only in 1990 did Italy pass its first legislation regarding immigration, and the first film dealing explicitly with such social phenomenon premiered, supports that point. However, that is not to say that migration was new to the peninsula. Without going into the long history of Mediterranean crossings, it is worth noting that Italian colonial enterprises in Africa, along with Italy’s close proximity to the Balkans, facilitated ebbs and flows of migration into Italy since its foundation in the late 1800s.

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<sup>44</sup> Bailey, “What Is the Story: An Interview with Srinivas Krishna,” 38.

<sup>45</sup> In the case of Black British, as we have seen, there were some earlier signs of this shift, as in the films done under the collaboration of the director Stephen Frears and screenplay writer Hanif Kureishi, but the decisive move is really marked by Chadha’s comic movie.

<sup>46</sup> Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-persone: L’esclusione dei migranti in una società globale*, Nuova ed (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2006).

Such flows have left their mark in Italian cinema throughout its history, even if for the most part the colored faces captured by the camera have been ignored.<sup>47</sup> Part of the reason for Italy's blindness to its own growing population of immigrants, is that despite the long history of human movement in and out of the peninsula, immigration into Italy was not particularly massive or visible for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For various and complex reasons, Italy's former colonies were not major sources of immigration, and the largest group of immigrants from developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s were catholic women, who worked as live-in caretakers and were thus not very visible in Italian society.<sup>48</sup>

However, by the 1980s, the presence of migrant laborers from all over the world could no longer be ignored. According to sociologist Jeffrey Cole, by the end of the 1980s, Italy had outpaced Germany as the top European destination country for immigrants from all over the global south.<sup>49</sup> The sudden spike of immigrants in Italy, along with wider political trends in Europe, generated a strong, anti-immigrant, popular backlash, which in turn helped with the formation of conservative-nativist political movements that capitalized on the emerging multicultural reality. However, Italy's migrant communities in the 1980s were too new and too heterogeneous to effectively form ethnic-based concepts like *Beur*, or even umbrella ones like Black in Britain. Socially and politically, the cause for immigrants was picked up by progressive scholars, journalists, politicians, civic associations, writers, directors – the ideological inheritors of the counter culture of the 1960s and the historical Left. As it happened in 1970s Germany, these Italian progressives felt that there was a “social need” to tell the stories of Italy's new subaltern subjects cinematically, but no grassroots subaltern movement was yet in place to take the lead. There were no co-ops, or ethnic film associations, so the question remained, who was to tell their story?

The obvious answer is “native” Italian directors.<sup>50</sup> By and large, the tale of Italian immigration and multiculturalism has been told by indigenous screenwriters, directors, producers, etcetera – but not exclusively. In fact, the timing of the Italian cinema of immigration, coming into play after the struggle for migrant representation and filmmaking had been initiated in other parts of the West, accounts for a bifurcated, though extremely unbalanced, trajectory between accented filmmakers and native ones. Unfortunately, both types of filmmaking have often been conflated, grouped together simply by theme, a move that not only erases a myriad of specificities and differences regarding the relationship between accented subjects and Italian cinema, but pushes certain accented filmmakers out of the evolving discourse regarding multiculturalism.

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<sup>47</sup> The following two texts have made steps toward correcting this oversight in the scholarship of Italian cinema: Greene, *Equivocal Subjects*. Leonardo De Franceschi, ed., *L'Africa in Italia: Per Una Controstoria Postcoloniale Del Cinema Italiano*, 1. ed, Studi Postcoloniali Di Cinema E Media 1 (Roma: Aracne, 2013). See also chapter one of this dissertation.

<sup>48</sup> Jacqueline Andall, “Cape Verdean Women on the Move: ‘Immigration Shopping’ in Italy and Europe,” *Modern Italy* 4, no. 2 (1999): 241–57, doi:10.1080/13532949908454832; Andall, “Women Migrant Workers in Italy”; Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (Peter Lang, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> Cole, *The New Racism in Europe*.

<sup>50</sup> I used the term native to describe what otherwise might be called “indigenous” Italians, or people whose connection with Italy through birth go back generations. It is an imperfect term, as the next generation of accented Italian filmmakers could also be called ‘native’ since it is probable that they will be born (thus native) in Italy. However, ‘indigenous’ is a term too loaded with racialist discourse, and its used here might be construed as facetious, and therefore distracting. I use “native” as a counter point to “immigrant”, acknowledging that the term is provisional and cannot hold forever.

For example, if one were to go just by Naficy's "components of accent style," then the answer to the question "is there such a thing as accented Italian cinema?" would have to be *Yes*. Italian films about immigration in the 1990s and 2000s share almost all of the formal qualities and apparent structures of feeling articulated in that list. Films like Placido's *Tomato* (1990), Amelio's *Lamerica* (1994), Da Seta's *Letters from the Sahara* (2004) and Giordana's *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (2005) are particularly marked by narratives of border crossing, with epistolary devices embedded in the narrative that describe life in the host country, and serve to remind the audience of an idealized "somewhere else." Films like Mazzacurati's *Another Life* (1992) and *Vesna Goes Fast* (1996), as well as Soldini's *A Soul Divided in Two* (1993), repeat one of the most marked tropes of Turkish German cinema of the 1980s, namely the victimization of women who need to be rescued by the West. This particular trope is also found in some Asian-British films of the early 1980s. One can easily find as well the common use of small, crowded and claustrophobic spaces of rooms, boats, trains, dark alleys, all of which tell the story of immigration as an eternal contact zone, one that produces anxieties, feelings of entrapment, of not belonging, and are thus symbolic spaces of social crisis, and incommensurable differences, as we see in Zaccaro's *Article 2* (1994), Faccini's *Giamaica* (1998), and Munzi's *Saimir* (2004).

However, we know that the cinema of duty is not always accented cinema, and though the films just described do have the familiar accent of Black British, Beur and Turkish German films from the 1980s, their accent is nothing more than ventriloquism. This is not accented cinema, but rather a mimicry of what seemed from the outside as a successful formula for discussing immigration and multiculturalism. The films imitate well the content and style, motivated perhaps by similar intentions to "talk back," but they lack the organic timbre of an accented subject. As films scripted, researched, produced and directed by native Italians, they have been unable to go beyond "the limits of vicarious representation," and have lingered in cinema of duty for about twenty years – a much longer period than any other European accented cinema.<sup>51</sup> For Black, *Beur* and Turkish German cinemas, the phase of cinema of duty was symptomatic of specific social configurations and power relations. It was the accent of the initial struggle for representation. As those configuration changed, so did the accents. Those changes were made possible by the personal investment of the accented subjects, filmmakers and the communities their film interpellated, communities that wanted to speak and not just "talk back" the way cinema of duty tends to do. Without that personal investment, native Italian films touching upon immigration or multiculturalism tend to go back again and again to the same watering holes of previous generations, to old stereotypes, prejudices and reductionist tendencies in new guises.

A good example of this tendency can easily be seen in the comedies that touch upon multiculturalism after 2007. We have already seen that comedy, within other national (and accented) contexts, can be a liberating formal technique to explore the pleasures of hybridity.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, while breaking away from the social realism of cinema of duty, these Italian

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<sup>51</sup> 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. Italian cinema of immigration started in 1990, and it is the claim of this chapter that very little changed in their representational practices over the course of the preceding two decades.

<sup>52</sup> In fact, within the canon of Italian cinema there are films about Italian emigration that subvert stereotypes of immigrants through a typically Italian, bitter-sweet, mode of comedy as well: *commedia all'italiana*. For example, see Busati's *Bread and Chocolate* (1974), a film about Italian emigration to the Germanic north, and Zampa's *A Girl in Australia* (1971), a film about Italian emigration to Australia.

comedies leave everything else intact. I am referring to comedies like Claudio Cupellini's *Lezioni di cioccolato* (2007), which is the story of Mattia, an opportunistic owner of a construction company who habitually cuts corners and shirks the law to maximize profits.<sup>53</sup> Due to his negligence, one of his workers (Kamal) gets injured, and in order to keep the worker from talking to the police, Mattia agrees to take Kamal's place at a confectionary school. The result is a film where the central character is a white Italian posing as an Egyptian immigrant, speaking in broken Italian about polygamy in the Arab world, and the dreadful circumstances of his "home" country, Egypt. Though the film attempts to be "progressive" by espousing a reconciliatory tone, a "together we are better" plot resolution, it nonetheless mobilizes stereotypes for the sake of a good laugh. Citing Freud, Deniz Göktürk has pointed out that in every joke there is a joker, a listener and the one who is the butt of the joke, and then asks, "who is laughing with whom and at whom, and why? What kinds of bonds are forged between the tellers of the joke and its listeners?"<sup>54</sup> While Cupellini's film does not openly mock the immigrant the way films from a previous generation had done, the centrality of Mattia's racial masquerade forecloses the possibility of forging a bond with potential migrant audiences, excluding them from the fellowship of the joke, and thus creating the sensation that whatever laughter this film may evoke, it is done at their expense.<sup>55</sup>

Cristina Comencini's romantic comedy, *Black and White* (2008), fares no better as it deploys stereotypes and echoes of colonial images and tropes. *Black and White* is the story of Carlo, a middle-aged man who owns a computer repair shop. He is married to Elena, who works for an NGO that focuses on helping Africa and raising awareness about the continent's problem. During one of Elena's work events, Carlo meets the strikingly beautiful Nadine, a Senegalese woman married to one of Elena's co-workers, Bernard. Carlo and Nadine fall for each other, beginning a passionate affair that is meant to highlight the fears and prejudices of western society, and of migrant communities that are "self-segregated" from the rest of Italian society. Unfortunately, the film does little more than highlight fears and prejudices that we all know exist. Though *Black and White* does without racial masquerading, it uses problematic figures such as the Mammy servant, the pseudo-colonialist male suffering from *Mal d'Africa*, guilt-driven westerners attempting to save Africa, the proud black man, the black community that distrusts whites, etcetera. On the one hand, all of these figures and tropes, along with countless events and circumstances that are part of the discourse of racial prejudice, are deployed conscientiously, pointed out explicitly in what one can only interpret as an attempt to undermine them. However, the attempt does not succeed, and no new knowledge or understanding is derived from the presence of such tropes and figures, only a moment of laughter aligned with the perspective of a presumed white Italian audience that thinks, "yes, I know people like that!" without necessarily pointing the finger at him/herself.

Furthermore, in attempting to convey the idea that love knows no race, the film produces echoes of colonialist discourses by promoting a narrative of a westerner who falls in love/lust with a "Black Venus," or the erotic-exotic black woman, who is also submissive and domestic,

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<sup>53</sup> No official English title is available. The title translates as "Lessons in Chocolate Making." A sequel has been released, titled "Chocolate Kisses" (2011).

<sup>54</sup> Deniz Göktürk, "Jokes and Butts: Can We Imagine Humor in a Global Public Sphere?," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (October 2008): 1707.

<sup>55</sup> A good example of comedies from a previous generation is *Delitto al ristorante cinese* (1981, Corbucci), in which Tomas Milian pretends to be a Chinese cook, Ciu Ci Ciao, in a manner which reduces the character to a purely stereotypical figure: an Asian robe, a top-knot wig (which is not even Chinese), slanted eyes, white make up, exaggerated accented speech (with "l's instead of "r's), and rhyming proverbs that are cheap punchlines.

and takes the place of the Italian wife.<sup>56</sup> Such a colonialist figure is no stranger to Italian cinema, as the 1970s erotic-exotic films starring Zeudi Araya prove, and Nadine is made to fit the mold:<sup>57</sup> she is shown to be an exotic and sexy black woman, who is also a reserved and domestic wife with no job of her own, and who ultimately takes the place of the workaholic, inconsistent and chaotic Elena. In the course of the film, Carlo and Nadine have two lovemaking scenes, in which the camera lingers on the voluptuous curves of Nadine's naked body, on her hips and breasts, and lingers on shots that show the chromatic contrast between their skins. The first scene takes place at Nadine's home, where she is wearing a rather modest outfit: a pink cardigan sweater and a skirt, with her hair up in a bun. She looks beautiful and demure. The second scene takes place at Nadine's new lodging after she has been kicked out of her house by her husband when he finds out about the affair. It is a borrowed room, full of African wooden masks with a bed in the middle of the room, as if it were a stage. This scene is more passionate, with more emphasis on their nude bodies. After they make love, they linger on the bed, talking and cuddling, with Nadine's breast exposed to our view, all the while the African masks surround them, looking at them, out of frame but acknowledged by Carlo. The juxtaposition of these two scenes sets up Nadine as the fulfillment of certain colonialist fantasies that see black women as the perfect amalgam of exotic sexuality and domesticity.

The problem of these films lies in the complete absence of an accented voice in their production. Nowhere in the decision-making process is there a person who provides an accented perspective, a voice that can complicate the world these films construct. Without the personal investment of accented subjects, without the drive to continually push back and against the homogenizing tendency of the system, most films on immigration fall back on narratives of clash of civilizations, or on other forms of representation that fail to interpellate a potential migrant audience. To do so requires more than non-professional actors of color – a practice that can actually be counterproductive – but the organic timbre of an accented voice. Perhaps that is why the most accomplished films by native Italian filmmakers, when it comes to representing multiculturalism, are those that rather than trying to “address” the issue of multiculturalism head on, incorporate migrant characters into the world they create in such a manner that their (cultural) “difference” is but one of the many found in the tapestry of the film. They are often secondary characters, but it is precisely because they are not at the center of the narrative that their skin color, ethnic background, religious beliefs, multiple languages, etcetera, are not foregrounded as the “issue” to solve or overcome, and thus the films avoid the blunders committed by the aforementioned comedies.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Giulia Barrera identifies that one of the earliest colonial practices in Italian East Africa was for officers to “prender madama” or take on an indigenous concubine for various reasons: to avoid venereal diseases, to avoid officers and subalterns (Italians and natives) from frequenting the same brothels, and finally, because officers were not allowed to bring their wives with them. Thus, concubines served as surrogate wives. Giulia Barrera, “Sessualità e segregazione nelle terre dell’Impero,” in *L’impero fascista: Italia ed Etiopia (1935 - 1941)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 393–414.

<sup>57</sup> “The black immigrant woman [is inscribed] within adulterous romances in which Araya’s exotic and submissive characters substitute for the emancipated white woman in the Italian family.” Purpura, “Racial Masquerade Italian Style?,” 394.

<sup>58</sup> Some good examples of this type of approach are: Ponti’s *Santa Maradona* (2001), Archibugi’s *Flying Lessons* (2007) and Mazzacurati’s *The Right Distance* (2007). In all three films, there is a migrant character who plays a supporting role, though the importance of the role varies from film to film. The only danger in such films, as there always are, is to relegate those characters to such small roles that inevitably the narrative tends to fall back on stereotypes to make such figures intelligible to the audience.

## Accented Italian Cinema

While it is relatively easy to identify Black British, Beur and Turkish German cinema, it is quite difficult to speak in general of an accented Italian cinema. This is due to the fact that the first generation of Italian accented filmmakers is composed of only four feature film directors.<sup>59</sup> Their works span 1992 to 2014 totaling only eighteen films, two of which never received commercial distribution, and ten others belong to just one director.<sup>60</sup> I am speaking of Marcello Bivona, Rachid Benhadj, Mohsen Melliti, and of course, Ferzan Özpetek. These four directors have different backgrounds, different trajectories and relationships with Italian culture and the Italian film industry, which results in an extremely heterogeneous cinematic production that ranges from Bivona's two independent and almost forgotten films from the 1990s, to the polished and still ongoing films of Özpetek. All four directors were born outside of Italy, from three different non-western countries: Tunisia, Algeria, and Turkey. Three of these directors have the freedom, and the financial capacity, to go back and forth from Italy to their country of origin, and two of them maintain transnational connections with their native film industries, which have resulted in film projects. Only one of them, Melliti, had refugee status at the time he directed his film, and was thus unable to travel and promote the film abroad.<sup>61</sup> Two directors were born in Tunisia, but their combined output of three films hardly makes for a "Tunisian-Italian" cinema. On the other hand, there are ten films with links to Turkey, but the lack of a large Turkish community in Italy, and the fact that these films are the product of just one filmmaker, forecloses the communal title of "Turkish-Italian cinema" for these films as well. Furthermore, since Özpetek's films do not thematically "confront" immigration head-on, his filmography is usually bypassed even by the best scholarship on Italian multiculturalism, which tends to focus only on "cinema of immigration."<sup>62</sup>

For these reasons, we can say that in Italy, the first generation of accented cinema is neither ethnic, nor diasporic, or exilic. Its connections to the world reach beyond the traditional nostalgia, which maintains with its historical backward glance a vertical and linear connection with the country of origin: from *there* to *here*, from *then* to *now*. The first generation of Italian accented cinema is, in fact, cosmopolitan, and as such it maintains multiple connections to the world in reciprocal modes of exchange, and therefore it is more in touch with the evolution of accented cinemas in other European countries than Italian cinema of immigration. Unlike diasporic, exilic and ethnic communities, these accented Italian filmmakers have the mobility to not only go back and forth to the "home" country, but also maintain connections with other places/spaces as well, which at times leads to international co-productions and other forms of transnational collaborations. Furthermore, while not rich and powerful, they possess substantial cultural capital that allows them to access multiple symbolic systems as points of references, which enriches and complicates their cinematic projects.

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<sup>59</sup> At this point I'm only looking at the first generation of accented filmmakers, which are very different from the second generation who do mostly documentaries.

<sup>60</sup> I count every film after the filmmakers establishes him/herself in Italy, even if such film is shot somewhere else with non-Italian monies, but not the ones before. The point is to account for the film production that can be said to have been influenced by the experience of living/working in Italy. This becomes an important point with Rachid Benhadj.

<sup>61</sup> However, since the Arab Spring that brought about a new government, Mohsen Melliti is no longer a political exile and has a Tunisian passport. He currently lives in Los Angeles where he is working on a new film project.

<sup>62</sup> A great example is Parati, *Migration Italy*.

Yet it is only an incipient accented cinema: too small to be a movement, too heterogeneous and disparate to be recognized by others as belonging together, it nonetheless provides an example to follow for the next generation of Italian accented filmmakers. Given the trajectory of other Accented European cinemas, and of Italian cinema of immigration, one would expect to see cinema of duty as the dominant mode of filmmaking, at least for the first decade. However, there is very little “cinema of duty” in the first generation of Italian accented cinema, unless it is under the “prison of subsidy”, and even then it is in ways that complicate the binaries for which cinema of duty is known. Instead, these films provide (in different ways) a sense of identity that is multilayered, complicated, and irreducible to “us versus them”, or even “us and them.” Rather than the head-on approach of cinema of duty, which puts the question of immigration front and center, Italian accented films in the 1990s and 2000s privilege oblique approaches to questions of identity, community and belonging. Their aesthetics employ distancing mechanisms that allow multiple identifications, and couch discussions of multiculturalism within broader contexts. However, given their different trajectories, it is best to look at them individually to form a more complete picture.

### **Marcello Bivona: Layering Here and There**

Marcello Bivona was born in Tunis, as were his parents and grandparents. He was part of a large and vibrant Italian-Tunisian community that had existed in the Maghreb for at least a couple of centuries. In 1956, Tunisia gained its independence from France, and right away started an aggressive program of decolonization, resulting in legislation that expelled a great number of pied noirs and Italian-Tunisians. In 1959, Bivona’s family, along with many others, was sent “back” to Italy, even though for most of those families Tunisia was the only home they had ever known. Marcello Bivona was five years old when his family left Tunisia and settled in Italy, and he has been living there as an Italian citizen ever since. His migration story is obviously not a typical story of postcolonial scatterings, whereby a person of color from the global south (usually a previous colony or sphere of influence), under economic, social or political duress, migrates to the metropole. The ancestral connection to the ‘host’ country, substantiated in his body and family name, allows not only the obfuscation of difference, but also the creating of complex modes of identification. It allows a perspective of multiculturalism that is unique in 1990s Italy, one that sees difference and diversity as the norm rather than the exception. Bivona’s first film, *Clandestini nella città* (1992), demonstrates this perspective, particularly when compared to contemporaneous Italian films of immigration, such as Placido’s *Tomato* (1990).

*Clandestini nella città* is the earliest known Italian accented film, produced by the NGO *Centro orientamento educativo*, a cultural organization dedicated to international voluntarism and the founder of *Festival del cinema africano d’Asia e American Latina di Milano*. The title of the film gives the impression that one is about to see yet another cinema of duty film. The term *clandestino* (singular form of *clandestini* in title) is often used for people who live in Italy without proper documentation, referring to a “clandestine” form of entry into Italy. Given that in 1992, the mass influx of immigrants from the global south was a relatively recent phenomenon, the term connotes foreigners and immigrants of color in general. Therefore, the title could equally be translated as “illegals/immigrants in the city.” Not surprisingly, one of the three main characters in Bivona’s film is Ali, a young man from Tunisia (with a passport), and elements associated with immigration such as unemployment, lack of housing, and xenophobic rants are

also part of the film. These are indeed elements of cinema of duty. However, the term *clandestino* implies not just illegality, but also conveys a sense of concealment, of invisibility of people and things that are outside the eyes of the law and in the margins of society. Given this connotation, the title could also mean “invisible/marginal subjects in the city” and not just “illegal” immigrants. In fact, it is this broader perspective that Bivona’s film adopts, even as it touches upon immigration, pointing to societal fractures that run deeper than the foreigners/natives binary usually privileged by cinema of duty, and exploring alternate modes of social relations.

The film tells the story of three young people (Ali, Lallo and Rosa) who are at the margins of society, not because they are immigrants (though one of them is from Tunisia) but because they are poor and without family. If there is a ‘clash of civilization’ in this film, it is not between the foreigner and the native, but rather between the negative effects of capitalism, such as the fracturing of communal living. The film begins when Ali is kicked out of his hotel because he is unable to pay. The Hotel manager verbally abuses Ali and tells him that he will keep Ali’s passport until Ali can settle his bill. After wandering around the city and interacting with people, Ali breaks into a junk yard at night to sleep. Early the next morning, a young Italian man named Lallo is woken up by his abusive boss. Lallo sleep in a van at the car junk yard where he works. Later on, Lallo finds Ali sleeping inside a car, and what would usually be a confrontational scene is turned by Bivona into a scene of solidarity, as Lallo befriends Ali rather than chasing him away (as his boss does later on). Consequently, Ali helps Lallo with his work and Lallo hides Ali from his boss. We soon learn that a pair of car thieves have been trying to recruit Lallo for a while, but he has refused. However, in order to protect Ali, he agrees to help them one night. Ultimately, he walks away from that choice, a decision that only prompts the burning of his ‘home’ by the criminals while Lallo is returning to his van. Fortunately, Ali had heard them coming and got out of the van before they burn it down. With nothing to lose, and with only change in their pockets, they both leave the junk yard before the boss returns.

They wander through the city, sleep on the streets, and help unload boxes at the market to get some money to eat. While wandering around, they meet Rosa, a young woman who has a flat tire and needs help. Lallo and Ali help her and soon all three become friends. After spending the day together, she offers to host them for the night. We learn that she lives in an apartment building that is scheduled to be demolished under the new city plans in order to build banks and offices. She is in constant trouble with the cops because she refuses to leave, in part because her childhood neighborhood was also demolished years before, and she is trying to fight back against the city’s gentrification. In fact, the next day she is taken to the police department, held for a few hours, and put at a hotel while the police close off the building where she lives. This separates Rosa from Ali and Lallo, who spend the rest of the film trying to find her. In that time, Ali becomes disillusioned with the possibility of making a living in Italy, and the both of them conceive of a plan of returning to Ali’s country and starting a business together with Rosa. In order to do so, they need Ali’s passport, and so they go back to the hotel to steal it back. Unfortunately, Ali is shot by the hotel owner while the boys are trying to flee and dies.

This summary may give the impression that this film is just as dark and bleak as any cinema of duty. However, against abusive bosses, unemployment, evictions, gentrification, and violence, the film foregrounds the easy friendship engendered by these three innocent, hopeful, playful, people. Though from time to time events in the narrative reminds us that our protagonists inhabit a hostile environment, most of the narrative is spent on the near-fantastical space and time of their evolving friendship. For example, when Lallo and Ali meet for the first



time, the possible clash between the two turns to shared work, conversation about lost family and homes, language exchanges (Lallo wants to learn some Arabic), a shared meal or two. Later on, soon after Lallo finds his van burned down and fears for the safety of Ali, the tense moment is broken by a playful game of hide and seek and a hug. When they wander through the streets, homeless, they constantly play games, laugh, and race. The addition of Rosa leads to a day of exploration, as she shares with them her hobby of taking pictures of pigeon excrement outside churches, which she compares to works of art. The boys laugh, and the conversation becomes a veiled discourse on the appreciation of difference.<sup>63</sup> Later on, they rush towards dozens of pigeons on the ground, laughing, crowding the shot with flying birds and the sound of flapping wings. When they hear the religious chant of monks inside a church they go inside, prompting Lallo to say, “Something like this on the radio makes me change the channel right away, but in here it makes me feel that I’m in heaven.” That night they dine at a restaurant with outside sitting, where a man playing guitar prompts a scene of Lallo playing a tray as a tambourine, while Rosa and Ali dance to an appreciative audience of patrons. Unlike contemporaneous Italian cinema of immigration, which privileges social relations full of tension, *Clandestini* presents a social space that allows the possibility of fellowship, music and playfulness.

Yet it is impossible to forget that one of the protagonist is killed near the end, which seems to place this film’s narrative well within the discursive umbrella of Italian cinema of immigration. However, unlike those other films, such as Placido’s *Tomato*, the tragic event does not signal the conclusion. Prior to Ali’s death, the juxtaposition between social fragmentation and fraternal community has been elegantly scaffolded in the formal elements, particularly in the juxtaposition of color versus black and white footage. The film is mostly set in Milan, and the external scenes shot in black and white often juxtapose the communion of friends against giant skyscrapers looming in the background, reminders of the wealth that displaced communities, such as Rosa’s family. The city is shown to be empty, full of buildings but devoid of people. The use of black and white signals a disinterest in “realistic” representation of space, and an investment in symbolic layering: against the monochromatic, impersonal urban and social landscape of Milan, the film juxtaposes vibrantly colored images of social relations in Tunisia. Throughout the film, Ali’s experiences in Milan are interlaced with flashbacks triggered in multiple ways; through narrative association, such as when having coffee in Milan reminds him of coffee in Tunis; personal questions, such as when Rosa asks him to tell her about his home after she described the loss of her childhood home and community; or *mise en scène* matches, such as when looking out the window of Rosa’s apartment reminds him of looking out his bedroom’s window in Tunis. Every flashback shows Ali interacting with family and friends, in private and public spaces. They are full of color and music, with wide-open skies and the sea. These scenes stand in direct contrast to the bleak and lonesome shots of Milan, particularly in their portrayal of communal living.

However, these interludes, full of music and color, are more than just flashbacks. Were they just flashbacks, reminders of the place from where Ali came from, then their interlacing with the narrative would be no different from the “chronotopic inscription of utopia and dystopia” identified by Naficy in most cinema of duty.<sup>64</sup> In those films, the oppressive present is

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<sup>63</sup> To Lallo’s playful taunting Rosa responds, in relation to her hobby: “you have to look at things carefully, from every angle. Otherwise you live life the way one browses a newspaper, until one day you look closely and realize that every word has its own meaning.” Later on at the church, she responds to Lallo’s comment regarding the church music by saying, “to truly love something, you must experience it and understand it within its own reality.”

<sup>64</sup> Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 153.

“often experienced retroactively by means of a nostalgically reconstructed past”: the old country becomes an idealized place in relation to the host country. In this film, Tunis is not so much the lost home as it is the symbolic possibility of how things can be – not only a place of departure, but a place of arrival as well. As Ali is dying in Lallo’s arms on an overpass next to the airport, an airplane is taking off in the background. A close up of Ali’s dead hand holding his passport is followed by a shot of Ali’s dead face, and then the camera pans up towards the sky as if following the airplane, then we fade into the last sequence of the film. Once again we find Ali in Tunis, walking down the street full of vendors. Along the way he finds Lallo selling dates, who joins Ali. Later on they find Rosa selling herbs, and she too joins the two friends. Together they walk and run out of the market and then out of the city, jumping from rooftops, going into caves and ruins and finally running along the coast holding hands, at which point the shot freezes and the film ends. It is obviously not a flashback, but rather a hope of how things might have been. The shot of the airplane as Ali passed away, and the following sequence that takes place in Tunis, creates a circular relationship between Italy and the global south, complicating the traditional sites of fantasy and reality, making both shores of the Mediterranean points of departure and arrival. More importantly, the fact that the three friends ultimately leave the city of Tunis behind while holding hands, very much in the same way they planned to leave the gritty life of Milan, signals that the ultimate destination is coexistence itself. The fact that they were able to achieve it while still in Milan shows that it is not an impossible dream either.

The idea is further explored in his second film, *Ritorno a Tunisi* (1997), a documentary-styled feature film that tells the story not only of his family’s transnational trajectory, but of a Tunis that at one time was simultaneously Italian, French and Arab. To quote the director, Tunis at one point was “three dimensions that blended together, creating a multicultural personality, modern and intense – already completely lost.”<sup>65</sup> Though the quote obviously shows some elements of the idealization of the lost homeland, the focus on multiculturalism in the face of massive immigration from the Maghreb makes it a model to follow into the future, not just a nostalgic dream of the past. It embraces a sense of cultural identity that is much more multilayered, complicated, and impossible to reduce to a simple binary of us and them.

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<sup>65</sup> Three dimensions that blended together, creating a multicultural personality, modern and intense – already completely lost.

## Rachid Benhadj: Performing Cosmopolitanism

Mohamed Rachid Benhadj (Algeria, 1949) is the second best-known Italian accented filmmaker (after Özpetek), and the one most written about in relation to cinema of immigration. His migration trajectory, though not the “typical” story a subaltern, economic or exilic migrant, is more recognizable.<sup>66</sup> Rachid Benhadj finished high school in Algeria, but obtained his degree in architecture from the *Ecole Supérieure des Art Décoratifs de Paris* in 1973, then obtained a degree in film from *L’Ecole de Cinema* in 1976. As a thesis, he directed a documentary on the living conditions of north African immigrants in the outskirts of Nice entitled, *Immigration* (1976, 60’). He then returned to Algeria, filming made-for-TV movies and mini-series before gaining international exposure through the film festival circuit (Cannes) with *Rose of the Desert* (1989, 110’).<sup>67</sup> That exposure allowed him to make his first international co-production, *Touchia* (1992), a film about Fella, a woman who, on the eve of the Algerian civil war (1991-2002), is about to give a televised interview about being raped during the Algerian war of independence. The social turbulence and violence of the film are not just narrative events, but rather a reflection of the beginning of the Algeria civil war between factions of religious fundamentalist and the government. The horrors of the war, in particular the targeting of intellectuals and journalist by the rebel fundamentalist groups, prompted Rachid Benhadj to permanently settle in Italy.

Benhadj started working in Italy in 1995, with two documentaries for the production house Filmart on the Comboniani Order of the Heart of Jesus in Verona. However, his relationship with Italian culture dates much farther back. According to the director, he encountered Italy through its cinema, and vice versa: he has repeatedly said that watching De Sica’s *The Bicycle Thief* with his father was the event that made him fall in love with cinema in the first place. His cultural relationship continued when he became an extra in Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), and with his eventual study and practice of painting, an artistic endeavor that exposed him to Italy’s rich pictorial tradition. In Italy, Benhadj made his first feature film in 1997, *The Tree of Suspended Destinies*, a made for TV film. His next film, *Mirka* (1999) was a co-production between Italy, France and Spain. His subsequent film, *For Bread Alone* (2005) was also an international coproduction and based on the eponymous autobiography by Moroccan writer Mohamed Choukri, who collaborated with Benhadj in writing the screenplay. His latest film, *Perfumes of Algiers* (2010), which the filmmakers has dubbed as a continuation of his 1992 *Touchia*, touches upon oppression of women within religious fundamentalist factions of Algerian society, particularly around the Algerian civil war. With this film, Benhadj was able to return to Algeria to film, and received funding from the Algerian government, as well as Italy. He is currently an Italian citizen.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> According to Carrie Tarr, within the French context Algerian *émigré* filmmakers and their work tends to be very transnational as the filmmakers tend to have received professional training either in France or Algeria. Compared to Beur, or ethnic filmmakers of the second or third generation, their work tends to be more heterogeneous in style and less explicitly autobiographical. Furthermore, rather than focusing on the travails of ethnic communities in the host countries, they tend to focus on individuals. Though thematically speaking they touch upon the same topics as Beur filmmakers, their films on the “here” is more lighthearted while the ones focused on back home show a larger emotional investment. Rachid Benhadj, though an Italian *émigré* rather a French one, nonetheless follows some of these patterns. Tarr, *Reframing Difference*, 187–189.

<sup>67</sup> He made the following in Algeria: *The Aggressors* (1979, 80’), *Number 49* (1980, 60’), *Room 28* (1983, 360’, TV series, 6 episodes), *A Thousand and One Births* (1984, 45’ documentary).

<sup>68</sup> Giovanna Grassi, “Depardieu contro la violenza più atroce,” *Corriere della Sera*, March 4, 2000, sec. Cinema & Attualità.

Benhadj's cosmopolitan career spans over thirty years and traverses three national (political, symbolic) boundaries, all of which deeply inform his narrative choices, his symbolic references, as well as the network of collaborators and funding mechanisms.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, although his interaction with Italian culture dates to his childhood, Benhadj's work can only be said to have an Italian accent from the point in which the Algerian civil war prompted the filmmaker to settle permanently in Italy in the mid-1990s.<sup>70</sup> That is not to say that his previous production is to be ignored, but that it must be contextualized within the life-changing decision to permanently settle somewhere other than in the country where he grew up and worked, or France, the country that provided the linguistic, cinematic, and literary context of his education. His Italian films – *The Tree of Suspended Destinies*, *Mirka*, *For Bread Alone*, and *Perfumes of Algiers* – mark a detour and a continuation of Benhadj's previous works.

Rachid Benhadj's first Italian feature film, *The Tree of Suspended Destinies*, is the closest the filmmaker ever comes to the cinema of duty, and even then the film displays distancing mechanisms that allows the social expectations laid on the film to be subsumed under more personal narrative elements.<sup>71</sup> The film was not an independent project, but part of a larger venture. According to Graziella Parati, "in 1997, RAI [state owned broadcasting company] commissioned Pier Giorgio and Marco Bellocchio and their production company, Filmalbatross, to make four films in a series entitled *Un altro paese nei miei occhi (Another Country in My Eyes)*."<sup>72</sup> While the project provided Benhadj with a great working opportunity, it also had its limits. As the name of the series implies, this project is part of Italy's "soft" politics of multiculturalism, and the four films are meant to explicitly and openly engage with the social "issues" of multiculturalism and immigration.<sup>73</sup> According to Benhadj, the subjects of the films were already in place when he joined the project, and he picked the one that he found the most interesting. Initially, he started to work on the screenplay with one of the creative directors, Roberto Giannarelli, but they had very different ideas about immigration. Upon a conversation with the producer, Marco Bellocchio, Benhadj was given the green light to write the screenplay on his own, but still following the initial idea for the film.<sup>74</sup>

The prescribed topic of the film frames it within the realm of cinema of duty, though not completely. *The Tree of Suspended Destinies* tells the story of a young Moroccan immigrant trapped inside an ethnic and cultural island within Italy: he is the cook/housekeeper for a group of immigrants who work in construction in a fairly rural part of northern Italy, and spends most

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<sup>69</sup> Among his usual collaborators are the Italian cinematographer Vittorio Storaro, the Algerian (American trained) musician Safy Boutella, and the French-Moroccan actor Said Taghmaoui.

<sup>70</sup> De Franceschi, *L'Africa in Italia*, 254–256. Ada Manfreda, "Immagini d'infanzia e voci di diversità nel cinema di Rachid Benhadj," *Amaltea: Trimestrale di cultura* IV, no. 1 (March 2009): 20–30.

<sup>71</sup> As noted earlier, Benhadj's earliest Italian films were two documentaries for Filmart on the Comboniani Order of the Heart of Jesus in Verona: *The Last Supper* and *Dear Comboniani*. *The Last Supper* records the centennial celebration of Father Nanni, and through his stories as a young missionary, the film records a subjective history of Italian missionaries in Africa. Given the topics touched, it would have been relevant to discuss this documentary, but unfortunately I have no access to it.

<sup>72</sup> Parati, *Migration Italy*, 114.

<sup>73</sup> "Soft" politics in so far that Italy, unlike Germany or the UK, has never adopted an official program for integration or multiculturalism, with funding mechanisms and governmental programs to promote it. The closest it ever came to do so was under the government of Enrico Letta (April 2013 to February 2014), who created the position of Minister of Integration in his cabinet, and appointed the first Black minister in Italian history, Cécile Kyenge. The position was eliminated when Letta's government fell.

<sup>74</sup> De Franceschi, *L'Africa in Italia*, 258.

of his day by himself cleaning, cooking and listening to Italian language tapes.<sup>75</sup> Samir is unhappy with his isolation, and the opportunity to escape it presents itself when Youssef, the man responsible for delivering goods and money from the men back to their village in Morocco, dies of a heart attack. Against the wishes of the other Moroccan men, Samir hijacks the car and sets off to become the “postman” and deliver the goods to his village. Though not a great driver, he manages. Along the way, he gives a ride home to an Italian woman, Maria, who then decides to go with Samir as far as San Remo since she needs to go to a wedding, and then decides to tag along to Morocco. Between the two a relationship blooms, one that is complicated by the internal dilemmas of each individual. Thus the first twenty minutes of the film focus on Samir’s secluded life with other immigrants, the next forty minutes focus on Samir and Maria travelling through Italy, then there is an intermission (*secondo tempo*), and the last forty minutes focus on their travelling through Morocco.

This particular structure displaces the usual contact zone between communities of immigrants and western cultures to the experiences of two individuals. The centrality of a single character in Italian films of immigration is not new, but Benhadj gives his characters a particular valence that differs from previous films. Films such as *Tomato* (1990), and *Vesna Goes Fast* (1996) both have a single character at the center of the narrative, but in both cases such characters are representative of immigrant types and groups: the first one as the black farm workers of the south and the later as the prostitutes from the east. Samir’s character is not recognizable as any “type,” and though as a Moroccan he may loosely stand for all immigrants, his particular role in the film does not lend itself to a stereotypical reduction.<sup>76</sup> The question of a “clash of civilization” is thus bypassed and in its stead we find a story of repeated encounters between individuals and the world around them. This is not to say that moments of “clash” are avoided, but rather than being phenomena at a social/communal level central to the narrative, they are personal moments of discomfort and exploration that happen sporadically. Mostly, the narrative is interested in the development of two marginal subjects looking for their place in the world: the first one trying to prove that there is more to life than working in a kitchen, the other one trying to sort out a myriad of complicated relationships, and an unexpected pregnancy. Samir and Maria find the necessary support in each other to get through their present difficulties, without necessarily becoming “the” solution to all of their problems. The film ends with a shot of the road ahead of a moving car, and the voice over of the Italian language tape stating that the previous lesson was about expressing the past, and that the next unit is about expressing the future.

The language tape brings the narrative to a full circle, providing a framing device. The film begins with a daydreaming sequence, in which a voiceover of a language tape plays, introducing a lesson with Ms. Bell and Mr. Rossi at the dance floor, and in which Mr. Rossi explains that he emigrated from Calabria to look for work. We can assume, given the names of the characters, the dialogue and the costumes, that this hypothetical dialogue is taking place between an American woman and an Italian immigrant from the early 1900s. The scene is set to match the voiceover, with a couple mouthing the tape’s dialogue in a room suffused with soft white light and indiscernible background. Right before the scene ends, and in between the

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<sup>75</sup> I would like to thank Professor Leonardo De Franceschi, from Università Roma Tre, for giving me access to a copy of this film for the purpose of this analysis. The film is not commercially available.

<sup>76</sup> Being Moroccan is significant in so far that for the longest time, Italians referred to “marocchino” to all Arab (and at times Black) immigrants the way some people in the USA call all Hispanics Mexican. Sicilian use the term “Turk” rather than “Moroccan.”

dialogue lines, the couple kiss, and then Ms. Bell says “you must feel alone, so far away from home, alone.” As the last word echoes, we cut to an extreme close up of Samir’s face in a dark room, who is looking towards the left of the frame while the image of Ms. Bell is projected on his face. The tape continues to play, while the image on Samir’s face flashes. Then we cut to a shot from behind Samir, and we realized that he is looking out of a window, and that the image flashing on his face is the reflection of a billboard from across the street. At this point Samir turns around to face the kitchen where he is preparing dinner, while the tape plays on. Finally, before the last shot of the film with the road and the voiceover, Samir imagines Maria wearing the same outfit as Ms. Bell, and they both kiss and start to dance in a scene that echoes the beginning of the film.

Graziella Parati’s analysis of Benhadj’s film in, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*, focuses exclusively on this framing device. Given the book’s emphasis on “talking back”, it is not surprising that she is so invested in it, for it inscribes the story of Samir within an older story of Italian emigration:

Benhadj forces his audience to set its gaze on an other who is telling the audience’s story and using it to create a self in relation to the invisible otherness of the spectators: ‘you who are looking at me, you are telling my story,’ in Cavarero’s words. The relationship established between Samir and Mr. Rossi – that is, between the immigrant from Morocco who looks like the immigrant from Italy and the Italian American who looks like Samir – cannot be erased *even by the comical situation presented in the oneiric sequences*.<sup>77</sup>

Parati’s reading of the film is nuanced and fits well within the theoretical frame that she is working with. However, it overemphasizes an aspect of the film that is not very innovative for the genre, while dismissing the aspect that is. The obvious parallel between the new immigrant from the global south, and the Italian emigrant from previous generations, one of the most common tropes in cinema of immigration as we have seen in the previous chapter<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, “oneiric” sequences are hardly ever used in such films. As in Bivona’s *Clandestini nella città*, the dream sequences in Benhadj’s film gives access to a register other than the social realism of cinema of duty, that of dreams and desires. Yes, the final dream sequence let us know that Samir is Mr. Rossi as he dances with Maria, but it also let us know that these lonely, marginal subjects have found kindred spirits, and perhaps even the *possibility* of not being alone. If transnational identifications mobilizes both below and above the nation, then Samir and Maria mobilize their identifications both below and above the contact zone of cinema of duty: below as single individuals travelling together, and above as broader figures of marginality in the era of globalization and postmodern scatterings. Within the confines of the politics of multiculturalism and the prison of subsidy, Benhadj is able to tell a story that feels simultaneously personal and universal.

With his second and third Italian film, Benhadj leaves behind the framework of cinema of duty completely, and moves towards higher levels of abstraction. *Mirka* (2000), an Italian, French, and Spanish coproduction with the participation of Gerard Depardieu, Vanessa Redgrave and Franco Nero, is the story of a foreign child arriving to nameless town in a nameless country. His arrival causes major social and emotional distress in the little mountain town, as his presence reminds the townsfolk of their own collective disgraceful past: a few years earlier the town was

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<sup>77</sup> Parati, *Migration Italy*, 109. Emphasis mine.

<sup>78</sup> For example: Michele Placido’s *Tomato* (1990), Giani Amelio’s *Lamerica* (1994), Vittorio Da Setta’s *Letters from the Sahara* (20xx), and Giordana’s *When You Are Born* (2005). For an in depth discussion on this trope of similarity, please see my previous chapter.

caught in a regional war, and when enemy soldiers impregnated some of the local girls after raping them, the town committed collective infanticide to “erase” the shame of the rapes. Mirka was the sole survivor because his grandmother spared him. The film ends with the townsfolk trying, and failing, to kill Mirka. The frightened boy escapes and hides in some ruins out of town, where his mother finds him. After the last shot of the film, an intertitle informs us that in the last decade more than a million and a half of women and children in the world have been victims of rape and violence during ethnic-based wars, acts aggravated by the suicides and emotional scarring that followed.

Because of the mountain setting and the closing intertitles, and in spite of the lack of specificity of country, the film has often been interpreted as making reference to the Balkan ethnic wars of the 1990s. However, the vagueness and the dichotomies presented in the film allows multiple interpretations closer to the biography of the filmmaker. On the one hand, the topic of the abuse of women during wartime is one that Benhadj explored in *Touchia* (1992), a film that simultaneously referred to Algeria’s war of independence and the ongoing civil war (1991-2002). In 2010, Benhadj shot *Perfumes of Algiers*, a film he calls a sequel to *Touchia*, and one that he started to write in the mid-1990s but could not bring himself to finish because at the time “what was going on in Algeria made me sick, I didn’t feel the necessary distance to be able to face the argument” of the effects that war, and other patriarchal systems, have on women.<sup>79</sup> Written and directed between *Touchia* and *Perfumes of Algiers*, *Mirka* is an indirect contemplation of the atrocities still going on in Algeria, as much as it is a contemplation of the atrocities of war in general.<sup>80</sup>

On the other hand, the internal dichotomies as well as the language used in the film point toward more local (i.e. Italian) affairs. For starters, the division between native villagers and foreigners is one that is highly racialized: all the local people are blonde and fair skinned, while Mirka’s foreignness is localized in his strange name and his dark hair, which is shorn to help him blend in better. Furthermore, the town has an annual tradition of burning an effigy of the “enemy,” which happens to have a very dark coloration with black, curly hair. The dichotomy between white (blonde) natives and brown/black foreigners is one that distinctly echoes the general xenophobic discourse about immigration going on in Europe in general, and Italy in particular. Against the image of the black “*vu cumprà*,” or itinerant peddlers, and the brown “*marocchini*,” stands the image of the white, and often blonde, northerners embraced by right wing and xenophobic political groups such as the *Lega Nord*. Furthermore, the language used against Mirka by the town’s people echoes the Italian rhetoric against immigrants; he is not just called a “*straniero*” (foreigner), but also a “*clandestino*” whose presence is the reason why suddenly things started to go wrong in the community. Without explicitly addressing the situation, Benhadj’s film obliquely touches upon the racial/ethnic tensions that have been developing in Italy and other parts of Europe.

While Bivona’s accent, in relation to multiculturalism and Italy, is hopeful and artistic in tone, and harmonious in its imagining of Italian society through the lessons of Mediterranean history, Benhadj’s accent maintains the dissonance of social tensions but sublimates them into

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<sup>79</sup> De Franceschi, *L’Africa in Italia*, 262. Translation mine.

<sup>80</sup> The point is raised also by Giuseppe Gariazzo, who says that Mirka’s mountains, forests, valleys hide other mountains, forests and valleys, and other rapes, escapes, memories of violence and tragic acts. He sees *Touchia* as a specter than lingers in the background of Mirka. Giuseppe Gariazzo, “Italia Anno Zero Zero,” in *Il Cinema Europeo Del Métissage: XXXVI Mostra Internazionale Del Nuovo Cinema: Pesaro, 23 Giugno-1 Luglio 2000* (Pesaro: Il castoro, 2000), 210.

narratives that are able to interpellate broader audiences at multiple registers. Though always telling the stories of the “little guy,” which in some way are always iterations of his own social subject position, his narrative and stylistic choices interpellates a broader constituency of subalterns, and expands the field of references in the Italian imaginary.<sup>81</sup> When viewed from this perspective, Benhadj’s other film, *For Bread Alone* (2005), is not only a great story that affirms the power of education in the life of the most marginal subjects in society, but introduces one of the most prominent novels in contemporary Arab literature to an Italian audience that may have otherwise never discovered it. In this case, cosmopolitanism is not represented, but rather performed.

### **Mohsen Melliti: Relocating the Sites of Struggle**

Mohsen Melliti migrated from Tunisia to Italy in 1989 as a political exile and his earliest creative works were literary. By 1992, he had written his first novel in Arabic, but published only in Italian with the help of Monica Ruocco, *Pantanella: Canto lungo la strada*. In 1995 he published his second book, written completely in Italian, entitled *I bambini delle rose*. Melliti then turned to the moving image, directing (and co-directing) some documentaries in the later part of the 1990s: *The Other Rome* (1995), *Homebound* (1996, with Massimo Guglielmi), *Lighthouse Girl* (2000), and *My Head On the Ball* (2000).<sup>82</sup> These early documentaries were commissioned by either a TV station (Rai Due) or by the University of Rome, and along with his earlier literary production, fall within the category of “engaged” work and/or cinema of duty – generally speaking. Given the fact that the production monies came from state institutions, and that the films espouse a certain pedagogical perspective, they can be said to be confined within the prison of subsidy as well. Even so, and in a manner reminiscent of Benhadj’s 1997 *The Tree of Suspended Destinies*, some of his work resonates with an accent that differentiates it from Italian cinema of immigration. *Homebound* (1996), for example, is a “docu-fiction” that bypasses the discourse of the contact zone while still talking about the topic of immigration by documenting the return of some Moroccan immigrants back home from Milan. This film, while still well within the realm of “realism” and socially responsible in its intention, is more interested in the personal lives of the people it records, in the world they inhabit outside and alongside Italy. While ethnographic in its approach, it does not place its Moroccan subjects in an antagonistic relationship with Italian or western society, and thus avoids the implication that this film is about an “Italian problem” that needs to be resolved.

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<sup>81</sup> Regarding the continuous representation of the marginal subject Benhadj has said: “I believe that my work has a common thread of telling the story of those who cannot speak for themselves, of those who do not have the opportunity, and I feel like a sort of spokesperson for these marginal subjects, of these characters excluded from society.” The fact that Mirka is played by his son Karim (Mirka is an anagram of Karim), and that in *For Bread Alone* his son plays the best friend of the protagonist as a child, and that Rachid Benhadj plays the protagonist’s instructor as an adult, indicates that to some extent the filmmaker sees himself in those marginal subjects as well. Manfreda, “Immagini d’infanzia e voci di diversità nel cinema di Rachid Benhadj,” 24. Translation mine.

<sup>82</sup> From the press book of *I, The Other* (2006). According to the press book, *L’altra Roma* (1995, *The Other Rome*) was an anthropological documentary, produced by Università Di Roma, with the collaboration of the social scientist Professor Roberto De Angelis. *La mia testa nel pallone* (2000, *My Head On The Ball*) and *La ragazza del faro* (2000, *Lighthouse Girl*) were documentaries produced by Rai Due TV station. *Verso casa* (1996, *Homebound*) was also produced by Rai Due, but it is classified as a “docufiction,” highlighting the perceived necessity of aligning immigrant narratives with realist/documentary aspects, as a mode of “talking back” or showing “the real conditions” of immigrants.



However, our main cinematic focus regards the filmmaker's only feature film to date – *I, The Other* (2007). From the title of the film, one could infer that the narrative will take us to the aforementioned binaries of cinema of duty, where the Italian and the immigrant, the native and the foreigner, are pitted against each other as representative of divergent cultures that cannot coexist, in part because Italian society is oppressive and unwelcoming. The film, however, plays with these expectations and disturbs them through a complex narrative and a minimalistic *mise en scene* and setting. The story revolves around two fishermen, Giuseppe and Youssef, who struggle to make ends meet and who have an antagonistic relationship with Troina, their Mafia affiliated fish buyer. The film is 75 minutes long, of which only 2 minutes are spent land-side to show that Troina is under paying them, and to set him up as a the symbolic representation for the socio-economic forces that Giuseppe feels are against them. The rest of the film takes place on the boat in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea with only Giuseppe and Youssef as characters over the course of 24 hours. However, these two are not completely isolated from the rest of the world as their radio transmits both music from the African coast and news from Italy, not to mention the two-way radio Giuseppe uses to communicate with Nello, the captain of another fishing boat.

The conflict of the narrative appears when the news on the radio reports on the 2004 Madrid bombings, for which the authorities are searching for a suspect named Youssef Ben Ali, a seemingly integrated Tunisian living in Sicily for years. The similar name and biography (however scant), between the terrorist suspect and Youssef, triggers a slow buildup of tension and distrust between the men, exacerbated by Giuseppe's insomnia, his paranoia regarding Troina's attacks on him/them, and Nello's doubts about Youssef because, according to Nello, "at the end, who really knows Youssef?" Though at first the idea is taken as a joke, the seed of mistrust takes root and soon the two best friends are attacking and defending each other from verbal and physical attacks that alternatively lead to one physically restricting the other, all the while showing their mutual disappointment in each other. Finally, they come to an understanding that it is all a mistake, and reach a truce necessitated by the fact that they are stranded since the engine has broken down and the radio does not work. A second conflict is introduced then in the form of a dead body pulled in by the fishing nets. Giuseppe wants to bring the body to port and turn it to the authorities, while Youssef foresees nothing but trouble in doing so. Once again, tensions arise, but Youssef tricks Giuseppe into drinking water spiked with sedatives so that he can toss the Jane Doe overboard. Unfortunately, the sound of the body hitting the water wakes up Giuseppe, who is in a drug induced haze. In that condition, he sees Giuseppe standing there, facing away from him, and that triggers a sequence of associations that signal danger: Troina, the radio news, a shot of Youssef with a bloody knife from earlier in the day when he was cooking, etcetera. In that state he gets up, with knife in hand, and stumbles into Youssef, who turns around at that very moment, impaling himself in the knife. Over the next few seconds Giuseppe gets his bearings back and realizes what he has done, sinking into shock and despair. Ultimately, the film ends with Youssef dead and Giuseppe stranded, alone, in the middle of the sea, and in complete shock at having killed his best friend.

The clash between Giuseppe and Youssef, particularly when factoring in the death of the latter, seems to point toward the typical clash between Italian natives and foreigners. However, a closer look at the film indicates that any clash of cultures is not the result of local interactions, but rather the fabrication of much larger systems of powers that ultimately interpellate both the Italian fisherman and the immigrant as victims and perpetrators. The title of the film, in fact, is not "I and the other" as one may automatically interpret it given the long-standing narratives of

antagonistic relationships between a (national, ethnic, cultural) self and a perceived 'other.' Instead, the title "I, the Other" indicates that what seems a binary opposition is really a mirroring, a reflection of the same subject. This idea is reinforced throughout the film, not least of all by the analogous names of the two characters, whose names both mean Joseph in their respective native languages. The similarities (almost *interchangeabilities*), between both characters are constantly reinforced throughout the film narratively and cinematically: they are both fathers, husbands, and blue collar, hardworking, brown men, and are placed physically in symmetrical positions at key moments of the film to signal their interchangeability. Furthermore, the convincing portrayal of Youssef by Sicilian actor Giovanni Martorana not only signals the idea of interchangeability vis-à-vis casting, but also reminds us that Sicily and Tunisia are not separated but are rather united by 100 miles of sea, and a long history of exchanges.

However, the displacement of the elements of cinema of duty, of the "clash of civilization," is not a historical one, as in the case of Benhadj's *The Tree of Suspended Destinies* (1997), or Amelio's *Lamerica* (1994), which mobilize the trope "they are as we once were." Such a trope appeals to commonalities between Italians emigrants of the past and the immigrants of the present in order to diffuse the difference at the heart of the "clash of civilization" argument. Instead, Melliti's film suggests that as far as the immigrants from the global south and the average Italian citizen are marginal socio-economic subjects in the world, or "little people" subjected to the whims of social, political and economic powers beyond their own control, they are analogous subjects. In fact, the film implies that the problem is not a simple clash of 'civilizations' or 'cultures,' but rather the systemic inequalities and tensions found within the global networks of exchanges, signaled in this narrative by Troina (employer, mafia), government state apparatuses (Italian and Tunisian coast guard) and international politics (terrorists and US war on terror) – all of which barely touch the plot, but whose influence are heavily felt at the edge of the diegesis. The radio may have brought the news that instigated the conflict in the narrative, but the mistrust that led to the tragic end of the film was made possible by an accumulation of pressures applied by economic, political and global forces before the film even began, which put them on the defensive once the conflict was introduced. At the end, the events that culminated on the boat (aptly named Medea) are a tragedy that simultaneously indicts and exonerates both characters, guilty of mistrust and violence, but collateral damage to a war that is not their own, a sentiment reinforced by the dedication at the end of the film: "to the victims of the war on terror."

Bivona, Rachid, Melliti – all three accented filmmakers distance themselves from the cinema of duty, even though that is the prominent mode of representation by Italian cinema of immigration, and even when caught in funding mechanisms that demand a film "about" immigration and multiculturalism. Indirect, oblique approaches to questions of belonging, marginality, and diversity are the predominant style of the first generation of Italian accented cinema, which in turn belongs to a second (or perhaps third) generation of European accented filmmakers. Though the anxieties identified by Naficy in the first generation of European accented filmmakers are still felt, they are often subsumed, and at times sublimated, within narratives that are simultaneously *situated* within the personal biography of the filmmaker, but connected with *universal* ideas of belongings.

## Ferzan Özpetek: Autobiographical Inscription

Ferzan Özpetek is the best-known accented filmmaker in Italy, and he enjoys a long and fruitful relationship with his adopted country and the Italian film industry. Born in Turkey in 1959 to an affluent upper middle class family, he transferred to Rome at the age of 17 in 1976 to study film at La Sapienza University. While in Rome, the filmmaker started to work at a film magazine, “*La rivista d’Arte*,” which afforded him access to some of the biggest names in the Italian industry through interviews he conducted for the publication. According to Gabriele Marcello, “at the end of every interview, Özpetek offered his service as a volunteer assistant,” an unpaid intern, to get his foot inside the doors of the Italian film industry.<sup>83</sup> His approach paid off when he was contacted in 1982 by Umberto Angelucci, assistant director to Massimo Troisi for the film *Scusate il ritardo*.

Over time, Özpetek moved up from intern to director’s assistant, and worked for some of the best known names in the Italian industry: Maurizio Ponzi, Ricky Tognazzi, Lamberto Bava, Francesco Nuti, Sergio Citti, Giovanni Veronesi and Marco Risi. The relationships he formed over time with these filmmakers led directly to Özpetek’s directorial debut in 1997, when Marco Risi and Maurizio Tedesco helped to produce *Hamam – The Turkish Bath*. Though the project encountered many financial and distribution problems at first, the film ended up in the *Quinzaine* section at the Cannes Film Festival, where it was received extremely well, launching the film to a successful run of 38 weeks at Italian movie theaters. The success of his first independent film led to a partnership with producers Tilde Corsi and Gianni Romoli, and their production company R&C Produzioni, which produced Özpetek’s next five films: *Harem Suare* (1999), *His Secret Life* (2001), *Facing Windows* (2003), *Sacred Heart* (2005) and *Saturn in Opposition* (2007). In each one of these films, the script was written by Romoli and Özpetek himself. In 2007, the filmmaker and R&C Produzioni parted ways and Özpetek started working with Fandango, an important Italian studio, for which he made three films: *A Perfect Day* (2008, script by Sandro Petraglia), *Loose Cannons* (2010), and *A Magnificent Haunting* (2012). In 2013 the filmmaker collaborated once again with Gianni Romoli and R&C Produzioni, releasing in 2014 *Fasten Your Seatbelts*.

Over the course of his long career as a filmmaker, Özpetek’s films have been nominated for countless prizes and awards, and have won quite a few, which include Davids (Italy’s equivalent to an Oscar), Golden Globes, and *Nastro d’argento* (by the Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists). His films have also appeared at Cannes, Venice, and Berlin, as well as Toronto, Karlovy Vary, Moscow and Tribeca, and other minor festivals worldwide. In 2007, he was selected as part of the official Jury for the Venice Film Festival. In 2008, New York’s Museum of Modern Art dedicated a retrospective to Özpetek, an honor that only few Italian filmmakers have ever had. All and all, Özpetek has enjoyed a very successful career, becoming a well-known filmmaker not just in Italy and Turkey, but in Europe and North America as well. However, his traditional trajectory through the Italian film industry, his obvious fluency in Italian cinematic history and technique, his successful career, his international fame, his dual citizenship – are sometimes interpreted as proof that Özpetek lacks an “accent.” Unfortunately, the popular discourse surrounding accented filmmakers is still tied in the national imaginary to exilic, diasporic or ethnic discourses articulated through the language of cinema of duty. The fact that his films have a polished look, and narratives that do not tackle issues of immigration head-on, makes some think that his films bear no accent, no traces of the filmmaker’s subjective

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<sup>83</sup> Gabriele Marcello, *Ferzan Ozpetek: la leggerezza e la profondità* (Genoa: Le mani, 2009), 21.

experiences in relation to the state and imagined communities, of Özpetek's own nomadism and cosmopolitan existence.<sup>84</sup>

In fact, the few times the concept of “accented” and Özpetek have been put together in scholarly articles, there has been either a very weak commitment to the union or an outright rejection of it – even as the articles performed, ironically, an accented reading of Özpetek's films.<sup>85</sup> Part of the rejection lies in the fact, as mentioned earlier, that Naficy's repetitive attempts to articulate a cogent vision of an accented style through concrete examples of accented cinema are often interpreted as being *prescriptive* rather than *descriptive*. For example, because Özpetek's career seems to show no “(dis)location of an interstitial subject” within cinematic practices (i.e. struggling artist), Derek Duncan soft-pitches the connection between accented cinema and the filmmaker.<sup>86</sup> Elisabetta Girelli, on the other hand, rejects the notion of accented cinema not on the merits of the theory itself, but rather on what she perceives ‘recent film criticism’ has done with it, and basically calls it a “critical burden.”<sup>87</sup> Duncan and Girelli forget that Naficy is attempting to map out the cinematic practices of accented filmmakers from previous decades, particularly the 1980s, not articulate what shape accented cinema should always take. Ultimately, the notion of accented cinema should point towards a “relationship between the film and the filmmaker to existing or imagined homeplaces,” a relationship that is underwritten by the experience of displacement and of movement, and not necessarily toward specific cinematic practices.<sup>88</sup> It is undeniable that he speaks Italian with a Roman accent, knows that Italian canon quite well, and is part of a complex network of friends and colleagues in Rome, where he has lived for over thirty-eight years. However, the fact still remains that he was born in Turkey, that his mother tongue is Turkish, he visits Turkey all the time and has family, friends, and a home there – all of these experiences are in great part the source of his cinematic voice. From this perspective, one can see that ultimately Girelli's and Duncan's readings of some of Özpetek's works, are in fact readings of his cinematic accent, as the former speaks of Özpetek's “dualistic relationship to Turkey” and the latter of Özpetek's queering of Rome's urban spaces.

This brings us to the last complication one faces when attempting to discuss Özpetek within the perspective of accented cinema, which is mainly the fact that his films are often

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<sup>84</sup> In fact, at a round table on meridian cinema (read: southern/Mediterranean) at the Northeast Modern Language Association on April 4 2014, a question was raised on whether one could think of Özpetek as an accented filmmaker, to which another member of the roundtable responded, “his films are so well integrated in the Italian mainstream that he has lost all accent.” As a member of that round table, I personally witnessed the described events.

<sup>85</sup> Elisabetta Girelli, “Transnational Orientalism: Ferzan Özpetek's Turkish Dream in Hamam (1997),” *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 5, no. 1 (2007): 23–38; Derek Duncan, “Stairway to Heaven: Ferzan Özpetek and the Revision of Italy,” *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 3, no. 2 (2005): 101–13.

<sup>86</sup> “It is not my aim in this article to make any kind of definitive claim for Özpetek as either a queer or an ‘accented’ film-maker. What I am more interested in suggesting is that the adoption of either, or indeed both, of these critical perspectives dislodges the dominant national framework through which films made in Italy are characteristically evaluated.” Duncan, “Stairway to Heaven,” 105.

<sup>87</sup> “In his influential study of ‘accented’ films, Naficy describes their prime function as ‘expressing, allegorizing, commenting upon, and critiquing the home and host societies and cultures and the deterritorialized conditions of the filmmakers’ (2001:4). If we are to take these practices (as Naficy appears to suggest) as being present to an unusually high degree in ‘accented’ cinema, then they come to represent a considerable burden of expectation for the filmmaker: they imply both freedom from received cultural systems, and an obligation to engage critically with them.” However, Naficy's original quote does not say anything about “prime function” or suggest an obligation. Furthermore, her comment suggests a rather narrow view of contestation. Girelli, “Transnational Orientalism,” 25.

<sup>88</sup> Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 21.

received, commonly and critically, within the framework of queer theory.<sup>89</sup> The move is reasonable given that the recurring thematization of male-male desire in his movies. Unfortunately, that also means that Özpetek's cosmopolitan accent is often subsumed under the queer aspects of his films. The constant focus on such aspects, by either critics or scholars, is perhaps the reason why the filmmaker constantly downplays the queer elements of his own works or shuts down the topic of discussion completely.<sup>90</sup> He often maintains that his films are not *about* queerness or *being* queer, but rather about abstract ideas that at times are discussed through characters who happen to be gay. Indeed, it is true that his films engage with a wide array of subjects such as infidelity, power plays, social pressures, parental pressures, and other issues. However, it is also true that he often frames his investigations of such subjects through non-heteronormative relationships, a move that nonetheless "queers" (i.e. defamiliarizes) the viewpoint from which such themes are often seen or dealt with in cinema. Such a move is dependent upon the constant negation that his narratives are about gay issues in order to avoid ghettoizing his own films under the genre of "gay films," which in turn would deactivate its subversive elements. This chapter proceeds from the perspective that Özpetek's queerness is part of his cosmopolitanism just as much as his cosmopolitanism is part of his queerness: though not commensurable experiences, they are nonetheless part of Özpetek's life and strongly inform his unique cinematic accent. For that reason, I consider the specific attributes of being gay, male, Turkish, Italian, etcetera, as means to access broader and more abstract notions of belongings, which in turn shape the sound of Özpetek's cinematic accent.

### Autobiographical Inscription

Though most of Naficy's "components of accented style" are rather descriptive of specific forms of exilic and diasporic displacements, some components carry over to the articulation of their cosmopolitan form. Autobiographical inscription is one of them, and we have seen how Bivona, Benhadj and Melliti have all inscribed themselves to varying degrees within their films, either through linguistic/musical referents as in the case with Melliti's *Io, the Other*; or through biographical/geographical referents as in Bivona's *Tunis*; or in the case of Benhadj through multiple devices, such as linguistic, symbolic, literary referents and the interjection of his son and himself as actual characters in his films. According to Naficy, "in the accented cinema, the author is in the text in multiple ways...In a longitudinal and intertextual study of the films of individual filmmakers, we may discover certain consistencies from which we can construct an authorial presence within the films."<sup>91</sup> That means that the more films an

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<sup>89</sup> Ryan Calabretta-Sajder, "Divergenze celluloidi: Colore, Migrazione, e identità sessuale nei film gay di Ferzan Özpetek" (PhD Dissertation, Middlebury College, 2014); Sergio Rigoletto, "Sexual Dissidence and the Mainstream: The Queer Triangle in Ferzan Özpetek's *Le Fate Ignoranti*," *The Italianist* 30 (2010): 202–18; Girelli, "Transnational Orientalism"; Alberto Zambenedetti, "Multiculturalism in New Italian Cinema," *Studies in European Cinema* 3, no. 2 (2006): 105–16; Duncan, "Stairway to Heaven."

<sup>90</sup> Citing an interview with Cristina Paterno in a website no longer active, Duncan quotes Özpetek saying about *His Secret Life*, "rather than being a 'gay film', it is a film that deals with openness." Regarding *Loose Cannons*, according to Calabretta-Sajder, "when *Loose Cannons* premiered at the Berlinale and he was interviewed, he said that the film was about two brothers and their relationship with their father; he said nothing about the fact that these two brothers were gay" and that the film was about them coming out to their families. Furthermore, Calabretta-Sajder cites a personal interaction with the director at the Festival di Cinema Internazionale at Taormina, in which the filmmaker got upset about people asking him about the queer aspects of his film, and responded, "enough with 'gay' questions!" Duncan, "Stairway to Heaven," 102; Calabretta-Sajder, "Divergenze celluloidi," 14.

<sup>91</sup> Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 35.

accented directors makes, the more instances we can discern of his/her autobiographical inscription. That is why in Benhadj's films the inscriptions are more varied than in Melliti's or Bivona's.

Özpetek's ten films offer plenty of opportunities to witness the multiple ways in which he inscribes aspects of himself.<sup>92</sup> Over the course of his career, these inscriptions generally become more subtle and more abstract, though they are never gone. Great examples of this tendency are visible instantiations of *queerness* and *turkishness*, elements that resonate in relation to the invisible and normative "standards" that are heterosexuality and Italianness, and the two strongest elements through which Özpetek constantly negotiates questions of belonging and community formation.<sup>93</sup> His very first film, *Hamam: The Turkish Bath* (1997) is set in Turkey and revolves around coincidental life-changing experiences that allow, first Francesco and then Marta, to live different versions of themselves. The actual Turkish bath at the center of the narrative offers itself up for analysis as the site where passion and a sense of belonging are developed through the discovery of romance and a corner of Istanbul that is as real as it is iconic of orientalist tendencies in the West.<sup>94</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay to analyze in depth the many, and often contradictory, layers of this chronotope, I simply want to point out the way in which these two aspects of Özpetek's life are rendered not only visible, but essential to the process of dismantling (hetero-national)normative social formations.

The geographical displacement occasioned by the death of Francesco's aunt, Anita, is central to the re-articulation of a new life of the Roman couple. Francesco and Marta are architects who own and work in an interior design firm. They are wealthy, and their conversations in their rich and rather sterile apartment either revolve around work or become shouting matches, foregrounding their inability to communicate with each other. The scene of their life in Rome is short and full of tension, completely set within their apartment, which feels claustrophobic compared to the panoramic view of the city in the background. The point of such a short sequence is to set it as a geographical and emotional point of departure, first for Francesco and then for Marta. It sets Istanbul, by contrast, as a symbolic space charged with a valence of community, family, tradition, sensuality, and passion – attributes that could be considered reductive and orientalist given that they are articulated by the western eyes of its characters.

Girelli is right in pointing out, however, that this reductive, orientalist perspective exists alongside another, one that is unavailable and inaccessible to the Italian audience to whom the film is marketed.<sup>95</sup> This other perspective is created by the linguistic and cultural gaps formed

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<sup>92</sup> It is important to point out that even when all the inscriptions are put together, what one gets is reflection of the filmmaker, a discursive identity that gives us glimpses, not necessarily real access to a real empirical subject. The performance of identity and the ambiguity it engenders is part of the accented condition of displacement.

<sup>93</sup> I would like to leave the terms "turkishness" and "queerness" uncapitalized, as an acknowledgment of the vagueness and slippery nature of such terms. To capitalize "turkishness" is to imply, in my eyes, some essential quality found within the nation of Turkey, which then transfers to all its grammatical variations through capitalization. In this essay, my references to Turkish cities, culture, and language are directly correlated to the personal experiences and knowledge of the filmmaker, as represented in his films.

<sup>94</sup> The shots of the Hamam, in this film as well as in his next one, *Harem Suare* (1999), unequivocally point to classic orientalist iconography by framing shots of the baths in a manner reminiscent of paintings by Jean-Leone Gérôme, whose paintings, incidentally, adorn in the covers of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (1995).

<sup>95</sup> "Against the dominant subjectivity of the Italian protagonist, whose point of view provides an 'explanation' of Turkishness, Turkey itself surfaces as a subject; in contrast with the implicit gap, which otherwise defines Özpetek's relationship with the country in the film, in these particular scenes the director posits an intense closeness

by the insertion of sequences of Turkish speech and traditional music that is left untranslated, as well as the references to Ozpetek's favorite poet, Nâzim Hikmet. It is in these gaps between a Western orientalist view of Istanbul, and a native knowledge of the culture, where the filmmaker's interstitial-ness as a Turkish-Italian subject emerges, where his accent can be heard. Of particular relevance is the last scene of the film, when Marta is looking at Istanbul from a rooftop, all the while a non-diegetic Turkish song plays in the background. Özpetek wrote the lyrics of the song, which repeats again and again, "Istanbul I loved you very much," bringing together his Turkish words with his Italian gaze on the city that he loves and sees through the nostalgia of memory.

However, without the slow-building relationship, almost imperceptible at first, between Francesco and Mehmet, Francesco's visit to Istanbul would have been a short one. He would have sold the Hamam (as was his initial intention) and returned to a loveless marriage, in a passionless life of work, in a house that seems sterile and lifeless. All the allures of Istanbul would not have sufficed to keep Francesco there, were it not for the promise of romance couched within a "non-traditional" relationship, one that is hinted at but often disavowed, obfuscated by more traditional options. Even as the film hints at multiple instantiation of that love that dare not speak its name, the film constantly puts the beautiful Fusun, Mehmet's sister, alongside Francesco, in the bedroom talking, in the Hamam working together, in the dining room teaching each other Turkish and Italian, playing with our heteronormative expectations and hinting at a possible romance.<sup>96</sup> This heteronormative perspective is instantiated in Marta, who upon joining Francesco in Istanbul attributes his change in behavior and demeanor to an illicit relationship, and often fails to see the looks exchanged between Francesco and Mehmet and instead suspects Fusun. Her surprise comes not from catching Francesco cheating, since she is herself cheating with Paolo, but from finding out that he is cheating with a man.

It is precisely the combined geographical and heteronormative distancing that allows the film to be more than just an Orientalizing fantasy, or a simple "coming out" story, questioning the very nature of the relationships we establish with others and our social environment. On the one hand, the seemingly obvious contrast between Rome and Istanbul is problematized by the fact that the Roman apartment is not always cold, lifeless, and full of anxiety. For example, whenever Nelly, the Filipino servant, appears in the apartment, the apartment acquires a different emotional valance. The first time Nelly appears in the film by herself, she is singing an untranslated Tagalog song as she sets the table. Her singing gives the apartment a liveliness that is suddenly erased when Marta's off camera voice intrudes to give Nelly orders, cutting Nelly's singing off. Later in the film, when Francesco and Marta are not in Rome, Nelly is shown hosting friends and family at the apartment, who are eating and talking convivially around the table. This time it is Francesco's voice that intrudes, but through a message in the answering machine. The disembodied voice is enough to make Nelly pause and listen, but not enough to interrupt the festivities of her guests. Both instances show that the coldness of the apartment is

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to his birthplace, so intense in fact as to allow for Turkey to remain uninterpreted, equal-to-itself." Girelli, "Transnational Orientalism," 34.

<sup>96</sup> Anita's letters, heard as voiceovers throughout the film, constantly hint at the homosexual relationships that her Hamam facilitate, and at the power and protection such knowledge gives her as a business woman living in a very patriarchal society: "I have a lot of friends here that would be very grateful if I could provide for them a welcoming and discreet shelter for certain whims." Later on she continues, "My clients talk to me, they confide in me, they treat me as an equal. Once in a while, it's fun to hide and watch them, while they amuse themselves amidst the steam. And about those honorable heads of family, I now know so many things, that they respect me more than their saintly mothers."

not inherent in the space, that the problem is not Rome, or the West, or even “modern life”, but the type of relationship Francesco and Marta have established with each other and their environment.<sup>97</sup>

On the other hand, Francesco’s relationship with Mehmet reinforces that criticism by foregrounding the fact that what he found was not a different lover, but a different type of love. Marta has been having an extramarital affair with Paolo, their business partner, for the past two years, and yet there is no evidence that her life has been any different with Paolo. When finally the couple confront each other about their failed marriage and their extramarital affairs, it is Francesco who says that he was miserable with his previous life, and that in turn he made other people miserable. Now things are different: people seem kinder with him and he is kinder with the world, he does things with more enthusiasm, Perran and Osman treat him like a son, and Mehmet listens to him and encourages him. “This is the life,” he says, “that I wanted.” The focus is not on “coming out,” but on a different worldview. Marta is unable to reciprocate a similar narrative involving her and Paolo, suggesting that for her nothing had changed. The inheritance of the Hamam literally took Francesco (and Marta) to the margins of Europe, allowing him to get out of his daily rhythm and giving him the possibility of seeing things from a different perspective. However, he was able to adjust his outlook in life *only* when he engaged in a relationship that took him to the interstices of (a traditional and patriarchal) society, preventing him from replicating the same perspective he had in Rome. Nothing less than a complete re-orientation from the normative coordinates of Francesco’s world could have ‘straightened’ out the course of his life.

Over the course of his career, Özpetek has continued to mobilize elements of “queerness” and “turkishness” to different degrees and in different configurations as distancing mechanism, and as estranging devices to facilitate the recalibration of social bonds. *Harem Suare* (1999) kept the cinematic eye on Turkish soil for the last time (so far), but references to Özpetek’s ‘turkishness’ continued to inhabit his films in different ways, one of which is the casting of Turkish actor Serra Yilmaz in five of his films. From a visual perspective, the continued presence of Serra Yilmaz in Özpetek’s films serves multiple functions. Often called “Özpetek’s iconic actor” in Italy, Yilmaz is actually an accomplished actor in her own right, with over forty films to her credit since 1983. Furthermore, she hosts her own TV show in Turkey, and is a rather well known thespian, as the theater was her first passion, one that she continues to cultivate in Turkey, and in Italy. Though not a top-billing actor in the Italian industry, her continual presence in Özpetek’s films have given her a certain level of recognizability, which helps to habituate the Italian audience to the presence of immigrant actors, not just immigrant faces in the media.<sup>98</sup> At the narrative level, Yilmaz’ characters also provide a different form of representation of cultural ‘otherness’ for the Italian imaginary. While Italian films on

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<sup>97</sup> By the same token, one must keep in mind that Istanbul is not necessarily the ‘paradise’ it seems to be for Francesco and Mehmet, as multiple cues in the film show it to be patriarchal and heteronormative culture where their love will not be able to exist in the open.

<sup>98</sup> For various reasons, most Italian films on immigration in the 1990s and 2000s tended to cast non-professional actors playing the parts of immigrants, the negative result being that these actors became as disposable as the characters they portrayed: the narratives became recognizable while the actors are simple interchangeable masks. For a more in depth criticism on the practice of hiring nonprofessional actors, please see Leonardo De Franceschi, “L’attorialità come luogo di lotta. Africani e afrodiscendenti nel cinema italiano post-1989,” in *L’Africa in Italia: Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano*, ed. Leonardo De Franceschi (Rome: Aracne, 2013), 289–206. See also the interview with actor and founder of casting agency Malcolm X Casting Kim Bikila in same volume, pp. 267-277



immigration portray, for the most part, persons of color as immigrants at the margins, Yilmaz' characters are often in the thick of things as an average, middle class character whose turkishness is an acknowledged characteristic, but not a defining or limiting trait.

Over time, Yilmaz has featured less prominently in Özpetek's films as the actor moved on to other projects. However, other indexical elements of the filmmaker's Turkish cultural background continue to inhabit his films, though in less visible forms. For example, Özpetek often inserts references to his favorite writers, especially the Turkish poet, Nazim Hikmet. Already in *Hamam* a passing reference was made when a friend of the deceased Anita mentioned that she had been Hikmet's lover. In *His Secret Life* (2001), the poetry of Hikmet occupies a central node in the narrative, for once upon a time Michele and Massimo met at a bookstore, when both were trying to buy a rare Italian translation of the poet's work. The encounter happened before the narrative time of the film, but in recounting the episode, Michele (the lover) and Antonia (the wife) find some common ground as it is revealed that Massimo was buying the book for Antonia, and not for himself as Michele had previously taught. When Antonia starts to recite from memory one of Michele's favorite Hikmet poems, it becomes clear that they have more in common than a simple antagonistic relationship as lover and widow of Massimo.<sup>99</sup> The last reference to Hikmet made in one of his films, *A Magnificent Haunting* (2012), is almost imperceptible as it comes in the form of lyrics to a Turkish song, which an Italian audience would have missed completely.<sup>100</sup> However, this points out the most consistent way in which Özpetek indexes his residency within Turkish culture, which is the music used in his films. In every single one of his films, the score includes music by different Turkish artists. Of particular importance is Sezen Aksu, a performer of colossal standing in Turkish culture. Her songs are included in six of Özpetek's films. However, the fact that most of the Italian public would have missed the continual reference also points out the interstitial nature of immigrant culture: though it is always present, it is often unappreciated and sometimes unnoticed.

As we can see, overtime, Turkish elements move away from the center of the narrative to become elements that blend in the tapestry of Özpetek's films. Sierra Yilmaz' characters foreground their turkishness less and less until such element disappears from the narrative and exist only as a projection of the actor's own biography.<sup>101</sup> By 2010 there are no Turkish characters in *Loose Cannons*, and when one returns in *A Magnificent Haunting* (2012) in the form of Yusuf (played by Turkish comedian Cem Yilmaz), it is not mobilized as a national signifier against which other national signifiers are mobilized (as in *Hamam*), or a site of social crisis. It is just an individual difference among others.

Likewise, over the course of Özpetek's career queer elements are moved off center, and repositioned within the narrative in such a manner that they, too, become part of the tapestry of differences within Özpetek's films. This transition is very much in line with the filmmaker's perspective discussed previously, whereby he seeks to avoid a limiting label of "queer

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<sup>99</sup> It is also worth noting that after Magherita Buy recites a Hikmet poem in the film, Nazim Hikmet's poetry began to be published in Italy in earnest. Mondadori published, between 2002 and 2013, 7 different editions of the poet's works. Before the film premiered in 2001, there had been only one edition published by a minor publishing house, Fahrenheit 451, in 1992.

<sup>100</sup> "Tenna" (1993), performed by Sezen Aksu.

<sup>101</sup> In *A Perfect Day* (2008), the last time she appeared in an Özpetek film, Yilmaz has only a small cameo as a "gelataia," or ice cream server. There is nothing in the film that would signal a specific national identity, and yet, the lingering close up on her face allows members of the audience who are familiar with Özpetek's film to recognize her as Serra Yilmaz. There is also the fact that before this cameo, she had always played Turkish character, thus reaffirming the association of Yilmaz and Turkey.

filmmaker” even as he uses queer characters in order to discuss multiple issues. Of all of his films, *His Secret Life* (2001) foregrounds queerness, and the social issues surrounding the interstitial queer community in Rome, the most within the narrative of the film. According to Sergio Rigoletto, the film is “hailed as the cinematic manifesto of the Italian LGBT community for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” because it “was the first queer-themed Italian film to achieve mainstream success in Italy.”<sup>102</sup> It is important to notice Rigoletto’s use of the word “manifesto,” as it helps us to see that in some ways, *His Secret Life* is a “queer cinema of duty” film; it challenges the way Italian cinema has represented queerness in the past, it corrects misinterpretation of the mainstream, it tells buried stories and writes unwritten histories.<sup>103</sup> In other words, it puts queerness at the very center of the narrative, where every other issue of community and belonging must circle around it. In spite of the filmmaker’s attempt to direct the discussion towards broader issues, such as “openness” and “diversity,” the centrality of queerness to its overall theme frames most discussions of the film.

Perhaps that is why in *Facing Windows* (2003), a homosexual relationship is not at the center of the narrative, but off to the side. Indeed, the film goes one step further and dislocates the relationship to the past and within a community with a particular history of persecution, the Jewish community, compounding layers of alienation and dislocation, and complicating any facile “gay” reading of the film.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, Davide’s reasons for saving the community that mocked him for being gay rather than the love of his life, Simone, echoes Eminé’s maxim to her black stepchildren about keeping themselves clean and always being polite: in both cases, it comes down to the feeling of having to “prove” yourself of being worthy of the communities that continually reject you.

*Saturn in Opposition* (2007) is, in some ways, a reboot of *His Secret Life* (2001). The sudden and unexpected death of a character (Lorenzo) serves as a catalyst for a narrative that revolves around the struggle and anxiety of a group of friends who must deal with diverse personal problems (infidelity, drug abuse, etcetera) as they grieve their friend. In this reboot, however, the characters are not marginal subjects, but rather well integrated bourgeois members of society: they are writers, doctors, police officers, and business people. They are part of the mainstream, and because they are part of the mainstream, their problems, their differentiating traits, are positioned as interstitial traits in society rather than markers of marginality. Likewise, Davide’s and Lorenzo’s relationship is not represented as a secret to be discovered, a shock to be dealt with, as in *His Secret Life*, but rather as fact. Though the film explores certain queer-specific issues through their relationship, such as the rights of life partners at hospitals or facing family members that had distance themselves from their gay children, by and large the focus of the film is on the grieving process experienced by Lorenzo’s friends, individually and as a group.

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<sup>102</sup> Rigoletto, “Sexual Dissidence and the Mainstream,” 202.

<sup>103</sup> Derek Duncan points out how this film represents a departure from the dominant representation of male homosexuality by citing Italian classics such as *Rome Open City* (1945) and *The Conformist* (1970), in which homosexuality “is seen as a symbol and marker of the depravity of fascism and as something that is inimical in its essence to the nation.” Duncan, “Stairway to Heaven,” 103.

<sup>104</sup> Calabretta-Sajder reveals the filmmaker’s anxiety regarding the reception of *Facing Windows* when he quotes him: “Before doing the film I was nervous that someone may accuse me of always making films that talk about gays. But has anyone every asked any other director why he or she continues to make films about heterosexuality? It’s an absurd thought, but I believe it has political value. Homosexuality in *Facing Windows* has the significance of diversity, of that which is considered intolerable: Davide is not tolerated on the outside because he is a Jew, and inside the Jewish community he is not tolerated because he is gay.” Calabretta-Sajder, “Divergenze celluloidi,” 3–4. Translation mine.

The diffusion of the film's perspective among the many characters, and the exploration of specific individual issues in conjunction with the group's deep sense of loss, allows queerness to be visible without being an essentializing element. This is a balancing act that the filmmakers manages less adroitly in *Loose Cannons* (2010), but once again does well in *A Magnificent Presence* (2012).

In many ways, this is a common dilemma of accented filmmakers, even those who do not necessarily draw their accent from diasporic, exilic, ethnic or cosmopolitan experiences: how do you access and mobilize your difference as an aesthetic and analytical tool without letting its usage become a prison? In other words, how do perform difference without letting it become an essentializing element, particular for the hyper-politicized elements of race, class and gender? As we have seen, Özpetek's answer to these questions over the course of his career has been to decentralize and naturalize them, to make them always part of the tapestry of his films but not the central site of investigation. This move allows queerness and turkishness to blend in and work in conjunction with other elements of Özpetek's accent, with other aesthetic choices that make up his artistic signature.

Though a full spectral analysis of Özpetek's cinematic signature is beyond the scope of this work, it is worth mentioning some of his most consistent moves. For starters, there is a strong relationship between his films and the place they are set: with one exception, they have all been set in Istanbul or Rome, the two urban centers the filmmaker calls home. Those that are set in Rome, are shot in sites that are autobiographically connected to the filmmaker: most of them are shot in his neighborhood, with the *Gazometro* featuring often in the background. *Saturn in Opposition* (2007) was actually shot in his house, in his kitchen, bathroom and bedroom. Second, history and the past, particularly in relation to WWII, are constantly *present* in his films. For Özpetek, the past is a time and place that we either visit narratively and in flashbacks, or visits us (including the viewing audience) in the form letters, objects, and specters. The relationship between past and present is complex, dynamic, and not necessarily linear, often echoing each other. Of particular interest are his first two films, where the second is actually a prequel to the first. Third, Özpetek's makes reference to his italiannes as much as his turkishness. His mastery of Italian history and literary/cinematic canon is always present, from the smallest details to structuring references. For example, his casting of Lucia Bosè to play the older, elegant and sophisticated Safiye in a scene set in the 1950s, while famous songs from that decade play in the background, is delightful. It easily calls to mind Bosè's film roles from the 1950s, particularly the beautiful and stylish Paola Fontana from Antonioni's *Story of a Love Affair* (1950). Furthermore, two of his films, *Sacred Heart* (2005) and *A Magnificent Haunting* (2012), are adaptations of Rosellini's *Europe '51* (1952) and Luigi Pirandello's play "Six Characters in Search of an Author" (1921), respectively. Fourth and last, Özpetek's photography often favors the foreground, and continually creates a sense of intimacy with his characters/actors through long and lingering close ups of their faces, a device that the filmmaker often uses to open and close his films. *A Magnificent Haunting* actually begins with an extreme close up of a set of eyes as the actor is applying make-up.

While this is only a partial list, it suffices to show the complexity of Özpetek's style, much of which stems from his own particular accent, an accent that resonates against the filmmaker's own layered identity as a queer, Turkish, Italian male, as a formally trained filmmaker, a Roman, a transnational subject. Considering that as an empirical subject, Özpetek must make himself at home in different cities, languages and cultures, it is not surprising to find in his films echoes of Turkish culture mingled with Italian culture, as well as a strong queer

element, weaving around narratives that often question the bonds that unite family, friends, and lovers. This tendency to meditate constantly on questions of belonging is what unites Özpetek's cinema with that of Bivona, Behajd and Melliti. Although all four filmmakers have different trajectories, and privilege different elements within their films, all of them explore the links that connect people to each. Furthermore, they all do so in such a way as to explore multiple identifications that transcend the parochial contact zone of cinema of duty, and often by referencing multiple symbolic systems that enrich the Italian imaginary. In their cosmopolitan cinema, some *other* person, some *other* place, is not something to be feared or be weary of, but people and places that are very much part of Italianness already.

### Epilogue: The Return of Cinema of Duty?

To speak of a "first generation" Italian accented cinema is to conceive, at least provisionally, of a second and third generation down the line.: a second and third that would come after the first generation has exhausted itself, implying that a first leads to a second, and a second to a third. In reality, there is no causality or linearity to these social and cinematic phenomena. Migratory itineraries and access to cinematic representation are not even spaces that can be mapped out into predictable models. Furthermore, changes (or lack thereof) in national, continental and global policies affects different groups and different individuals in different ways. For that reason, at any given time, the Italian social landscape shows a complex topography of accents, with individuals and groups that stand at different relative distance from the mainstream in relation to their migratory experiences and access to the means of cinematic reproduction. That is as true today as it was in the 1990s, and as it will probably be in the next decade.

It is therefore necessary to point out that even as cosmopolitan accented filmmakers, such as Özpetek and Melliti, continue to work on new projects, other forms of accented cinema are developing. Through interstitial and artisanal mode of production, filmmakers like Dagmawi Yimer and Fred Kuwornu have been making films since 2005. Their films are, for the most part, documentaries on the struggles of new immigrants coming to Italy, and of the first generation of Italians of color, those who were born in Italy but are denied citizenship under current laws. The documentaries are deeply personal and often based on their own experiences as African-Italians or new immigrants. In other words, theirs is a cinema of duty: social issue in content, documentary-realist in style, firmly responsible in intention. It is also a cinema of artisanal production conditions, where resources are limited, where help comes from multicultural non-governmental institutions, where director plays cinematographer, producer, distributor, and whatever role is necessary to make the short documentary happen. It is a cinema that resembles the earliest forms of Black British and Beur cinema from the 1970s and 1980s.

However, this Italian cinema of duty of the new millennium is accented in its own way. Although Kuwornu and Yimer's films echo the Beur and Black British cinema of previous decades, the overall cultural and political context in which their work takes place has changed, which gives their work a different valence. For example, the politics of multiculturalism were something that Beur and Black British cinema struggled not to overcome, but to promote in the first place. Regardless of the emphasis I have put on the prison of subsidy within the politics of multiculturalism in the late 1980s, it is worth remembering that when these European accented cinemas started, there was no political or cultural space in which they could operate. There was no financial system support either. They had to force themselves into the mainstream and claim

a niche, even if that space was not precisely at the center of power and money. Two decades later, Kuwornu and Yimer operate within a cultural and political environment that, though not exactly welcoming, does provide limited support.

In fact, “multiculturalism” in the new millennium has a legal, financial and cultural space allocated to it in the West. Granted, Italy has no official politics of multiculturalism at the moment (though for one year it did have a Minister of Integration), but there are organizations that provide help and limited access to the means of film production, such as *Asinitas Onlus*, an organization that promotes multiculturalism and helps immigrants find their way in Italy. In the mid-2000s, they started a project that aimed at building an archive of immigrant’s narratives. They convinced newly arrived refugees, like Dagmawi Yimer, to participate in the project. Though Yimer had no previous experience in filmmaking, or even previous desire to pursue a career in cinematography, he participated in the project, and thanks to the support of *Asinitas* and the collaboration of native “allies,” Yimer shot four documentaries in subsequent years.<sup>105</sup> That project became its own independent organization, the *Archivio delle memorie migranti (AMM)*, and its stated function is to document and archive the testimony of migrants, as well as to produce documentaries about the immigrant experience.<sup>106</sup> Beyond the cultural organizations, such as *Asinitas*, *AMM*, *Lettera 27*, and *Centro orientamento educativo*, there are film festivals dedicated to this topic, such as the *Festival Cinema Africano* in Milan, not to mention special sections within the premiere festivals that were established to showcase this type of “alternative” cinema, such as the Horizons at Venice.

However, I do not mean to imply that the trajectory these filmmakers embark upon is easier than the one blazed by previous generations of accented filmmakers. It is simply a different situation, one that offers new possibilities as it does limitations and obstacles.<sup>107</sup> As much as there is a receptive, left-leaning, audience for these documentaries nowadays, there is also a renewed xenophobia in Italy that is deeply entrenched in the country’s politics and culture. Although people of color are now visible in TV, films, advertisement, and other media formats, there is also a fetishization of “alternative” cultures that turns diversity into a commodity.<sup>108</sup> Finally, while the new digital age allows for greater access to production equipment, and platforms of distribution that reach a global audience (e.g. Youtube), it is also true that the field(s) of cultural production are crowded with a myriad of voices all competing for attention. With Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, and other digital platforms that change by the month, the gates to self-representation have been thrown wide open and the problem of “can the subaltern speak?” has become “can the subaltern be heard?” in any meaningful way within this cacophony of voices.

It has been three decades since massive flows of immigrants started to arrive and settle in Italy. I stated earlier that the migrant communities resulting from the mass infusion were too new and too heterogeneous in the late 1980s to effectively form ethnic-based concepts like *Beur*, or even umbrella ones like Black. They are now no longer new, and though they are still one of the

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with filmmaker by Leonardo De Franceschi. De Franceschi, *L’Africa in Italia*, 345–356. Yimer’s documentaries are: *Il deserto e il mare* (2007), *Come un uomo sulla terra* (2008), *C.A.R.A. Italia* (2010) and *Soltanto il mare* (2011). His films focus extensively on the Mediterranean crossings of African refugees.

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/presentazione> accessed December 31, 2014.

<sup>107</sup> Mariagiulia Grassilli, “Migrant Cinema: Transnational and Guerrilla Practices of Film Production and Representation,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migrant Studies* 34, no. 8 (November 2008): 1237–55.

<sup>108</sup> Karen Pinkus, “Shades of Black in Advertising and Popular Culture,” in *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*, ed. Beverly Allen and Mary J. Russo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 134–55.

most heterogeneous ethnic minorities in Europe, grassroots film movements are starting to emerge – with a little help from ally organizations. I do not know if the current group of filmmakers associated with the AMM will become, in time, a new “wave,” particularly when one considers that most of them are from the Horn of Africa, a former Italian colonial holding. It could be that their current emphasis on the Mediterranean passage and Lampedusa will become an alternate structuring concept, rather than an ethnic-based one. Perhaps Fred Kuwornu’s project of “18 Ius Soli” will manage to get the necessary momentum to bring together groups of second generations of Italians of color involved in filmmaking, and in turn form a new groups of accented filmmakers.<sup>109</sup>

It is too early to tell. In the meantime, however, the very process of putting these projects together, or organizing themselves around certain common experiences, such as the Mediterranean crossing or being born in Italy and not be given citizenship, may lead to the articulation of a common identity as ethnic Italians from the ground up. By bringing accented subjects together to articulate narratives collectively, these projects allow the seed of a common cinematic identity to be planted. Just as importantly, these projects also create grassroots communities of accented film professionals by giving them the means, tools and educations to learn the trade. Bivona, Benhadj, Melliti and Özpetek are great accented filmmakers, and in many ways, they have blazed an aesthetic trail in fiction film for these young filmmakers to follow. However, if Italians of color are ever to have a significant presence in the Italian film industry, a network of film professionals, such as cinematographers, editors, scriptwriters, etcetera, needs to exist as well.

Perhaps this new modality of “cinema of duty” is the beginning of that network.

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<sup>109</sup> Fred Kuwornu’s film *18 Ius Soli: The Right to be an Italian* (2011) brings together people who were born in Italy but do not have Italian citizenship because Italy’s citizenship laws are based on blood kinship and not place of birth



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