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*Spaesati d'Italia*: Emigration in Italian National Identity Construction from Postwar to  
Economic Miracle

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Committee in charge:

Professor Mia Fuller, Chair  
Professor Barbara Spackman  
Professor Gene Irschick

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## Abstract

*Spaesati d'Italia: Emigration in Italian National Identity Construction from Postwar to Economic Miracle*

by

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Since the founding of the Italian nation in 1861, mass emigration has played a crucial role in the construction of a national identity among a population historically divided by regional, ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences. In the aftermath of the Second World War, emigration continued to fulfill a vital function in Italy's national redefinition. In material terms, it enabled Italy to rebuild a devastated political and economic framework in a manner that allowed old power blocs to evade the restructuring of traditional relations of production.

Yet emigration proved equally essential for redrawing the cognitive map of the nation, laying out the new ideological terrain upon which material reconstruction was to take place. In the ideological vacuum that followed the collapse of Fascism and the nation's loss of foreign colonies, postwar emigration narratives proved fundamental for carrying out a project of collective redemption that cleansed Italians from the stain of Fascism while restoring the colonial imaginary that had traditionally governed the nation's relationship with its South. By supplying at once absolution for past sins and an archaic internal Other against which the new nation could measure itself, postwar representations of emigration helped pave the way for Italy's transformation into a "modern," post-Fascist democracy, a founder of the European Union, and one of the world's leading economies.

This dissertation examines emigration narratives produced in literary and filmic texts spanning from 1945 to 1964 in works by key figures of Italian postwar culture such as Carlo Levi, Ignazio Silone, Rocco Scotellaro, Mario Soldati, Aldo Fabrizi, Luchino Visconti, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. By examining shifting forms of interdiction that placed migrant Others outside the moral, spatial and temporal boundaries of the nation, this research aims to illustrate how the emigrants' textual presence gave shape and meaning to the new nation, bringing into focus the contours of a new republic emerging from the ashes of Fascism.

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The Nation and the Internal Other

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## INTRODUCTION

Criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso once observed that “emigration is the only resource that allows us to sadly govern Italy.”<sup>1</sup> This confession, which appeared in the 1898 edition of *In Calabria*, formed a strident contrast with Lombroso’s negligible treatment of emigration in the original 1862 text, where emigration was barely mentioned, and only as evidence of the South’s deviance with respect to the rest of the nation. Lombroso’s about-face on the importance of emigration in Italian national affairs provides an insight into the increasingly powerful role that emigration came to play in shaping the Italian national imaginary after the formation of Italy as a nation-state in 1861. Emigration did indeed prove essential for “governing” Italy, as Lombroso claimed, but in a double sense, for while it constituted a major factor guiding the nation’s political and economic choices for over a century, it also, and perhaps especially, provided the sort of figurative material that “governed” how the Italian nation was imagined at home and abroad.

In 2003, Donna Gabaccia wrote that “without Italians, or an Italian nation, it is difficult to write with much confidence about an Italian diaspora.”<sup>2</sup> While her claim intended, quite justifiably, to shed light on the problem of searching for a unified, homogenous diaspora in Italian emigration history, the aim of my research originates from the reversal of this perspective, setting out to illustrate how without an Italian diaspora it would have been difficult to speak of Italians or of an Italian nation, since the representation of emigration has been one of the major grounds upon which the Italian nation has been articulated.

The important ideological function served by emigration narratives is not surprising, given that the phenomenon of mass emigration has been so fundamental an aspect of modern Italian culture and society. Historically, Italian emigration has exceeded that of any other country in recorded world history, including that of Britain and China.<sup>3</sup> Between 1876 and 1988, 27 million Italians emigrated – a staggering number if one

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<sup>1</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *In Calabria* (Sala Bolognese: A. Forni, 1898), 166.

<sup>2</sup> Donna Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1. See also Rudolph J. Vecoli, “The Italian Diaspora, 1876-1976,” in *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration*, ed. Robin Cohen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 114-122.

considers that this was the entire population of Italy in 1871 and half of its current population.<sup>4</sup> If we consider the additional 4 to 9 million<sup>5</sup> who migrated internally, from southern to northern Italy, during the 1950s and 1960s, post-World War II emigration alone constitutes approximately 40% of the Italian emigration phenomenon. Yet scholarly attention has tended to privilege the turn-of-the-century period<sup>6</sup>, a limit which in part explains why it is *la grande emigrazione* (“the great emigration”) that remains so dominant in Italian recollection while the far more recent experience remains much more elusive in collective memory.

The tendency to ignore or minimize the extreme recentness of the phenomenon springs from the long-standing view, in Italy, of emigration as an affront to national pride, a belief with roots sinking back to the beginnings of mass emigration – and of the nation itself – in Italian history. On the one hand, emigration was perceived as a necessary evil, an ideal “release valve” that allowed Italy to eschew the threat of social unrest posed by chronic unemployment and poverty, especially in the South. This position was embodied by Francesco Saverio Nitti, a southern economist, journalist and politician. Nitti’s first text, written in 1888, when he was twenty years old, synthesized the pro-emigrationist viewpoint, arguing that to suppress or limit emigration was cruel and unjust, since the poverty of the South relegated it to a sad and fatal alternative: *o emigranti o briganti* (“either emigrants or brigands”).<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, mass emigration also provoked feelings of enormous embarrassment. For the leaders of a young nation struggling to project an image of economic and colonial prowess on par with other European powers, mass emigration provided rather damning evidence of a pre-industrial economy, eliciting the dictum, so offensive to the colonial ambitions of the Liberal and Fascist states, that Italian emigration constituted a form of *colonialismo straccione* (“beggar colonialism”). This position, which guided Italian emigration policy until the end of the Second World War, was upheld by nationalists like the writer and politician Enrico Corradini and the poet Giovanni Pascoli, both of whom argued for the necessity to turn Italy’s emigrant masses, scattered across the globe, into a colonizing force in Africa.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Antonio Golini and Flavia Amato “Uno sguardo a un secolo e mezzo di emigrazione italiana,” in *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana I*, eds. Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina de Clementi, and Emilio Franzina (Roma: Donzelli, 2001), 50. These official figures should be approached with some caution, however, as they do not account for clandestine emigration, and are thus conservative, at best.

<sup>5</sup> Figures vary according to whether they reflect only “official” changes of residence, which were far fewer than “illegal” internal migrations due to a Fascist anti-urbanization law that remained in effect until the 1960s, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Ercole Sori, *L’emigrazione italiana dall’Unità alla seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984); Donna Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas*, Piero Bevilacqua, *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana*; Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*; and Emilio Franzina, *Dall’Arcadia in America. Attività letteraria ed emigrazione transoceanica in Italia (1850-1940)* (Torino: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Francesco Saverio Nitti, “L’emigrazione italiana e i suoi avversari,” *Scritti sulla questione meridionale*, I: *Saggi sulla storia del Mezzogiorno, emigrazione e lavoro*. (Bari: Laterza, 1958), 364.

<sup>8</sup> See Enrico Corradini’s novel, *La Patria Lontana* (Milano: Treves, 1910), and Giovanni Pascoli’s 1911 speech, “La grande proletaria si è mossa,” *La Tribuna* 27 November 1911. For accounts of the pro- and anti-emigrationist approaches taken by various Italian governments, refer to Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919) and Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*.



This ambivalence towards the issue of emigration was not overcome by the time mass emigration resumed after the Second World War. The general tendency at the institutional level was to keep the migration flow out of public view<sup>9</sup>, yet such intentions could hardly have met with success, given that the Italian government not only vigorously encouraged emigration, but, for the first time in history, officially administered it through an extensive “assisted emigration” program. Moreover, the exodus of Italian laborers northward after the war assumed such massive proportions that it could not but reveal, at home as abroad, the inadequacies of Italian economic policy even at the height of (and as late as) the economic miracle. The preservation of a colonial model of exploitation that relied on producing and maintaining regional disparities ensured a vast reservoir of cheap labor that northern Italian industry was only in part capable of absorbing. While elsewhere in Europe a vastly expanding economy created a demand for imported labor, Italy’s chagrined response to its unemployed masses was, once again, emigration. As the countryside emptied, the decrease in population and the influx of emigrants’ remittances home were fundamental to producing the rise in consumption patterns characteristic of the economic miracle. Thus, the “great shame” of emigration ensured that even as emigration played such a central role in the political and economic reconstruction of Italy, its representation in the cultural sphere remained disproportionately minor. However, an analysis of certain literary and filmic works will demonstrate that even from its position on the fringes of national culture, emigration continued to exercise enormous power in the “making of Italy” throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

In the historiography of certain countries of immigration, such as the United States, Canada and Australia, the cultural significance of migration in nation-building has been studied, offering accounts of the racialization of immigrants as part of a broader project to forge a national identity. Joseph Pugliese, for instance, has examined how the screening of southern Italian immigrants during the “White Australia Policy” was a significant aspect of Australia’s practices of racialization in the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> In the context of the United States, Joseph Cosco has analyzed the writings of American novelists and immigration journalists to narrate the “racial odyssey” of Italian immigrants to the United States, demonstrating how American representations of Italians impacted America’s racialized national identity at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

Scholarship on Italian emigration has thus contributed significantly to national histories outside of Italy, focusing on the role of Italian immigration in the construction of the “host” nation. Because the United States was the chief destination of Italian emigrants before World War I, most accounts of Italian immigration to the U.S. focus on the turn of the twentieth century, while Australian historiography on the subject has tended to concentrate on the postwar period since the bulk of Italian emigration there did not occur until after the Second World War.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> A tendency that found confirmation, for instance, in the 1949 Andreotti Law against films that depicted the poverty and social ills of postwar Italy.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Pugliese, “Race as Category Crisis: Whiteness and the Topical Assignment of Race.” *Social Semiotics* 12, no.2 (2002).

<sup>11</sup> Joseph P. Cosco, *Imagining Italians: The Clash of Romance and Race in American Perceptions, 1880-1910* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Jean Martin, *The Migrant Presence: Australian Responses 1947-1977* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1978).

In addition to contributing to various national histories, Italian emigration scholarship has also abounded with accounts of emigrants' experiences in building ethnic communities abroad. Representative texts of this area of inquiry are, to name but a few, Gastaldo *et al.* (1994), *The Columbus People: Perspectives in Italian Immigration to the Americas and Australia*, John Zucchi's *Italians in Toronto: Development of a National Identity 1875-1935* (1988), Nicholas Harney's *Eh, Paesan! Being Italian in Toronto* (1998), and the numerous contributions made to *Italian Americana*, a cultural and historical review dedicated to the Italian experience in America. Related to this field of inquiry are analyses of the formation of a national identity among Italian expatriates, with considerable attention devoted to the attempts made by the Fascist state to "fascistize" Italian communities abroad during the 1920s and 1930s. This research is represented in texts like Gianfranco Cresciani's *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and the Italians in Australia, 1922-1945* (1980), Luigi Bruti-Liberati's *Il Canada, l'Italia e il Fascismo 1818-1945* (1984), and Luconi and Tintori's *L'ombra lunga del fascio: canali di propaganda fascista per gli "italiani d'America"* (2004).

More recently, scholarship on Italian emigration has favored a transnational perspective that extends the implications of migration beyond national borders. In *Emigrant Nation*, Mark Choate interprets Italian emigration from national unification to the First World War in relation to Italy's colonial ambitions, placing Italian emigration in dialogue with the nation's imperial program of "demographic colonialism." His work details Italy's attempts to create a "Greater Italy," a sort of emigrant empire that, by fostering common banking, education and religious programs, cultivated a shared sense of *italianità* (Italianness) among emigrant communities abroad.

The transnational turn has placed Italian migration scholarship within the larger field of diaspora studies. The term "diaspora," which comes from the Greek *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over), essentially means a scattering of people. The ancient Greeks in fact used the term to signify migration or colonization. In his pioneering work on diasporas, Robin Cohen<sup>13</sup> has identified various categories of diasporic communities. Victim diasporas, the most well-known, are those of forcibly displaced peoples, such as Jews, Africans, and Armenians. Imperial diasporas, on the other hand, were formed by the overseas settlements of citizens of imperial powers, exemplified by the British and Portuguese. This kind of diaspora is also known as "settler colonialism." Because Italian emigrants were neither forcibly removed nor elite members of a colonial society (outside of their colonies in Libya and East Africa, that is) they can perhaps be considered to fit, albeit imperfectly, within the category of "trade diasporas," which Cohen defines as "networks of proactive merchants who transport, buy and sell their goods over long distances,"<sup>14</sup> if by "goods" we may also consider emigrant labor. However, this categorization also proves somewhat unsatisfactory, for trade diasporas suggest degrees of freedom and affluence typically absent in the experiences of first-generation emigrants.

This is not the only aspect troubling the placement of Italian emigration within diaspora studies, however. Perhaps an even greater problem is raised by the existence among diasporas of a bond with a real or imagined homeland claiming the migrants' loyalty and emotions. Indeed, the diasporas' relationship to the adopted country is often

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<sup>13</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

complicated by the migrants' "acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of a similar background."<sup>15</sup> It is precisely this inescapable link among migrants and between their communities and the home country that problematizes the classification of Italian migration as a form of diaspora. In *Italy's Many Diasporas*, Donna Gabaccia has contested the existence of a widespread and unifying sense of Italianness that would have tied Italian emigrants to a larger, abstract community such as that of the nation. Arguing that Italians' regional divisions and their sense of *campanilismo*, or localized belongingness, predominated in their cultural practices long after their separation from the "mother country," Gabaccia proposes thinking about Italian emigration, as the title of her work suggests, as "many diasporas." The conclusion reached by her study is that the experience of emigration ultimately did not foster the formation of a national identity among Italian expatriates, whose identities were instead shaped by much stronger local and regional ties to their places of origin, thereby contributing to the formation of a multiplicity of diasporas.

In Italy, emigration historiography has tended to privilege empirical rather than hermeneutic methodologies. Major works on Italian emigration, such as the impressive *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana* edited by Bevilacqua and others, but also smaller volumes like Ercole Sori's *L'emigrazione italiana dall'Unità alla seconda guerra mondiale*, Ugo Ascoli's *Movimenti migratori in Italia*, Enrico Pugliese's *L'Italia tra migrazioni internazionali e migrazioni interne*, or Michele Colucci's *Lavoro in movimento*, to name but a few, offer essentially quantitative accounts and policy analyses of Italian emigration, often focusing on the social and economic import of the phenomenon and usually stopping at the Second World War. Unfortunately, the invaluable information provided in such studies has not been accompanied by a correspondingly vast body of research capable of explaining the cultural and ideological import of Italian emigration. While some studies have provided surveys of literary and filmic representations of emigration, they typically fail to delve below the surface to examine how emigration narratives may have contributed to the figurative creation of the Italian nation. What has been largely absent in scholarship on Italian emigration, in other words, is an engagement with the relationship between the migrant figure and the Italian nation, an interpretive approach capable of discerning the contributions made by Italian emigration narratives to the ideological mechanisms through which the Italian nation was produced.

With *Spaesati d'Italia*, I have attempted to illustrate how Italian cultural texts manufactured differences in the Italian diaspora through the erection of moral, temporal and spatial boundaries that rendered the country's reconstitution in the postwar era as a modern and prosperous democracy more visible. It is with considerable caution, however, that I use the term "diaspora" here. Strictly speaking, this dissertation is not a study of Italian diaspora(s). In examining Italian postwar migration, I do not follow, so to speak, the emigrants to their adopted communities to examine their efforts to integrate in the host country or to recover a sense of *italianità* ("Italianness"). My analysis focuses instead on the figurative construction of Italian emigrants and interrogates how their movements, enunciations and displacements in Italian postwar texts acted upon the (re)construction of a national imaginary in Italy itself. Due to the metaphorical function of such representations, portrayals of Italian emigrants functioned as a kind of self-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., ix.

portrait for the nation as a whole. Rather than examine the repercussions of migration upon the emigrants themselves, therefore, I analyze how strategies employed by emigration narratives gave shape to the idea that Italians had of their nation in a decisive moment of Italian political and cultural refashioning.

The figurative construction of all nations involves a proliferation of discourses and an intensification of intellectual activity. The theory of *hegemony* which Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci developed in his *Prison Notebooks* can help to shed light on how national identities are cultivated. The concept of hegemony served to describe how one social group or idea achieved and maintained dominance over others through ideological rather than coercive means. Gramsci defined hegemony as “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production”<sup>16</sup> Throughout the *Notebooks*, Gramsci often uses the term *direzione* (direction, leadership), and more specifically “intellectual and moral leadership,”<sup>17</sup> as a substitute for hegemony to correlate the concept more clearly with a complex cultural elaboration that Roger Simon has termed “the organization of consent.”<sup>18</sup> The importance of hegemony theory lies in having established the crucial role of culture not only for achieving and maintaining political power but also for shaping any form of collective identity, such as that of the nation, through the use of ideological constructs.

Europe’s passage to modernity was marked by the demise of feudal systems of government based on inherited or “divine” authority and the rise of (at least nominally) democratic forms of state power based on popular consent, thus establishing the dependence of modern forms of life upon the function of ideological mechanisms. As John McLeod has explained, “These novel forms of government and power required new myths to sustain their legitimacy, and it is here that the [...] image of the nation emerged as a potent idea, aligning the subjectivity and psychology of individuals with the sense of belonging to a common people, in whose shared interests the nation-state appeared to function.”<sup>19</sup>

French Orientalist, Ernest Renan delivered an historic lecture at the Sorbonne in 1882 titled “What is a Nation?” Though Renan considered the nation from the perspective of historic fact, meaning that he focused on the nation “as state,” as the product of a succession of conquests and laws, he nonetheless centered on the novel *ideological* character of nations, foregrounding the role of “consent”:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. [...] A nation is therefore

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<sup>16</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Simon, *Gramsci’s Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> John McLeod, “Nation and Nationalisms,” in *A Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature*, eds. Shirley Chew and David Richards (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 100.

a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarized, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life.<sup>20</sup>

Cultural media such as music, literature and then cinema thus became essential for constructing the legitimacy of the nation. Precisely because the nation is, as Benedict Anderson observed, an “imagined community,”<sup>21</sup> in the sense that we do not know all the members belonging to this community and must therefore imagine our connection to the nation, it relies heavily on the narratives produced through cultural channels. For this reason, there is an intimate relationship between the nation and cultural productions, for in the words of David Forgacs, “the media do not reflect or articulate the identity of a pre-existing national community but are one of the means, maybe even the principal one, by which that community and its identity are brought into being and shaped and later (perhaps) eroded.”<sup>22</sup>

Part of the “fiction” of the nation lies in its apparent lack of contradictions, its exhibition of “natural” unity and universality in the face of the constant challenges posed by ethnic, linguistic, religious and other differences that threaten to tear the nation asunder and thus render it a deeply unstable formation. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out, “the instability of the nation is the inevitable consequence of its nature as a social construction. This myth of nationhood, masked by ideology, perpetuates nationalism, in which specific identifiers are employed to create exclusive and homogeneous conceptions of national traditions. Such signifiers of homogeneity always fail to represent the diversity of the actual ‘national’ community for which they purport to speak, and, in practice, usually represent and consolidate the interests of the dominant power groups within any national formation.”<sup>23</sup> The nation thus tends to be represented as a “finite space” that includes certain kinds of subjects but not others.<sup>24</sup>

Needless to say, in the Italian case mass emigration problematized the nation’s project to coat itself with an ideology of homogeneity and stability. The paradox posed by migration was that while the Italian population scattered, especially subaltern groups deemed dangerous or otherwise undesirable to the nation, the cultural representations of this diaspora set out to put back together in virtual form precisely that national cohesion that had been preempted by mass emigration. Such representations sought to (re)create a unified, coherent national whole precisely by recasting the emigrant as an Other who was placed outside of the spatial and temporal confines of the nation and whose movements across these could be controlled or manipulated in a manner that invested them with meaning by and for the nation. As a result, representations of emigration served to create the ideological glue for a perennially elusive sense of national cohesion.

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<sup>20</sup> Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 19.

<sup>21</sup> The term was coined by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> David Forgacs, “The Mass Media and the Question of a National Community in Italy,” in *The Politics of Italian National Identity*, eds. Gino Bedani and Bruce Haddock (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 142.

<sup>23</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. “Nation/nationalism,” *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 135.

<sup>24</sup> McLeod, “Nation and Nationalisms,” 101.

The migrant figure thus plays a fundamental role in the formation of a national identity. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the very essence of identity formation was to be found in the journey of the migrant's "I" toward the ideal "I" of a perpetually distant destination.<sup>25</sup> Bauman's point suggests that "identity" is more a process involving performance and representation than an *a priori* state of being that holds intrinsic, authentic value. Identity, in other words, does not transcend history but can be seen to develop within the discursive practices of national formations. As such, it is inseparable from the *form* of the nation taken on by modernity. Indeed, the passage from inherited to acquired identity, more than the nation *per se*, may be considered to be modernity's most distinctive materialization, for in order to perform and represent itself, the nation state depends on a stable, fixed identity, and proceeds discursively to create it as a natural, original state of being. Those forms of identity that do not fit within the nation's project to create a homogenous order, such as migrants and other subaltern groups, Bauman defines with the metaphor of "the stranger." Strangers are "the people who do not fit the cognitive, moral, or aesthetic map of the world," he explains; "they befog and eclipse the boundary lines which ought to be clearly seen; if, having done all this, they gestate uncertainty, which in its turn breeds discomfort of feeling lost – then each society produces such strangers, while drawing its borders and charting its cognitive, aesthetic and moral map."<sup>26</sup> Historically, the formation of the nation state, with its requirement to build order, has meant that "certain inhabitants of the territory to be made orderly in the new way turn into strangers that need to be eliminated."<sup>27</sup> Strangers thus live "in a state of suspended extinction [...] their presence [...] defined a priori as temporary."<sup>28</sup>

In a vicious circle, the Other created by the nation's project to construct a homogenous unity becomes a specter who justifies the raising of boundaries and the patrolling of borders in an attempt to seal in the nation, a figurative "circling of the wagons"<sup>29</sup> that seeks to preserve the laboriously constructed integrity of the national subject, until the stranger becomes someone "who makes you think you are at home."<sup>30</sup> So powerful has the role of the migrant Other been in the Italian construction of national space that it is reflected in the language itself, for in Italian the migrant's ambiguity and nationlessness are combined in the single term *spaesamento*, which signifies both a general confusional state and the condition of being without a *paese*, or country. This outsider figure insinuates itself into the coziness of the nation, depriving it of the reassurances of familiarity, isolation, and safety. The production of the nation thus embodies this paradox: while the Other is created in order to displace and exclude whatever diversity or uncertainty may call into question the nation's order, it must also be continually articulated, called forth and made to appear in the very same location as the nation so that it may define its contours.

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<sup>25</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., "Making and Unmaking of Strangers," *Thesis Eleven* 43, no. 1 (1995), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> It is for the enormous ideological power of the image of the "circling of the wagons" that I consider the Western the American national film genre *par excellence*.

<sup>30</sup> Edmond Jabès, *A Foreigner Carrying in the Crook of his Arm a Tiny Book* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 82.

With its reliance on binary oppositions like insider/outsider or (European) self/Other, the construction of the nation brings us inevitably to the issue of the colonial subject who traditionally has formed the nation's most consistent Other. The emergence of the nation state did not just "coincide" with the practice of colonialism but was joined indissolubly with it, both emerging with the rise of capitalism and European industrialization from the sixteenth century onwards.<sup>31</sup> As Timothy Brennan put it,

Even though [nationalism] as an ideology ... came out of the imperialist countries, these countries were not able to formulate their own national aspirations until the age of exploration. The markets made possible by European imperial penetration motivated the construction of the nation-state at home. European nationalism was motivated by what Europe was doing in its far-flung dominions. The 'national idea', in other words, flourished in the soil of foreign conquest.<sup>32</sup>

European colonizers thus did not "discover" so much as *create* the colonial Other as an object whose very alterity validated the stability and fixity of their own national identities. The nation state can thus be considered to be derivative of colonialism insofar as it became materially and ideologically caught up in the creation of a colonial Other, a relationship that prompted Frantz Fanon to claim once that Europe was "literally the creation of the Third World."<sup>33</sup>

The intimate relationship between national formation and colonialism has placed postcolonial theory at the center of cultural studies inquiries of national identity. It is of course to Edward Said's foundational text, *Orientalism*, that we owe a fully-developed thesis of the mutually constitutive relationship between European national identities (particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) and their colonial Other. After Foucault's work on the power/knowledge nexus, Said illustrated how the "knowledge" produced and circulated in Europe about "the Orient" was an instrument of power that accompanied the conquest and exercise of colonial rule over the "Near East." The "Orient" produced in this discourse did not exist as a real place but was a representation of the colonial Other that served to give contour, through negation, to the European national subject. This is what Said intended when he claimed that the Orient was an invention by and for Europe.

Within the European context, nowhere is the reliance of the national subject upon the construction of a (colonial) Other more evident than in the case of Italy, where national unification in 1861 resulted in a form of colonial rule over the South and the production of a discursive field (the so-called "Southern Question") that, through various disciplines, consistently produced the alterity of the southern population. So germane is Said's work to the Italian context that some scholars have referred to it as "Orientalism in one country."<sup>34</sup> Much like the "Orient" had been for the "West," the South became the foil against which to define a new, northern dominated nation anxious to measure up to the great powers of Europe. And like the Orient to which it was constantly likened, the

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<sup>31</sup> McLeod, "Nation and Nationalisms," 99.

<sup>32</sup> Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 59.

<sup>33</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 76.

<sup>34</sup> See the collection of essays in Jane Schneider, ed., *Orientalism in One Country: Italy's "Southern Question"* (New York: Berg, 1998). See also Nelson Moe's *The View From Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

South ceased to be a real, geographical place in and of itself and became a discursive locus for the construction of the Italian national imaginary. To paraphrase Said, the “South” became almost a northern invention. Echoing contemporaneous discourses in France and England with respect to their colonies, Italy’s discourse on the South proved powerfully formative for its national identity and particularly expedient for the colonization of the South. As a brief example, let us recall the aforementioned text by Cesare Lombroso, *In Calabria*. When Lombroso wrote it in 1862, the occasion for his visit to Calabria was his conscription in the Piedmontese army that had been dispatched to the South to squash “brigandage” in the immediate aftermath of national unification. As part of this campaign to annex the South to the new Italian nation, tens of thousands of “brigands” and their collaborators were killed, imprisoned, tortured, and exiled.<sup>35</sup> Incredibly, Lombroso, then a young doctor, never mentions the violence and injuries inflicted by his army upon the civilian population, yet he minutely records all the illnesses and weaknesses of the Calabrians, including hysteria, syphilis and rampant cretinism (even in dogs). The careful, “scientific” measurement of the southern population’s physical and moral degeneracy was to become the life work of Lombroso and scores of his fellow social scientists who, in the act of producing the South, were also creating a “civilized,” non-South Italian nation.

When Italian mass emigration took a distinctively southern turn in the last decade of the nineteenth century, with the majority of migrants originating from southern regions, the discourse on the Southern Question replicated itself in the *questione dell’emigrazione*, or the “emigrant question.” In literary and filmic representations, emigrants were cast as internal Others whose movements across the spatial and temporal boundaries beyond which this discourse had relegated them begins to threaten the illusory stability and homogeneity of Italian national culture. This is all the more true for emigration narratives produced in the aftermath of the Second World War, when the spread of decolonization movements around the world, including former Italian colonies, threatened to affect Italy’s internal colonial situation. Given this context, representations of emigration in the postwar era bore an even more urgent task in the re-construction of the Italian nation. Considering all that was at stake, the migrant figures produced in postwar narratives of the nation held an infinitely more complex function than ever before, for it was no longer sufficient simply to confirm, once again, the superior/inferior or modern/archaic oppositions: emigrant figures were invested with the task of rebuilding Italy’s identity as a post-Fascist, modern, capitalist, democratic nation within the new geography of power of the European Community and its economic market.

One of the traditional figurative strategies for Otherizing emigrants was that of temporal displacement, in which emigrants were placed outside the time of the nation. In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, Johannes Fabian pursues the question of how certain bodies of knowledge are validated through the use of temporal categorizations. While Fabian focuses on the field of anthropology, the same ideological process may be said to be at work in other fields of social inquiry and cultural representations. In such bodies of knowledge, Fabian argues, the use of Time “is made

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<sup>35</sup> See Pino Aprile, *Terroni. Tutto quello che è stato fatto perché gli italiani del Sud diventassero “meridionali”* (Milano: Edizioni Piemme, 2010).



for the purpose of distancing those who are observed from the Time of the observer.”<sup>36</sup> The researching subject’s temporal displacement of the Other entails the construction of a kind of Time that Fabian calls *Mundane* or *Typological Time*, present in descriptions of a culture or society as “archaic,” “primitive,” “savage,” “backward,” and in the use of adjectives such as “mythical,” “ritual,” “tribal,” and so on. This “denial of coevalness,” as Fabian calls it, amounts to “a *persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) [...] in a Time other than the present of the producer of [...] discourse.*”<sup>37</sup>

While Said’s and Fabian’s theories have proved invaluable for understanding how the production of alterity has served to create and bolster national identity, I have also found it necessary to reach beyond them to examine the complex dynamics emigrant figures have set in motion. While fundamental for identifying mechanisms of oppression, Said’s theory also seems to leave important questions about the agency of the subaltern unanswered, in that the action of constituting the Other tends to be unidirectional, with the object of study serving merely as a passive recipient of Western colonial constructions. In the literary texts Said examines, an Oriental figure is created “by and for” Europe but is never shown to respond or to have a *presence* in the text, that disturbing, disquieting position that motivated the Western need to eliminate it in the first place. The work of Homi Bhabha proves particularly helpful in this respect. While he looks to Said as having “inaugurated the postcolonial field,”<sup>38</sup> Bhabha nonetheless revised Said’s more monolithic history of colonialism to allow the colonized the possibility of agency. Extending Said’s practice of reading against-the-grain of colonial texts, Bhabha identifies unintended “slippages” and “excesses” which, reappropriated and reinscribed by the colonized, constitute “a native refusal to satisfy the colonizer’s demand.”<sup>39</sup> Because the Other is continually called forth in colonial texts, Bhabha argues, it constitutes an unsettling “partial presence” that disrupts the “writing” of the nation, and thus of itself as Other. Such texts are therefore mined from the outset by the “ambivalence” of colonial discourse: the Other who must be present to lend the colonizer authority at the same time constitutes a menace, because “in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse [it] also disrupts its authority.”<sup>40</sup> In a radical move, Bhabha turns the ambivalence of colonialist texts against colonial authority, opening up a space for resistance with “a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention.”<sup>41</sup>

Bhabha’s more dynamic interpretation of the Other proves particularly fruitful for examining how emigration narratives helped to produce the Italian nation. In *Nation and Narration*, Bhabha identifies “a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation,”<sup>42</sup> and suggests that it is against the margins of national space and time, where the emigrant Other has been displaced, that the nation is textually produced. There where the

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<sup>36</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 25.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 31, italics in original.

<sup>38</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “Postcolonial Criticism,” in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: MLA, 1992), 465.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, “Sly Civility,” in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 99.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, “Of Mimicry and Man,” in *Location of Culture*, 88.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” in *Location of Culture*, 112.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, *Nation and Narration*, 1.

nation is written, he argues, we do not move upon stable, homogenous ground but are always confronted with the problem of disjunction and hybridity. Though it has been circumscribed by boundaries and cleared of dissonant Others, the space of the nation is nonetheless made vulnerable precisely by those limits, haunted as it is by the specter of those it has marginalized, who threaten to return and disrupt its writing. Since representing the nation requires the setting of limits and boundaries, it is in such in-between, marginal spaces that the act of writing the nation takes place. Hence the practice of critically “reading” national space becomes an issue of identifying and elaborating upon sites of exclusion and struggle.

In Italian postwar emigration narratives, emigrants can be seen as “interstitial determiners” of nationhood: in the descriptions of their incursions across the temporal, spatial and moral borders of the nation we can see the topography of a new, modern Republic being born. In Chapter 1 I examine how Carlo Levi’s 1945 literary masterpiece, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (*Christ Stopped at Eboli*), contributed to redefining Italian national identity in a critical moment of Italian history that was marked by the collapse of the Fascist regime, world war, civil war, the liberation and foreign occupation of the South, and the loss of Italy’s foreign colonies. In his autobiographical account of exile in the southern region of Lucania, Levi reinforced the imaginary boundary separating the nation from its internal colonial Other. My analysis of *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* pays close attention to the literary devices Levi employed, including the appropriation of certain writings by Ignazio Silone and Rocco Scotellaro, to handle the predicament of emigration across the nation’s liminal space of interdiction, thereby reclaiming the authority of colonial discourse.

Chapter 2 reinterprets Italy’s postwar reconstruction as an ideological problem that was addressed through interpretations of the recent past capable of absolving Italy’s support of Fascism. The figure of the emigrant, once so disparaged, was revisited and invested with the task of redeeming the corrupt nation by crossing and defining the moral frontiers of the new Republic. Italian cinematic neorealism proved instrumental in this national reconstruction, as my analyses of Mario Soldati’s *Fuga in Francia* (1948) and Aldo Fabrizi’s *Emigrantes* (1949) illustrates. In these representations, the problem of how the South was to be integrated in the national whole was omitted altogether to favor a portrayal of popular unity at least formally evocative of the ideals of the Resistance.

In the third and final chapter I examine the identity crisis caused by internal migration during the transformative years of the “economic miracle.” As the urban centers of the industrialized north and of the capital city were resignified as *loci* of neocapitalist expansion, southern emigrants were displaced once more outside new boundaries of space and time. The nation’s progress and affluence came to be defined by the emigrants’ physical segregation outside these urban centers and their temporal displacement from modern society. The imaginary archive of Italy’s economic miracle was enriched by influential sociological treatises describing the “Koreas” (ghettos) the emigrants inhabited and the “primitive” “amoral familism” in which their culture was supposedly steeped. Cinematic masterpieces, such as Luchino Visconti’s *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1960) and Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Accattone* (1961), provided the master narratives of the emigrants’ experiences of marginalization, ultimately reaching very different conclusions about internal migration that ranged from its embodiment of a Gramscian national-popular unity to its constituting a case of cultural genocide.

## CHAPTER 1

### IMMURING THE COLONY IN CARLO LEVI'S *CRISTO SI E' FERMATO A EBOLI*

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Italy was involved in an extensive reconstruction effort that affected not only the material and political aspects of national life but also the cultural sphere made up of ideas, values, and identities. Italy's defeat in the war, the collapse of Fascism, the loss of its colonial empire all coalesced to create a moral and ideological devastation that equaled the material destruction of the war. In this atmosphere of radical indeterminacy, the reconstruction of national identity proceeded along a dialectic marked by the opening up of new possibilities on the one hand and the entrenchment of conservative positions on the other. One of the primary fronts of this confrontation was the time-honored discursive field of the Southern Question. The ritual question of "what is to be done about the South," now complicated by mass emigration, reclaimed urgency as Italy, in the process of losing its colonies abroad, returned its self-reflective gaze inward to its oldest, "unofficial" colony. This chapter will examine how Carlo Levi's literary masterpiece, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (*Christ Stopped at Eboli*) (1945), contributed to redefining Italian national identity in this critical historical moment by reinforcing the imaginary boundary separating the nation from its internal colonial double. This analysis will pay particular attention to the literary devices Levi employed, including the appropriation of certain postcolonial writings by Ignazio Silone and Rocco Scotellaro, to handle the predicament of emigration across this liminal space of interdiction, thereby reclaiming the authority of colonial discourse.

#### Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*

Carlo Levi was born in 1902 in Turin, the capital of Piedmont, the region that had "annexed" the South in 1860 and had been the seat of the ruling Savoy dynasty. His father was a wealthy physician and his mother was the sister of famous journalist and Socialist leader Claudio Treves. Levi received the classic education enjoyed by members of the Piedmontese upper bourgeoisie. At the University of Turin he became friends with the radical liberal Piero Gobetti, who first introduced him to political activism.<sup>1</sup> After

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<sup>1</sup> For a history of Levi's intellectual formation, refer to Nicola Carducci's *Storia intellettuale di Carlo Levi* (Lecce: Pensa Multimedia, 1999), and for a wider perspective on the cultural environment

receiving a degree in medicine, he went on to Paris for a specialization, though he would never practice medicine, preferring to dedicate himself to painting and writing. While in Paris, he frequented notable personalities like Giorgio de Chirico, Igor Stravinsky and Alberto Moravia. In 1929 he founded an anti-fascist movement called *Giustizia e Liberta'* (Justice and Liberty), and it was for his anti-fascist activities in connection with this movement that he was arrested by Fascist authorities and exiled, or sent to *confino*<sup>2</sup>, in Lucania, in the towns of Grassano and "Gagliano"<sup>3</sup> in 1935.<sup>4</sup> Carlo Levi continued to paint and write throughout his life, in addition to pursuing a political career from the 1960s onward. However, his enormous fame and influence is attributable to *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, which rendered him a giant of twentieth-century literature in Italy and beyond.<sup>5</sup>

Written between 1943 and 1944, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*<sup>6</sup> is a retrospective autobiographical account of Carlo Levi's exile. The point of view was of course that of a foreigner who had furthermore been sent to Lucania against his will. What was more, its author's moral, political and aesthetic views had been formed within a cultural milieu that historically had taken for granted and reproduced a version of the South as a colonial subject with no sovereignty. The novel's reproposal of the familiar *topos* of the South and its dramatic account narrated in "realistic," accessible prose earned it such enormous success that to this day, the name *Lucania* hardly conjures a place at all different from the mysterious, closed-off universe Levi described. The importance of Levi's novel lies in its construed impartiality in denouncing the ills of the Italian South, chief among which were the dire poverty of the peasantry living in tight, malaria-infested quarters, and the impoverishment of the petty bourgeoisie whose hatred for the peasantry impeded the cultural and material modernization of the region.

The damage wrought by Levi's beautiful novel lies partly in its alleged objectivity; though it was not part of the political discourse on the South, it had undeniable political implications, for Levi's novel was read and referenced in spheres far afield of literary circles to impute a persistent "backwardness" in the South<sup>7</sup>, thereby

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within which Levi circulated, see Umberto Levra and Nicola Tranfaglia's *Torino fra liberalismo e fascismo* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> *Confino* was a form of imprisonment commonly used by the Fascist government against political prisoners that combined exile with house arrest. The term itself refers to a "boundary" beyond which the prisoner was ostracized.

<sup>3</sup> The real name of the town is Aliano, but Levi changed its name to Gagliano in the novel.

<sup>4</sup> For biographical accounts of Carlo Levi's life, see Sergio D'Amato, *Il mondo di Carlo Levi* (Roma: Mancosu Editore, 1998); Franco Vitelli, ed., *Il germoglio sotto la scorza: Carlo Levi vent'anni dopo* (Cava de' Tirreni (SA): Avagliano, 1998); Sergio D'Amato and Gigliola De Donato, *Un torinese del Sud: Carlo Levi* (Milano: Baldini e Castoldi, 2001); and Sorrel Kerbel, Emmanuel Muriel, and Laura Phillips, eds., *Jewish Writers of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 598-600.

<sup>5</sup> The influence of *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* in the United States was so enormous that, according to Anna Maria Torriglia, it was the most widely read work of modern Italian literature before the publication of Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il gattopardo* (1958) and Luigi Branzini's *The Italians* (1964). Anna Maria Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map of Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 205.

<sup>6</sup> *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* was first published by Einaudi in 1945; I will be working from the 7<sup>th</sup> Einaudi edition (1981), which includes a letter from Levi to his publisher that prefaced the 1963 edition.

<sup>7</sup> Upon its publication in the United States in 1947, *Christ Stopped at Eboli* was described in the *New York Times Book Review* as "a diary, an album of sketches, a novelette, a sociological study and a political essay." See Paolo Milano, "Primitives, By-Passed By History. A Vivid Canvas of Italy's 'Deep

justifying prolonged colonial rule over it. Moreover, the very fact of its “literariness” testifies to the deep-seatedness of colonial thinking with regards to the South. The tremendous popularity of Levi’s novel, and the familiarity of the discourse on the South on which it relied, contributed to a general tendency to take for granted its author’s reliability as a disinterested, unbiased observer. However, rather than an autobiographical account describing an actual place or people, Levi’s masterpiece more closely resembles a fantastic tale in which creatures only half human inhabit a magical other-world existing outside the bounds of the modern space and time of the Italian nation.<sup>8</sup> Levi’s denunciation of the misery of the peasants was not backed by any historical inquiry, for he did not explain *why* the peasants were oppressed with such poverty and injustice, just as he devoted no attention to the fundamental division of labor, at the heart of the South’s “backwardness,” splitting the Italian peninsula into industrialism on one end and ruralism on the other.<sup>9</sup>

Along with little else, Levi arrived in Lucania with a cumbersome set of preconceptions gathered from the dominant discourse on the South. Indeed, Levi never even questioned that most, if not all, “exile” locations were in the South, which testifies both to its perception as lying “outside” national space and to its status as an undesirable

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South’ and the Earth-Wise Folk Who Dwell There.” *New York Times Book Review*, 20 April, 1947 (emphasis added). Subsequently, in various articles that Levi authored for the *New York Times* between 1947 and 1949, he was cast as an expert on the Italian South, and his writings were invested with the same authority granted to sociological and anthropological studies. See his “Peasants Stir in Groping Italy,” *New York Times*, 14 September 1947, SM18; and “Eboli Revisited: New Life Stirs,” *New York Times*, 13 March 1947, SM12. In the wake of Levi, a veritable procession of American sociologists and anthropologists came to “discover” the “primitive” Italian South, among these George Peck, Donald S. Pitkin, Frederick G. Friedmann, Leonard W. Moss, Robert D. Putnam, Ann Cornelisen, and Edward Banfield, whose *The Moral Basis of a Backwards Society* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958) is discussed in Chapter 3. Levi’s reputation as an expert on the South continued to develop long after his death, as chronicled in Sergio D’Amaro and Gigliola De Donato, eds., *Carlo Levi e il Mezzogiorno: atti della giornata nazionale di studi*, Torremaggiore, 5 novembre 2001 (Foggia: C. Grenzi, 2003). See also Gigliola De Donato, ed. *Carlo Levi nella storia e nella cultura italiana* (Manduria: Lacaita, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Critical analyses of Levi’s writings abound. These include Gene Pampaloni’s “Carlo Levi” section in *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana* (Torino: UTET, 1986); Mario Miccinesi, *Invito alla lettura di Carlo Levi* (Milano: Mursia, 1977); Gigliola De Donato, *Le parole del reale. Ricerche sulla prosa di Carlo Levi* (Bari: Dedalo, 1998); and, for an anthropological perspective, Giovanni Battista Bronzini’s *Il viaggio antropologico di Carlo Levi: da eroe stendhaliano a guerriero birmano* (Bari: Dedalo, 1996). For criticisms of Levi’s *Cristo*, those of Mario Alicata and Carlo Muscetta, discussed later in this chapter, constitute the most rigorous examples, but see also Vincenzo Napolillo, who criticized Levi’s vision of southern immobility in *Carlo Levi: Dall’antifascismo al mito contadino* (Cosenza: Brenner, 1984) and *Carlo Levi e la questione meridionale* (Mercogliano: Tipografia Buonadonna, 1972). In *Scrittori e popolo. Il populismo nella letteratura italiana contemporanea* (Roma: Savonà e Savelli, 1969), Italian literary critic Alberto Asor Rosa claimed that the peasant world represented in *Cristo* was a deeply self-representational act, while in “I realisti degli anni trenta,” in *Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1977), Giuliano Manacorda sustained that Levi’s novel produced the South’s otherness in order to better contrast and define the northern bourgeoisie.

<sup>9</sup> See Rosario Romeo’s classic, *Risorgimento e capitalismo* (Bari: Laterza, 1959), which discusses the rural exploitation of the South as counterpart to the industrialization of the North; Vera Zamagni, “Le radici agricole del dualismo italiano,” *Nuova Rivista Storica* 59, no. 1 (1975); Carlo Donolo, “Sviluppo ineguale e disgregazione sociale. Note per l’analisi delle classi nel meridione,” *Quaderni Piacentini* 11, no. 47 (1972); and Sandro Petriccione, *Politica industriale e Mezzogiorno* (Bari: Laterza, 1976). For a more detailed discussion of the roots of this political economy in the colonial exploitation of the South and the consequences upon Italy’s “economic miracle” in the 1950s and 1960s, refer to Chapter 3.

place to be. This banishment from national space was undoubtedly influential in increasing Levi's anxiety over his feelings of national belonging, but perhaps a yet more determining factor was the timing of Levi's arrival in Lucania and the temporal gap that ensued between this experience and his writing of it. Levi's forced exile from the nation took place in the midst of Italy's imperial war against Ethiopia, and the extent to which his Lucanian experience was marked by Italian colonial conquest is not negligible.<sup>10</sup> Levi was in fact released from confino on the occasion of Italy's proclamation of Empire with the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936. However, by the time Levi *wrote* the novel, between 1943 and 1944, Italy's standing as an imperial power had almost reversed. By the Fall of 1943, the Italian empire had effectively come to an end<sup>11</sup>. Against this broader setting, Italy's internal state was no less insecure: though still theoretically a monarchy ruled by the House of Savoy, Italy was for all practical purposes split in two: the South, liberated by the Allies in 1943, was the temporary seat of the reduced Kingdom of Italy, where the fleeing king had sought refuge and had entered into an alliance with the Allies. The North, above the so-called Gustav Line that cut across the peninsula at Cassino, was still controlled by the Fascists and occupied by German troops.<sup>12</sup> The composition of *Cristo si e' fermato a Eboli* from the Fall of 1943 to the summer of 1944 takes place within this turbulent national setting. In the Preface written for the 1963 edition of the *Cristo*, Levi in fact makes specific reference to the war then raging in the streets outside his secret refuge, and defines his act of writing as an "active defense" to stave off death.<sup>13</sup>

But Levi's act of writing is also, as we shall see, an attempt to forestall another kind of death, one concerning a practice of Italian national self-definition predicated on the displacement of the South as an internal other. The Italian nation was living the closing phases of the war in a state of extreme ambiguity and indeterminacy. This context does more than provide a background to Levi's writing: it amounts to a fundamental part of its meaning. While Levi condemned the regime's imperialist wars in Africa and supported, within a year of the publication of his novel, Italy's transition to a Republic, his writing nonetheless betrays deep anxieties over a drastically changing political landscape and its possible impact upon the imperial relationship between North and South that had thus far defined the Italian nation since unification and preserved the bourgeoisie's dominant position. Levi may therefore be considered as consciously anti-colonialist on the subject of Italy's "official" colonies abroad and unconsciously colonialist with respect to the "unofficial" internal colony. Though critical of the Fascist regime's colonialism, Levi not only did not pause to question how his entire way of life was predicated upon the construction of an inferior Other, but he himself participated in reproducing this Othering.

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<sup>10</sup>For histories of Italy's imperial wars, see Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), and Giorgio Rochat, *Il colonialismo italiano* (Torino: Loescher Editore, 1973).

<sup>11</sup> Italy's colonial situation was, of course, much more complex than can be detailed here. Suffice it to say that after the fall of Mussolini, Italy lost most of its colonies either to Germany or to the Allies, surrendering Libya in 1943. In the 1947 Paris peace settlement, Italy lost all effective control of its colonies, though it maintained a "trusteeship" over Somalia until 1960 and Libya did not become an independent monarchy until 1951.

<sup>12</sup> See David Ellwood, *Italy, 1943-1945* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985), and Enzo Colotti's *L'amministrazione tedesca dell'Italia occupata 1943-1945* (Milano: Lerici, 1963) for the civil war phase of the Italian campaign.

<sup>13</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, xvii.

A critical reading of Levi's novel in a postcolonial key reveals both its defense of certain imperialist premises and its reliance on various literary devices typical of the colonizer's construction of the colonized. I do not use the term "postcolonial" in a temporal sense, which is to say that I do not seek to define a state of political independence that came after one of colonization. Instead, "postcolonial" marks a discursive field from which to draw and discuss the effects of imperialism upon the multiplicity of Italian cultures after 1861. I also do not consider "colonialism" as requiring the settlement of people in another land (as in fact in the internal Italian model it did not), but rather as "the conquest and control of other people's land and goods."<sup>14</sup> This definition allows for a Marxist approach that distinguishes modern colonialism from its previous varieties by locating it within the development and expansion of capitalism. Colonial conquest entailed a novel restructuring of the economies of both the colonizer and the colonized based upon a complex flow of human and natural resources aimed at maximizing production in the metropole and creating "captive" markets for those products in the colonies. Hence the de-industrialization and forced ruralization of the Italian South following national unification.<sup>15</sup> As Loomba has argued, whatever their individual characteristics, all forms of colonialism "produced the economic imbalance that was necessary for the growth of European capitalism and industry. Thus we could say that colonialism was the midwife that assisted at the birth of European capitalism, or that without colonial expansion the transition to capitalism could not have taken place in Europe."<sup>16</sup> This imbalance was precisely the see-saw effect described by Antonio Gramsci in his influential essay, *Some Aspects of the Southern Question* (1926), in which he argued that the "inferiority" and "backwardness" of the Italian South had been not the unintended consequence but the necessary precondition for the industrialization of northern Italy and its entry into the European capitalist economy. This form of colonialism, defined by Lenin as "imperialism,"<sup>17</sup> does not rely on direct colonial settlement since it only requires maintaining economic and social relations of dependency that will guarantee it the necessary forms of captive labor and markets.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, though southern Italy was never formally declared a colony, it continues to remain economically and culturally dependent upon the "mother country."<sup>19</sup> Throughout this chapter I will be relying on a concept of colonization in which the South functioned culturally as a colony while being subjected to a political economy that was imperialist.

We will see how this fundamental "colonial imbalance" in the Italian nation produced but was also produced by practices of signification in the texts we will be examining. After all, there was a very close tie between the rise of an Italian "national"

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<sup>14</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 2.

<sup>15</sup> For a general discussion of de-industrialization in colonial economies, refer to Robert I. Rhodes, ed., *Imperialism and Underdevelopment: A Reader* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970); Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Political Economy of Underdevelopment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Andre Gunder Frank, "The Development of Underdevelopment," in *Paradigms in Economic Development: Classic Perspectives, Critiques, and Reflections*, ed. Rajani Kannepalli Kanth (New York: M. E. Sharp, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism," in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963).

<sup>18</sup> Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> This dynamic is the focus of "dependency theory," first developed in Andre Gunder Frank's seminal 1966 essay, "The Development of Underdevelopment."

language and literature and the nineteenth century experience of internal colonization, suggesting that the rise of Italian national culture and the exercise of colonial rule were mutually constitutive. Though much smaller in scale, Italy's internal experiment in imperialism runs parallel to the much more notorious British variety. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue,

the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and [...] the development of one is intrinsically bound up with the development of the other, both at the level of simple utility (as propaganda for instance) and at the unconscious level, where it leads to the naturalizing of constructed values (e.g. civilization, humanity, etc.) which, conversely, established 'savagery', 'native', 'primitive', as their antitheses and as the object of a reforming zeal.<sup>20</sup>

Cultural products such as literature and film were thus as essential as the army and the tax officials to colonial rule over the South.

Much of the corpus of "southernist" literature was thus not about "discovering" the South at all but rather about creating it as an antithesis that ideologically reinforced the nation as the locus of civilization and modernity.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the other-worldliness Levi "discovered" in Lucania is actually traceable to an earlier time of his life marked by the rise of totalitarianism across Europe and by a quasi-existentialist need to discover a pure, virgin world, as yet untouched by the tyrannies of modernity. Levi begins to live in this suspended time and place as early as 1934, with his first arrest for anti-fascist activities. As he would write to his family from the Turin prison, "Immerso in questo tempo che non è né di vita né di morte, giaccio in uno spazio altrettanto irreali [...]"

Tempo non tempo  
luogo non luogo  
se qui mi attempo  
nel nulla affogo.<sup>22</sup>

By the time Levi writes *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, he has been arrested a second time, sent to *confino* in Lucania for 8 months, pardoned, fled to France after the 1938 racial laws, escaped back into Italy after the German invasion of France, arrested a third time in Florence and released after Mussolini's arrest, and has been living in hiding in a secret room for over a year as the war rages on. The alternation of repeated, prolonged exile and confinement is the disturbed setting against which Levi's imagination of a fixed

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<sup>20</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Some of the classic texts that produced the South as a backward, barbaric place in need of (colonial) rule were Pasquale Villari, *Lettere meridionali* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1878); Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino, *La Sicilia nel 1876* (Firenze: G. Barbera, 1877); Alfredo Niceforo, *L'Italia barbara contemporanea* (Palermo: Sandron, 1898); and criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, *In Calabria* (Sala Bolognese: A. Forni, 1862), to name only a few. For a critical review of Southern Question literature, see the collection of essays in Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy's "Southern Question": Orientalism in One Country* (Oxford: Berg, 1998). See also Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Robert Lumley and Johnathan Morris, eds., *The New History of the Italian South: The Mezzogiorno Revisited* (Devon, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1997); and Vito Teti, *La razza maledetta: Origini del pregiudizio antimeridionale* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Carlo Levi, *È questo il "carcer tetro"? Lettere dal carcere 1934-1935* (Genova: Il Nuovo Melangolo, 1991), 112.



homeland produced the “closed” peasant world that he describes as Lucania in his novel: “Chiuso in una stanza, e in un mondo chiuso, mi e` grato riandare con la memoria a quell’altro mondo, serrato nel dolore e negli usi, negato alla Storia e allo Stato, eternamente paziente.”<sup>23</sup> In this oft-quoted opening passage, Levi introduces his readers to the object of his attention, the South, as a sick region so “sealed in pain” that it must be his “eternal patient”. Levi thus opens his novel by reactivating a *locus classicus* of discourses that placed the South in a position of passive dependence (the “patient”) yielding to northern tutelage (the “doctor”).<sup>24</sup>

Levi’s opening serves to immediately otherize the South as antithesis to the nation. Since defining national space requires setting limits and boundaries to separate that space from the others who have been cleared out of it, it is to this liminal area that we must look for the content-definition of national space. As a painter, Levi had already mastered the technique of defining the contours of an indistinct object by fixing the space immediately beside it. Similarly, national definition occurs as a *negative* process that relies upon defining, and then displacing, what it is not – its negative double. Thus, Lucania stands for everything that Levi’s civilized, modern nation is not. The nation, which Levi identifies with the standards and values of the northern bourgeoisie, is the opposite of the Lucania he describes. If Lucania is “backward” and “inferior” it is so in relation to another space, that of the nation, which is “modern” and “superior.” Edward Said’s concept of “Orientalism” proves extremely relevant for understanding the function of southern inferiority in the construction of the Italian nation. Just as the Orient was an invention by and for Europe, so too the South produced and reproduced in the “Southern Question” discourse served to define the Italian nation in the act of its ruling over the South.

The South is thus at once excluded from but necessary to the nation. The colonizer’s inherent necessity for the colonized was a predicament explained in Albert Memmi’s eminent treatise *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. In a colonial setting, colonizer and colonized are locked in a mutually constitutive relationship: the subject who colonizes, in the act of colonizing another, creates the colonized object, who in turn, in the act of being colonized, creates the colonizer. The colonizer, however, is torn between the elimination and the preservation of the colonized. On the one hand, the racism so essential to the maintenance of the colonial relationship feeds the desire to eliminate the inferior colonized. On the other hand, the colonizer is held back by a sort of internal mechanism of preservation that renders the elimination of the colonized an impossibility, for “to eliminate the colonized from the roll of the living, it would be impossible for him to do so without eliminating himself.”<sup>25</sup> The colonizer thus finds

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<sup>23</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> The rhetorical positioning of the North as authoritative doctor and the South as incapacitated patient can be traced back to the earliest texts of the Southern Question tradition. In his groundbreaking “study” of the socio-economic conditions of the South, titled “Condizioni politiche e amministrative della Sicilia,” in *La Sicilia nel 1876*, Leopoldo Franchetti made abundant use of medical metaphors that served to place him, a northern observer, in the position of doctor and Sicily in that of sick patient incapable of curing or governing itself. For a discussion on the use of such tropes in Franchetti and others, see Nelson Moe, “The Emergence of the Southern Question in Villari, Franchetti, and Sonnino,” in Schneider, *Italy’s “Southern Question,”* 68-71, and the section titled “The Wound, the Doctor, the Nation” in his *The View From Vesuvius*, 172-6.

<sup>25</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 54.

himself in the paradoxical situation whereby, “having chosen to maintain the colonial system, he must contribute more vigor to its defense than would have been needed to dissolve it completely.”<sup>26</sup>

This colonial predicament explains the nation’s necessity to define itself by at once recognizing and negating its internal other, in a double move of recognition and disavowal. Homi Bhabha defined this dilemma as the “particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation,” which entails a double movement: in order to recognize the nation, the author must fix his gaze upon its boundary, outside of which he has relegated the Other.<sup>27</sup> In order to *see* the nation, and himself as safely ensconced within its space, the author must literally recognize those he has pushed out. Yet this recognition suggests a similarity with the colonized that is too terrifying for the colonizer to admit, for this would reveal the flimsiness of the justification for colonialism. This movement back and forth that defines the other as “almost the same but not quite” introduces an uncertainty in the text, an opening for the Other that Bhabha defines as a “partial presence” with the power to destabilize the authority of the text.<sup>28</sup>

In Levi’s writing of the nation, it is the emigrants who constitute this haunting presence. In order to define the nation, and himself, as the northern “doctor” of an “eternally patient” South, Levi needs to delineate a circumscribed space immune from outside influences and the temptations of modernity such that emigration was introducing. Displaced from the historical, living world, Lucania becomes a world so sealed off that neither its conquerors, nor History, nor even Christianity have ever really pierced it – leaving it, without ever understanding it, locked within an eternal primitivity. For Levi the Fascist government, like any form of “the State,” had been neither capable nor even interested in winning over the peasantry. History here had always been “la Storia altrui” (“the History of others”), a violent imposition to which Lucanian peasants submitted with passive resignation.

Levi’s interpretation of the emigration phenomenon betrays his need to reinforce the dichotomy between the northern metropole and its primitive double. In order to sustain the rigid boundary that closes Lucania off from the nation, Levi forbids any form of social change from entering the region. Therefore, not even emigration can introduce any form of renewal, even though Levi’s descriptions often betray sweeping social changes as resulting from the emigration phenomenon; in order for Levi to deny emigration its destabilizing potential, he must first acknowledge its import.

One of the changes introduced by emigration was the radical loosening of sexual mores. Contrary to Levi’s expectations of finding a “traditional” southern culture domineering towards women, female sexuality was not considered taboo. In fact, despite his presumably more cosmopolitan sexual views, Levi himself remarks on the situation with a certain astonishment: “Le donne, chiuse nei veli, sono come animali selvatici. Non pensano che all’amore fisico, con estrema naturalezza, e ne parlano con una liberta` e semplicita` di linguaggio che stupisce.”<sup>29</sup> Levi recognized that it was emigration which had changed everything, for with the men gone, the town was now for all practical

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<sup>26</sup> Memmi, *Colonizer*.

<sup>27</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, ed., “Introduction: Narrating the Nation,” in *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 88.

<sup>29</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 89.

purposes a predominantly female domain. This change in sexual mores had accompanied a more significant transformation of Gagliano's social structure into a matriarchal society. Not only female sexual behavior but also an unprecedented high rate of illegitimate births were now, in the space of a couple of generations, no longer viewed as social stigmas. In addition to this, and again as a result of emigration, the traditional gendered division of labor had witnessed a similar transformation, as most of the women had now taken over the field labor previously performed by the men. Emigration thus proved destabilizing for the social seclusion and moral immobility Levi attempted to impose on Lucanian peasant society.

Nowhere were such ruptures more evident than with the returned emigrants, who prove particularly troublesome for Levi's depiction of Lucania. Aside from its massive proportions, Italian emigration was also characterized by a high number of returns, which amounted to approximately fifty percent.<sup>30</sup> Though Levi devotes minimal attention to them and barely glosses over their conspicuous rise in status and wealth, these so-called "americani" sneak into the margins of the text and leave traces of their destabilizing power. These returned emigrants essentially form a new social class positioned between the peasantry and the gentry. Their social differentiation is so manifest that Levi cannot help noticing it the first time he walks through the town of Gagliano:

Quasi tutte le case erano costituite da una sola stanza, senza finestre, che prendeva luce dalla porta. Le porte erano sbarrate, poiché i contadini erano nei campi [...] Qua e là alcune case avevano invece un primo piano, e un balcone; e la porta di strada, invece di essere di vecchio legno nero e consumato, brillava pretensiosamente di vernice, e si adornava di una maniglia di ottone. Erano le case degli "americani."<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, the only automobile in town belongs to one such repatriated emigrant who had foreseen the potential earnings of owning the only transportation service. Another "American" had returned to open a successful barber shop, while yet another had brought back the impressive tailoring skills learned in America:

[M]i prendeva le misure in pollici, con complicati e originali e moderni sistemi americani per l'abbassamento della spalla [...] per un vestito alla cacciatora. Era un artigiano intelligente, abilissimo nel suo mestiere, come se ne trovano pochi nelle più celebrate sartorie di città, e mi fece, per cinquanta lire di fattura, il più bell'abito di velluto che io abbia mai portato. In America guadagnava bene, ora era in miseria.<sup>32</sup>

Another repatriated emigrant, a carpenter named Lasala, had even become town mayor in the past.

Lasala's character is particularly interesting in that he represents the quintessential "americano": along with the only radio in the town ("il suo monumentale apparecchio"),<sup>33</sup> Lasala also possessed a veritable commemorative library of distinguished Italians that included recordings of Caruso, De Pinedo, and Matteotti, a

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<sup>30</sup> On figures of return migration, see Matteo Sanfilippo, "Tipologie dell'emigrazione di massa," in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana* 1, eds. Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina (Roma: Donzelli, 2001), 80-1; and Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 7.

<sup>31</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 38.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

significant selection that indicates the formation of an “Italian” identity occurring outside of Italian national space and largely as a result of the emigration experience, rather than in spite of it.<sup>34</sup> Ironically, these same individuals who defined themselves as “Italian” abroad, considered themselves “American” when they returned to Italy, suggesting that emigration presented the occasion for individuals to imagine themselves as Italians only within a foreign setting extrapolated from the “mother country.” On the other hand, this process underscored the volatility of such feelings of national belonging once the emigrants were reabsorbed within the discriminatory geographic space of the Italian nation. This complex formation of national identity therefore seems to form in opposition to the dominant identity which not only Italian political discourse but Levi himself would impress upon them as “stateless” individuals in need of foreign rule.

This is why the emigrants are such disturbing figures in Levi’s narrative, for they influence those back home with a newly acquired “consciousness of statehood,” as represented by the ubiquitous photo, so vexing for Levi, of President Roosevelt in peasants’ homes, and by the iconographic status of New York as the new capital of their imagined community. Their capital, more than Rome or Naples, Levi complains, is now New York. Rome and Naples, as centers of old sacred and dynastic power, had been eclipsed by New York. Of course, New York as the peasants’ new capital also signified a new, and much more worrisome, possibility for Levi: it was the confirmation that peasants no longer looked, if they ever had, to what for Levi was the metropole of the Italian nation. Since they were not free to rule over themselves, they chose to subject themselves to a hegemonic power other than – *and “superior” to* – that of Italy. Franklin Roosevelt’s photograph on the peasants’ walls signifies the failure of the dominant culture of Italy, which Levi represents, to win hegemony in this region. If ever Levi had required further proof that the southern colony was slipping away from the nation, he found it in the peasants’ eloquent gesture to reject the photograph of the Italian King in favor of that of the American President.

However, it is more precisely as agents of modernity that the returned emigrants prove threatening to the stability of Levi’s boundaries, for they are the bearers of modern instruments and techniques, world views and means of communication that place Lucania *in the center* of that “outside world” where important historical events are occurring. Emigrants, even when far away, are the source of everything new, from actual world news and networks of assistance, to machinery and techniques. The only transportation service and radio belong to returned emigrants, and Levi more than once describes the villagers gathering around the automobile every evening to receive news and mail. Levi’s explanation of this process is worth quoting at length, as it illustrates his simultaneous realization and disavowal of the important modernizing function of emigration:

I paesi di Lucania, mezzi di qua e mezzi di là del mare, sono rimasti spezzati in due. Le famiglie si sono separate, le donne sono rimaste sole: per quelli di qui, l’America si è allontanata, e con lei ogni possibile salvezza. Soltanto la posta porta continuamente qualcosa che viene di

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<sup>34</sup> On the development of a national identity among Italian emigrants, see Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas*, 45-52. See also John Zucchi, *Italians in Toronto: Development of a National Identity 1875-1935* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1988), and Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

laggiù [...] arrivano forbici, coltelli, rasoi, strumenti agricoli, falchetti, martelli, tenaglie, tutte le piccole macchine della vita comune. La vita di Gagliano, per quello che riguarda i ferri dei mestieri, è tutta americana, come lo è per le misure: si parla, dai contadini, di pollici e di libbre piuttosto che di centimetri o di chilogrammi. Le donne, che filano la lana su vecchi fusi, tagliano il filo con splendidi forbicioni di Pittsburg: i rasoi del barbiere sono i più perfezionati ch'io abbia mai visto in Italia, e l'acciaio azzurro delle scuri che i contadini portano sempre con sé, è acciaio americano. Essi non sentono alcuna prevenzione contro questi strumenti moderni, né alcuna contraddizione fra di essi e i loro antichi costumi. Prendono volentieri quello che arriva da New York, come prenderebbero volentieri quello che arrivasse da Roma. Ma da Roma non arriva nulla. Non era mai arrivato nulla [...].<sup>35</sup>

The emigrants do not use the standard measures and tools of the Italian metric system but are quite comfortable, better off in fact, using the American ones. Emigration in short was what helped Lucanians to *remain* “modern,” through the standardization and improvement of measurements, instruments and techniques, in ways that entirely bypassed and even surpassed those of the metropole.<sup>36</sup>

Levi's sense that something is awry in the Lucanians' possession of these marks of modernity is unmistakable, but there is something more in these passages on the emigrants, an unease and a preoccupation that belie Levi's thesis on the Lucanians' submissiveness. The fact is that Levi's observations about the emigrants, no matter how fatalistic, betray a profound transformation taking place in the social structure of the South. The emigrants neither left nor returned to continue working the land. The great demise of the peasant world so lamented during the economic boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s had actually begun a century earlier, with “la grande emigrazione” that followed national unification. Italian mass emigration has at times been interpreted as a sort of great peasant revolution<sup>37</sup>. While not all observers may have agreed with the thesis

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<sup>35</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 114-5.

<sup>36</sup> Francesco Paolo Cerase distinguishes between different kinds of return migration, such as returns due to failure or returns due to prospects of investment. The latter is of particular interest to us, for it is chiefly this category that Levi represents in his account but which he collapses into the “failure” category. Yet for these emigrants, as Cerase specifies, “il ritorno non è stato [...] un semplice reinserimento in una realtà preesistente ed immutabile. Al contrario, è stato considerato come la ricerca di una più profonda affermazione delle proprie capacità; un'opportunità per mettere pienamente alla prova quanto di nuovo ciascuno aveva appreso e possedeva – in termini di nuove idee, nuovi strumenti di lavoro, nuovi valori, nuove risorse. Tutto ciò è stato proiettato nella terra di origine come luogo in cui potesse meglio trovare una piena utilizzazione [...] Per un verso le loro risorse, i loro obiettivi ed aspirazioni, la loro diversità quanto ad atteggiamenti e modi di pensare hanno rappresentato un potenziale prezioso per l'innovazione non solo economica, ma anche culturale, dei loro paesi d'origine.” Francesco Paolo Cerase, “L'onda di ritorno: i rimpatri,” in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana* 1, 125. For more on return migration, refer to Dino Cinel's *The National Integration of Italian Return Migration, 1870-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), which, though covering a period preceding World War II, still offers a wealth of information, especially on the topics of emigrant remittances and returnee investments.

<sup>37</sup> Among the most notable sustainers of this thesis were the “Meridionalisti” Francesco Saverio Nitti, “L'emigrazione italiana e i suoi avversari,” *Scritti sulla questione meridionale*, I: *Saggi sulla storia del Mezzogiorno, emigrazione e lavoro*. (Bari: Laterza, 1958), and Napoleone Colajanni, “Gli italiani delle colonie,” in *Latini e Anglo-Sassoni (Razze inferiori e razze superiori)* (Napoli, Roma: La Rivista Popolare, 1906).

that mass emigration constituted a “great refusal” of colonial exploitation, it does seem irrefutable that Italian mass emigration was, in the last instance, a rejection of the rural way of life. This would explain the emigrants’ destinations of choice in the great industrial cities of Europe and North America. The predominantly northern Italian emigration to South America of the late nineteenth century had already abated as a consequence of the industrialization of northern Italy, France and Germany, which absorbed this migrant labor force.<sup>38</sup> Somewhat later, beginning around 1900, when Italian mass emigration became a distinctly southern phenomenon, the southern peasants who abandoned their land did not go in search of other land. They sought instead the bustling cities and vastly expanding industrial economies of the United States and Canada, which is to say the most obvious antithesis of the world they had left behind.<sup>39</sup> Though their abandonment of an agrarian form of life for an urban industrial one for which they had no skills usually spelled continued exploitation in the New World, it also represented a crucial break with old relations of power that were, before anything else, colonial. Even more significant for our purposes here, those who returned generally demonstrated far less interest for land ownership than would have been expected. The purchase or construction of a house – especially the American single-family model – far exceeded the purchase of land, which had historically been a universal peasant aspiration.<sup>40</sup> Significantly, none of the returned emigrants Levi describes work the land; all have moved to the service sector or have opened small commercial ventures, indicating an important move up the social hierarchy even if in economic terms the improvement was marginal. These implications prove even more striking in light of what Levi tells us about local emigration figures: while the town of Gagliano has 1,200 inhabitants, 2,000 of its citizens are in the United States. The fact that two thirds of the town’s population has, within the space of a single generation, abandoned one way of life for another testifies to the dramatic effects of emigration on the socio-economic structure of this part of the South.

Thus what proves particularly upsetting for Levi’s task of reinforcing the boundary between nation and colonial space is not so much his oft-lamented *lack* of a modern national subject in Lucania, but rather the *presence*, what we have been calling a “partial presence,” of a cosmopolitan Other whose migration has introduced a certain mobility – geographic as well as across gender and class lines – in a world Levi would have us imagine as inert for millennia until his own god-like descent stirred it magically to life. Levi’s reaction to these misfits moving across the boundary he so carefully constructs creates the “ambivalence” between recognition and disavowal. This movement mirrors the dual strategy Zygmunt Bauman identifies as the quintessentially modern approach to the migrant other: on the one hand there is the drive for *anthropoemy*, which means to vomit up or expel; on the other, there is the conflicting move of *anthropophagy*, which is to cannibalize or assimilate.<sup>41</sup> The first is distinguished by the characterization of the foreigner as somehow exceptional in order to isolate and ultimately expel him or

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<sup>38</sup> Flavia Amato and Antonio Golini, “Uno sguardo a un secolo e mezzo di emigrazione italiana,” in Bevilacqua, *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana*, 49-51.

<sup>39</sup> Giuseppe Galasso, “Civiltà contadina ed emigrazione,” in *Il sogno italo-americano. Realtà e immaginario dell’emigrazione negli Stati Uniti*, ed. Sebastiano Martelli (Napoli: CUEN, 1998), 21.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, “Making and Unmaking Strangers,” *Thesis Eleven* 43, no. 1 (1995): 2.

her; the second tends to annul significant differences in the other so that he or she may be swallowed up by the dominant culture demanding “integration.” Both tendencies, however, refuse to grant this *alter* figure its autonomy and ultimately seek its disappearance.

We can observe Levi caught in the same anxious movement. His first mention of a returned emigrant entails an othering of the car owner: “un ‘americano’, un uomo grande, grosso e biondo, con un berretto da ciclista, noto in paese per una sua gigantesca particolarità anatomica [...] che rendeva forse desiderabili, ma certamente pericolosi alle donne i contatti con lui.”<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, this over-sexualized motorist is the same man who transports and distributes the daily mail. The warning is clear: the returned emigrants constitute “dangerous contacts”; though the well-endowed “americani” may hold great appeal, the community should beware of how much it allows their excessively modern ways to penetrate their pure archaic world.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, Levi also resorts to anthropophagy when, in a last-ditch effort, he attempts to collapse this partial presence into the still Lucanian community he has constructed, refusing to assign any great significance to the sometimes radical cultural and socio-economic transformations wrought by emigration:

Quelli che ritornano, dopo vent’anni, sono identici a quando erano partiti [...] In America, essi vivono a parte, fra di loro: non partecipano alla vita americana [...] e risparmiano i pochi dollari [...] Poi, tornano un giorno in Italia, [...] qualcuno offre loro una piccola terra da comprare... [si] sposano [...] e in pochissimo tempo è tornata la miseria, la stessa eterna miseria di quando, tanti anni prima, erano partiti. E con la miseria torna la rassegnazione, la pazienza, e tutti i vecchi usi contadini: in breve, questi americani non si distinguono più in nulla da tutti gli altri contadini, se non per una maggiore amarezza, il rimpianto, che talvolta affiora, d’un bene perduto.<sup>44</sup>

Though Levi himself has demonstrated that these individuals have undergone such transformation as to have taken themselves out of the peasant class, he is compelled to conclude that those who return are ultimately swallowed up by the immobility of peasant life once more.

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<sup>42</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 71.

<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that sexualization is a recurring rhetorical strategy for constructing the colonial Other. Edward Said once identified the sexualization of the Orient as “a remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes to the Orient [...] the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies.” Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 188. In the context of India, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., show how British imperial rule operated through “the ideological construction and consolidation of white masculinity as normative and the corresponding racialization and sexualization of colonized peoples” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 15; while Rachel Alsop, Annette Fitzsimons, and Kathleen Lennon, eds., argue that “Western constructions of sexuality formulated during the period of colonial expansion are inherently racist, equating sexual excess and a lack of civilization in their conceptualizations of the colonized. White, Western discourses traditionally define African men as having animal-like, uncontrollable sexual demands; oriental men (and women) as subservient, yet perversely malleable” in *Theorizing Gender* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 151.

<sup>44</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 108-9.

Levi's text therefore demonstrates, *contra*-Levi, that Lucania, far from being a petrified, impermeable enclave, was at this time undergoing significant changes as a result of emigration and war, some of which had already become evident during Levi's confinement there. But precisely because emigration did have far-reaching effects on a society that Levi needed, for ideological reasons, to keep closed, he is ambivalent about granting it any innovative power. Giving the Lucanian peasants mobility and the authority to cross the boundaries he had erected around their world would have freed them from the condition of "eternal patients" – obviating Levi's function as "doctor" with all the implicit powers over the life and death of the dependent colonial population.

The emigrants are forbidden from tampering with the seals Levi has placed around Lucania just as God is interdicted from descending further South than Eboli: in the claustrophobic kingdom Levi has created there is room only for himself, the northern demi-god. As his novel progresses from historical anecdotes to pseudo-ethnographic observations, Lucanians are gradually dehumanized, alternating between frightening half-beasts to underworldlings with sinister magical customs. Under the stroke of Levi's pen, the local language becomes a series of spells evoked to maintain the region in a suspended, out-of-timeness. Levi dismisses as a "contradiction in their language" the fact that locals have such a rich variety of expressions with which to express temporality.<sup>45</sup> He is much more interested in linguistic expressions and old proverbs that he can interpret and transcribe as magical formulas, of which the language is full, for here "la ragione e la scienza [...] non sono ancora , e forse non saranno mai, divinità ascoltate e adorare."<sup>46</sup> Even the "sanaporcelle" is described as a witch doctor performing a sacrifice rather than a rustic castrator of pigs. And so a dance to a bagpipe becomes a primitive, animal-like "love dance" ritual, and so on.

Levi finds the women to be particularly beastly. He begins by observing how to him they do not even appear to be women but a strange fleet of vessels<sup>47</sup> Next, he confesses that they remind him of sheep, and smell like them too;<sup>48</sup> or of strange queen-bird creatures;<sup>49</sup> and finally, they are a bunch of sex-crazed wild animals.<sup>50</sup> Upon his first encounter with Giulia la Santarcangelese, the woman who becomes his servant in Gagliano, he describes her as possessing a statuesque figure and animal-like strength, the teeth of a wolf and the head of a snake, and as worshipping "eternal animal divinities."<sup>51</sup>

Levi also constructs a colonial relationship with local peasants through repeated gestures of feudal ownership. In the novel's Preface, Levi tellingly employs a possessive pronoun to refer to the peasants ("i miei contadini" – "my peasants"). Next, he makes us privy to various acts of feudal deference on their part: the peasants requesting his medical attentions beg him, bless him, and even kiss his hands. "Era forse," he concedes, "il prestigio naturale del forestiero che viene da lontano, e che è perciò come un dio."<sup>52</sup> Here he is still somewhat vague, ascribing the appeal to any foreigner who comes from "far

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<sup>45</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 184.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.



away.” But later on, inspired by a visit from his sister, he becomes more precise about the motives for his superiority: in a place that was

piu` lontan[o] che l’India e la Cina [...] capivo ad un tratto come questi due tempi fossero, fra loro, incomunicabili; come queste due civilta` non potessero avere nessun rapporto se non miracoloso. E mi rendevo conto del perche` i contadini guardino il forestiero *del nord* come qualcuno che viene da un al di la`, come un dio straniero.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, it is Levi’s differentiation of the Lucanians, placing them “further than India or China” from Italy, that constructs his superiority. Again and again Levi portrays himself as a god who has “fallen from the sky” and whose servant has come to consider not only her lord and master (especially after he deems it appropriate to underscore his authority by striking her) but also a divine power: “Mi supponeva un grande potere;”<sup>54</sup> “per la Giulia avrei assommato tutte le virtu` [...] del guaritore sacro.”<sup>55</sup> Even his medical attentions, which by his own admission were unremarkable given that he had never actually practiced medicine, begin to resemble the Raising of Lazarus: “E io passavo di meraviglia in meraviglia, vedendo questi malati, che qualunque buon medico avrebbe giudicato perduti, migliorare e guarire con le cure più elementari. Pareva che mi aiutasse una strana fortuna;”<sup>56</sup> “la mia fama di medico miracoloso andava crescendo; e spesso venivano dei malati anche da paesi lontani, per consultarmi;”<sup>57</sup> “Vidi, con stupore, che ero aspettato. Si sapeva che ero stato al Pantano, si sperava che passassi di là al ritorno. I contadini e le donne erano in strada, per farmi buona accoglienza: i più strani malati si erano fatti portare sugli usci, perché io li vedessi. Pareva una corte dei miracoli.”<sup>58</sup>

Carlo Levi, the painter and writer banished from the nation, gradually fabricates the more secure identity of Don Carlo, the northern god adored by the adults who pay homage with gifts and blessings – even of the Fascist mayor he says, “mi amava” (“he loved me”)<sup>59</sup> – and revered by the children who fight over the honor of carrying his painting supplies until Levi would intervene “come un dio inappellabile, a scegliere e giudicare.”<sup>60</sup> Not coincidentally, he has named the stray dog he has adopted “Barone,” a strange animal who amazes the villagers with his “heraldic” aspect, “il leone rampante sullo scudo di un signore.” Naturally, Levi identifies with such a noble creature, “poiché pare che i potenti, nel loro terrore del sacro, abbiano scoperto che anche in me è una doppia natura, e che, anch’io sono mezzo barone e mezzo leone”<sup>61</sup> – a belief confirmed by the children’s singing to him:

Aggio cantato sopra ’nu varcone  
e Don Carlo è ’nu varone  
Sona cupille si voi sunà<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 72, emphasis added.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

It seems, in other words, that the narration of his out-of-nation experience provided Levi with the opportunity to assert his authority by appointing himself lord and master, god and sorcerer of the colony. “Il mio orologio si era fermato, e nessun rintocco di fuori poteva giungermi e indicarmi il passare del tempo, dove il tempo non scorre.”<sup>63</sup>

It should by now be apparent that Levi’s novel belongs to that body of works that Said called “imperialist literature,” for, like all imperialist works, it attempts to conceal the groundlessness of the metropole’s superiority by arguing that

the source of the world’s significant action and life is in the West, whose representatives seem at liberty to visit their fantasies and philanthropies upon a mind-deadened Third World. In this view, the outlying regions of the world have no life, history or culture to speak of, no independence or integrity worth representing without the West. And when there is something to be described it is [...] unutterably corrupt, degenerate, irredeemable.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, Levi’s masterpiece makes a hefty contribution to the accumulation of “the great cultural archive” of colonial rule, participating in the production of an image of Italy in which the southern regions were viewed “with a combination of familiarity and distance, but never with a sense of their separate sovereignty.”<sup>65</sup>

When Carlo Levi’s novel was published, especially before the 1948 electoral victory of the Christian Democrats, many meridionalisti of the Left harbored high hopes for an economic and political renewal of the South that would also have granted the peasantry a more active role in national politics.<sup>66</sup> Some of the harshest critiques of *Cristo si e` fermato a Eboli* came from Leftist circles where expectations and commitment to social change were high. Literary critic Carlo Muscetta, for instance, denounced the novel as the delusion of a megalomaniac: “la discesa di Carlo Levi, pittore e medico, stregone e scrittore, è rappresentata nel suo stesso libro come una vera Epifania, come l’avvento e la rivelazione di una divinità da adorare.”<sup>67</sup>

Muscetta was skeptical about the actual “shock” Levi registered upon his arrival in the rural South, given that he had been primed by a whole Southern Question tradition that for generations had labored to construct precisely that South through the definition, measurement, and solution of the “problem” of the South. Muscetta thus accused Levi of belonging to that tradition that continued to construct Italy’s national identity through the ghettoization and othering of the South: “Quell’antifascista dell’ ‘altra’ Italia si doveva ritenere piu` che preparato culturalmente e psicologicamente a intendere il Sud. Egli apparteneva a quel gruppo d’intellettuali che si erano radunati intorno a Gobetti,

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<sup>63</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 182.

<sup>64</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1994), xix.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

<sup>66</sup> Among these intellectuals were writer-politician Manlio Rossi-Doria, head of the Agricultural Department of the University of Naples in Portici and Scotellaro’s mentor in the final years of his life; writer activist Danilo Dolci, who took part in the non-violent peasant land occupations and “reverse strikes” in Sicily; author Giovanni Russo, writer-politician Tommaso Fiore; journalist, writer and politician Francesco Compagna, who also founded the journal *Nord e Sud*; and Marxist politician Giorgio Amendola, founder of the journal *Cronache Meridionali*. For an account of the various threads running through postwar “meridionalismo” and the various figures involved, see Mirko Grasso, *Scoprire l’Italia: inchieste e documentari degli anni Cinquanta* (Calimera (LE): Kurumuny, 2007).

<sup>67</sup> Carlo Muscetta, “Leggenda e verità di Carlo Levi,” in *Realismo neorealismo controrealismo* (Roma: Lucarini, 1990), 58.

realizzando una feconda intesa con i Fortunato e i Salvemini, e soprattutto coi Dorso e gli altri giovani meridionalisti del Sud e del Nord, persuasi della necessita` di riproporre la questione meridionale secondo nuove prospettive.”<sup>68</sup>

Though Muscetta was not working within a postcolonial perspective, he nonetheless recognized and condemned the colonial subtext of Levi’s novel. After Levi “advances grandiosely towards apotheosis,”<sup>69</sup> Muscetta observed acerbically, the novel could only come to its rightful conclusion: Don Carlo receives his pardon and the permission to return home, but the locals do not want him to leave, so they threaten to slit the tires of the automobile that will carry him away. It seems, Muscetta objects, like reading the final pages of Melville’s Polynesian adventure, *Typee*, “ ‘Kannaka [the natives] no let you go nowhere [...] you taboo.’ ”<sup>70</sup>

The most interesting aspect of Muscetta’s critique, however, is his recognition of the central problem presented by the gaze of the colonized returning that of the colonizer: “Fin dal primo capitolo [...], ci rendiamo conto che, se ha importanza il problema com’è apparsa la Lucania a Carlo Levi, c’è un problema almeno altrettanto importante e anzi pregiudiziale: com’è apparso Levi alla Lucania.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, this “problem” is what ultimately destabilizes Levi’s authority. The incessant reappearance of the partial presence is, as we have seen, a continuous affirmation of the difference of the Lucanians from the god-like Levi/Don Carlo. Levi’s narration of this difference, such as through their reverence of him, requires him to consider how he appears to them, opening up a space for the colonized to look back at him. This is the colonized gazing back at the colonizer theorized by Bhabha: “the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence.”<sup>72</sup> This means that ultimately Levi must admit for this partial presence to have the power to shape his own identity as well, thereby rendering it, too, a “partial presence.” This returned gaze thus “reverses ‘in part’ the colonial appropriation by now producing a partial vision of the colonizer’s presence; a gaze of otherness, that [...] shatters the unity of man’s being through which he extends his sovereignty.”<sup>73</sup>

This “partialization” of the author’s identity, an alienation from himself, has the radically disruptive effect of denying him the security of ever feeling “at home” again, detaching him from his own environment. To be sure, once Levi’s “apotheosis” is complete, he experiences just such a rupture when he is allowed a short visit “home” to Turin on account of a sudden death in the family:

Il mio soggiorno fu melanconico, a parte la ragione dolorosa del viaggio. Mi aspettavo il più vivo piacere nel rivedere la città, nel parlare con i vecchi amici, nel ripartecipare per un momento a una vita molteplice e movimentata: ma ora sentivo in me un distacco che non sapevo superare, un senso di infinita lontananza, una difficoltà di adesione che mi impedivano di godere dei beni ritrovati [...] Mi pareva che una parte di me

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<sup>68</sup> Muscetta, “Leggenda,” 59.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>72</sup> Bhabha, *Location*, 89.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 88.

fosse ormai estranea a quel mondo [...] quella loro vita non era più la mia [...]<sup>74</sup>

The anxiety to reaffirm his authority produced a tension in Levi's writing that transcended the strict confines of his own narrative space and led him to engage with other writings in a continual deferral of the ambivalence in *Cristo*. In different ways, the writings of Ignazio Silone and Rocco Scotellaro presented an indirect challenge to Levi's authority over the South, as both propose versions of more complex "souths" seen from the point of view of historically active indigenous subjects. Through the textual devices of *appropriation* and *abrogation*, the "standard" language and "universal" spatio-temporal values of the imperial center are interrogated and destabilized, so that the act of writing becomes an act of contending power and authority with the dominant culture<sup>75</sup>. *Appropriation* in this case refers to the process whereby the experience of marginalization is expressed in the language of the imperial center, while *abrogation* refers to the rejection of the standards and values that make up the imperial culture, coming very close to its dictionary definition as the annulment *by authority* of any law, custom or institution. One can easily see then why abrogation is "a vital moment in the de-colonization of the language."<sup>76</sup>

### Carlo Levi and Ignazio Silone

Levi's novel provides a classic example of "appropriation" when read comparatively with the work of Ignazio Silone, pen-name of writer Secondino Tranquilli (1900-1978) born in Pescina dei Marsi, near L'Aquila, in the southern region of Abruzzo. A founder of the Italian Communist Party, Silone began his writing career as a journalist for various socialist and communist newspapers. In 1927, he traveled to Moscow with Togliatti and participated in the Komintern meetings that brought about the expulsion of Trotsky. Silone opposed the expulsion and abandoned the Communist Party and Italy in 1930. He lived in exile in Switzerland, where he began his work as an anti-fascist novelist. His first two novels, *Fontamara* and *Pane e Vino (Bread and Wine, 1936)*, written in the first years of his exile, are in fact the most well-known and appreciated of his oeuvre. Set in rural communities of his native Abruzzo during the Fascist regime, the novels are at once sketches of the way of life of the "cafoni" and blueprints for peasant revolutionary action against their oppressors. When Silone resumed political activity, with the Italian Socialist Party's foreign office, he was arrested by Swiss authorities and sent first to the Zurich prison and then to the internment camps in Baden and Davos. After returning to Italy in the mid-1940s, he was elected to the Constituent Assembly with the Socialist Party in the Abruzzo college. He remained in politics until 1956, year in which he founded and directed the literary cultural journal *Tempo Presente*. Silone's first postwar novel, *Una manciata di more (1952)*, is also set among southern peasants,

<sup>74</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 218.

<sup>75</sup> I am not imputing a conscious critical design upon the works of Silone or Scotellaro, as both colonial domination and resistance to it, when occurring textually, such as through literature, are more often than not unconscious processes, and are inscribed surreptitiously within the text. We have seen this be the case with Levi and it was certainly the case with Scotellaro, who regarded Levi an inspiration for his own work. That "no utterance is innocent" means that communication occurs as a struggle over meanings even when the author may him/herself be unconsciously or uncritically reproducing hegemonic meanings.

<sup>76</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Empire Writes Back*, 37.

who this time are rising up against local Communist authorities, suggesting that for Silone a simple change in the political parties in power was not enough to change age-old structures of oppression. He is remembered today as a controversial intellectual figure who denounced social injustice and fought for intellectual freedom (he once defined himself as “a Socialist without a party and a Christian without a church”) and who opposed totalitarianism of any stamp – Fascist or Communist. His political ambivalence has in more recent years been complicated by the controversy regarding his presumed espionage activities for the Fascist regime.<sup>77</sup> Although Silone’s subsequent novels did not meet with the same popular success of his first ones, he is considered a pillar of Italian twentieth-century literature, and his peasant novels constitute, along with the works of Alvaro, Levi, and Scotellaro, the *sine qua non* of Italian literary neorealism.<sup>78</sup>

If Levi’s *Cristo* shares certain themes with Silone’s *Fontamara*, it is because he appropriated some of its key features. Written in 1930, *Fontamara* was published in 1933 in German translation. Banned in Italy because of its anti-Fascist content, bootleg copies of the work in the Italian language were published in Switzerland and France. An official edition of the novel was not published in Italy until after the war, in 1945. Despite such obscure beginnings, however, the novel was translated in twenty seven languages and was widely read in Europe. Set in the Abruzzo region in the fictional town of Fontamara, the novel narrates the peasants’ resistance to the injustices suffered under the Fascist regime.

Levi’s identity as a political activist and as a writer was profoundly influenced by Silone’s works. In some of his anti-Fascist writings, Levi used the pseudonym Pietro Spina, which was the name of the anti-Fascist revolutionary hero in Silone’s 1936 novel, *Pane e Vino (Bread and Wine)*. In a passage of the *Cristo* Levi claimed he felt “celato, ignoto agli uomini, nascosto come un germoglio sotto la scorza dell’albero,” an obvious reference to Silone’s 1942 novel on revolutionary hope, *Il seme sotto la neve (The Seed Under the Snow)*. Levi was thus not only very familiar with Silone’s work but evidently shared its revolutionary flair.

More to the point, a comparative reading demonstrates that the Preface of *Cristo si e` fermato a Eboli* echoes that of *Fontamara*, in which the social and moral terrain of the peasant way of life is laid out, so that for those who have read one of these novels, the other appears oddly *déjà vu* :

Per vent’anni [...] le solite angustie, le solite pene, la solita miseria: la miseria ricevuta dai padri, che l’avevano ereditata dai nonni, e contro la quale il lavoro onesto non è mai servito proprio a niente. Le ingiustizie più

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<sup>77</sup> Ignazio Silone’s secret life as a Fascist spy was brought to light by Dario Biocca and Mauro Canali in *L’informatore: Silone, I comunisti e la polizia* (Milano: Luni, 2000) and in Dario Biocca’s *Silone. La doppia vita di un italiano* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2005). Elizabeth Leake provides a psychoanalytic reading of Silone’s works in light of his double life in *The Reinvention of Ignazio Silone* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); while Stanislao Pugliese’s *Bitter Spring: A Life of Ignazio Silone* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009) attempts to provide a more multi-faceted perspective of Silone by examining the fascist espionage controversy in light of Silone’s literary and political life.

<sup>78</sup> For a general biography of Silone, refer to Pugliese’s *Bitter Spring*. For Silone’s take on his own literary and political experiences, the collection of interviews in Luca D’Eramo’s *Ignazio Silone* (Rimini: Editori Riminesi Associati, 1994) is quite informative, while the best critical analysis of Silone’s work is probably still that provided by Richard W.B. Lewis in his *The Picaresque Saint: Representative Figures in Contemporary Fiction* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1959).

crudeli vi erano così antiche da aver acquistato la stessa naturalezza della pioggia, del vento della neve. La vita degli uomini, delle bestie e della terra sembrava così racchiusa in un cerchio immobile saldato dalla chiusa morsa delle montagne e dalle vicende del tempo. Saldato in un cerchio naturale, immutabile, come in una specie di ergastolo.<sup>79</sup>

The key terms of injustice, immobility, seclusion, timelessness, and the naturalization of these immediately bring to mind the major themes of Levi's narrative.

The greatest similarity between the two texts, however, lies in their anti-emigrationist views. Silone harbors a fatalistic view of emigration, regarding it as futile and at times even a betrayal of the revolutionary cause. Yet however pessimistic his judgment may be, Silone is clear about two issues: first, emigration is a necessity for the southern regions as it is the only resource of survival available to the peasantry; and secondly, the peasant's condition has only worsened with the Fascist ban on emigration:

[L]a proibizione dell'emigrazione aveva interrotto la partenza dei giovani, i quali erano costretti a restare a Fontamara, e così il lavoro era diventato scarso per tutti. L'impossibilità di emigrare significava l'impossibilità di guadagnare e risparmiare quel tanto che permettesse di conservare il piccolo fondo paterno corroso dai debiti e dalle ipoteche.<sup>80</sup>

While Levi does not care to pause on the necessity of emigration, his emphasis on the regret of the returned emigrants bears an uncanny resemblance to what is a recurring theme in Silone's novels, as a comparison between these two key passages demonstrates:

Una volta almeno riusciva ai montanari di fuggire in America. Perfino alcuni Fontamaresi, prima della guerra, tentarono la sorte in Argentina e in Brasile. Ma quelli di essi che poterono mettere assieme, tra il corpetto e la camicia, dalla parte del cuore, alcuni biglietti di banca, e tornarono a Fontamara, in pochi anni perdettero sui terreni aridi e sterili della contrada nativa i pochi risparmi e ricaddero presto nell'antico letargo, conservando come un ricordo di paradiso perduto l'immagine della vita intravista oltremare.<sup>81</sup>

Quelli che ritornano, dopo vent'anni, sono identici a quando erano partiti... risparmiano i pochi dollari: sono vicini al paradiso, ma non pensano neppure di entrarci. Poi, tornano un giorno in Italia... qualcuno offre loro una piccola terra da comprare.... e in pochissimo tempo è tornata la miseria... e con la miseria torna la rassegnazione.... In breve questi americani non si distinguono più in nulla da tutti gli altri contadini, se non per una maggiore amarezza, il rimpianto, che talvolta affiora, d'un bene perduto.<sup>82</sup>

The depiction of return emigration as a "paradise lost" is so similar in the two texts as to seem penned by the same author. This act of incorporating Silone's outlook on

<sup>79</sup> Ignazio Silone, *Fontamara* (Milano: RCS, 2003), 16-7.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-9.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>82</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 108-9.

emigration into his own text helps to grant Levi's own narrative with regard to emigration greater legitimacy.

However, there are fundamental differences between the two texts that prove "unassimilable," and it is in the tension between these differences that we find what was most radical in Silone's novel that motivated Levi's act of appropriation in the first place. To begin with, Silone's novel describes an evolving situation, in which oppression under the Fascist regime heightens to an unbearable degree. Through a metaphorical "regime" of moonlight, the opening paragraph of *Fontamara* manages beautifully to convey the Fascist seizure of power as a regression and a failure of modernity:

Il primo di giugno dell'anno scorso Fontamara rimase per la prima volta senza illuminazione elettrica. Il due di giugno, il tre di giugno, il quattro di giugno, Fontamara continuò a rimanere senza illuminazione elettrica. Così nei giorni seguenti e nei mesi seguenti, finché Fontamara si riabitua al regime del chiaro di luna. Per arrivare dal chiaro di luna alla luce elettrica, Fontamara aveva messo un centinaio di anni, attraverso l'olio di oliva e il petrolio. Per tornare dalla luce elettrica al chiaro di luna bastò una sera.<sup>83</sup>

One of the most obvious differences between the two texts, in fact, is that Silone's account is of a *revolution* occurring in the peasant world, not just in Fontamara but in countless other towns like it across the South: "Però l'anno scorso si produssero una serie di fatti impreveduti e incomprensibili che sconvolsero la vita di Fontamara."<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, Silone makes no mistake that the peasants' misery is due to a colonial structure of exploitation, characterizing the valley surrounding Fontamara as "sottoposta a un regime coloniale," so that its considerable resources "impinguano un ceto ristretto di indigeni e per il resto emigrano verso la metropoli."<sup>85</sup> Nor does Silone obscure the role of the Piedmontese monarchy in this mechanism of exploitation. While colonial exploitation began with the Napoleonic invasion of the South and continued under Bourbon rule, it was exacerbated by the Savoy government: "[I]n cambio dell'appoggio politico che egli offrì alla debole dinastia piemontese, Torlogne ricevette le terre in proprietà perpetua, fu insignito del titolo di duca e più tardi di quello di principe. La dinastia piemontese gli regalò insomma una cosa che non le apparteneva."<sup>86</sup> Thus, Savoy rule finds its rightful place in the list of foreign rulers who had exploited the local population, and in turn the locals are depicted as historically-developed subjects.

Thus Fontamara is not an "exceptional" place, nor is the revolution that occurs there an isolated episode. This historical connectedness is extended to its inhabitants; Silone unites the peasants of Fontamara in a common struggle with all the victims of colonization: "[I] contadini poveri, gli uomini che fanno fruttificare la terra e soffrono la fame, i fellahin i coolies i peones i mugic i cafoni, si somigliano in tutti i paesi del mondo; sono, sulla faccia della terra, nazione a sé, razza a sé, chiesa a sé."<sup>87</sup>

But it is Silone's appropriation of the "standard" Italian language that proves, ironically, to be the most destabilizing factor of *Fontamara*. To begin with, the novel

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<sup>83</sup> Silone, *Fontamara*, 25.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

opens with Silone claiming the power to name the setting of his story: “Ho dato questo nome [...]”<sup>88</sup> More radical yet is Silone’s reappropriation of the pejorative term used to refer to southern peasants, “cafoni” (similar to the English term “boor”) in a proud reclamation of the peasants’ self-respect and honor: “(Io so bene che il nome di cafone, nel linguaggio corrente del mio paese, sia della campagna che della città, è ora termine di offesa e dileggio; ma io l’adopero in questo libro nella certezza che quando nel mio paese il dolore non sarà più vergogna, esso diventerà nome di rispetto, e forse anche di onore.)”<sup>89</sup>

Especially after the nationalizing impetus of unification, it became standard practice in Italy to write prose in a literary language that little resembled the variety of languages actually spoken in the peninsula.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, Silone’s use of “standard” Italian would have been so taken for granted that it would have gone unnoticed, had he not made a pointed declaration in this regard. In the closing of his Preface, Silone addresses the important issue of his choice of language:

A nessuno venga in mente che i Fontamaresi parlino l’italiano. La lingua italiana è per noi una lingua imparata a scuola, come possono essere il latino, il francese, l’esperanto. La lingua italiana è per noi una lingua straniera, una lingua morta, una lingua in cui il dizionario, la cui grammatica si sono formati senza alcun rapporto con noi, col nostro modo di esprimerci.<sup>91</sup>

There is no clearer way to convey the estrangement of the peasants from the center of Italian national life than to declare Italian a foreign language and then demonstrate, throughout the novel, how this “official” language is used as a weapon against them. Of course, Silone was addressing precisely such a “foreign” reading public, but his claim, in the last instance, of everyone’s right to narrate “i fatti suoi a modo suo” testifies to his attempt to reappropriate authority from the imperial center even while using its language.

Interestingly, Levi makes a similar assertion regarding the foreignness of Italian in Lucania in the Preface of his own novel that seems to echo Silone almost verbatim, except for one crucial difference in the referent of the first person plural pronoun:

Parliamo un diverso linguaggio: la nostra lingua è qui incomprensibile. I grandi viaggiatori non sono andati di là dai confini del proprio mondo; e hanno percorso i sentieri della propria anima e quelli del bene e del male, della moralità e della redenzione [...] Ma in questa terra oscura, senza peccato e senza redenzione, dove il male non è morale, ma è un dolore

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<sup>88</sup> Silone, *Fontamara*.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-8.

<sup>90</sup> The linguistic politics that accompanied the advancement of one “standard” Italian language to the detriment of all other languages spoken in Italy at the time of national unification is referred to as the “language question.” Historical linguist Tullio De Mauro provides a comprehensive history of the language question in *Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita* (Bari: Laterza, 1986). Peter Ives also assesses the weight of the language question in Italian cultural politics and in the thought of Antonio Gramsci in his *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

<sup>91</sup> Silone, *Fontamara*, 22.



terrestre, che sta per sempre nelle cose, Cristo non è disceso. Cristo si è fermato a Eboli.<sup>92</sup>

The two authors' use of the pronoun *noi* ("we") is key here. While for Silone "we" refers to the peasants and himself, bound together by birth, culture, and language, for Levi the "we" unites him (and puts him on the same side of History as) the foreign conqueror. Furthermore, while Silone uses the plural pronoun to speak for a community ("noi pensavamo ...", "noi lo ringraziammo" and so on), Levi narrates only in the first person singular, so that his uncharacteristic use of the plural here is even more striking. By extension, then, when Silone speaks of "i miei cafoni," he is referring to the community of which he is a part. Levi, on the other hand, is, as we have seen, the super-protagonist of the world he describes, so that when, echoing Silone, he refers to "i miei contadini," it serves not to refer to equal members of a shared community but rather to pieces of property, much in the same manner that the colonizer refers to "his" subjects.

We have already discussed the colonizer's terror of and yet necessity for the resemblance of the other. As long as this ambivalence forms a continuous movement between "the twin figures of narcissism and paranoia that repeat furiously, uncontrollably,"<sup>93</sup> it allows for the production of authority. However, once the act of writing stops and the text comes to an end, this slippage can no longer be produced, revealing the limits of the text. However, another text may provide the chance to reassert this authority once more. Levi was presented with such an occasion with the work of Rocco Scotellaro.

#### Carlo Levi and Rocco Scotellaro

With the war over and his novel published, Levi returned to Lucania in 1946, where he made another "shocking" encounter. The visit was not meant as a mere nostalgic exercise: Levi had decided to run for election in both the Bari-Foggia and the Potenza-Matera electoral colleges. Along with other meridionalisti such as Guido Dorso, Tommaso Fiore, and Manlio Rossi Doria, he ran in the Alleanza Repubblicana party for a seat on the Constituent Assembly in the referendum election that determined Italy's transition from a Monarchy to a Republic.<sup>94</sup> During his campaign tour, Levi took the opportunity to revisit many of the Lucanian towns he had described in his novel, including Matera, Grassano and Aliano (the "Gagliano" of the novel), where he had spent 8 months in exile.

This visit proved to be a disappointment of Levi's expectations on various levels. To begin with, he was not well received by many of the locals who not only had read his book but contested its negative portrayal of their region and people. In Matera, he asked for local votes in appreciation of the fame he had brought to the region through his novel, concluding his political rally with the phrase, "Ho parlato di voi al mondo, ora sono

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<sup>92</sup> Levi, *Cristo*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Bhabha, *Location*, 91.

<sup>94</sup> For the immediate postwar political setting, see David Ward, *Antifascisms: Cultural Politics in Italy, 1943-1946: Benedetto Croce and the Liberals, Carlo Levi and the "Actionists"* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996). For Carlo Levi's political life, refer to Ghislana Sirovich, *L'azione politica di Carlo Levi* (Roma: Il Ventaglio, 1988).

tornato a parlare del mondo a voi.”<sup>95</sup> In Grassano one man threatened to kill him if he ever set foot in the town again. Things hardly went better in Aliano, where Levi had spent the bulk of his exile, and where most of the novel was set. Here, Levi made the unwise choice of holding a political rally from a balcony on the main square. In his novel, he had deprecated this practice as a pompous display of fascist power that failed to impress the local peasant population. Indeed, despite the fact that it was a Sunday afternoon, the square was practically deserted and a few of those present whistled and booed him.<sup>96</sup> Carlo Levi the writer – and now aspiring politician – could hardly claim the worshiping subjects he had fabricated for Don Carlo in the novel.

But nothing could have prepared him for the encounter that awaited him in the town of Tricarico. Levi still maintained, years later, that at the time of his first return to Lucania no substantial change in the peasant way of life had yet to occur there. Yet beginning in 1942, while still under Fascist rule and before Levi began writing his *Cristo, the South*, including Lucania, had been rocked by a series of peasant revolts and land occupations.<sup>97</sup> One of the leaders of this movement was Rocco Scotellaro, the young Socialist poet-mayor of Tricarico, who at the time of his election and first meeting with Levi was 23 years old. The son of a returned emigrant and cobbler, Scotellaro had become an activist in the local Socialist Party a few years earlier and had taken part in the peasant land occupations. While Levi had been writing his novel of peasant resignation, the subjects of his narrative had been occupying land and electing one of the first Socialist mayors of postwar Italy. Among Scotellaro’s chief accomplishments during his short tenure were the paving of Tricarico’s roadway and the construction of an important and badly needed hospital.<sup>98</sup> There before Levi stood shattering proof that the thesis of his bestselling novel was a lie.

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<sup>95</sup> Strazza, Michele. *Amiche e compagne. Donne e politica in Basilicata nel dopoguerra (1943-1950)* (Potenza: Consiglio Regionale della Basilicata), 78.

<sup>96</sup> D’Amaro and De Donato, *Un torinese*, 175.

<sup>97</sup> For a history of land occupations in Basilicata, see Cosimo Onorati, *Cultura, Meridionalismo e lotte contadine in Basilicata nel secondo dopoguerra* (Matera: Liantonio, 1981); Gregorio Angelini, “L’occupazione delle terre in provincia di Potenza nel dicembre 1949: Note di archivio,” *Basilicata Regione Notizie* 24, no. 3 (1999); and Antonella Manupelli, “Le occupazioni delle terre nella provincia di Matera (1949-1951),” *Basilicata Regione Notizie* 24, no. 3 (1999); for the South in general, refer to Rocco De Rosa, *Morire di terra: cinquant’anni fa le lotte contadine nel Sud* (Manduria: Lacaita, 1999); Francesco Avolio, *Meridionalismo e lotte contadine* (Caltanissetta: Salvatore Sciascia, 1986); and Maria Rosa Salvia, “Le lotte per la terra nel secondo dopoguerra: contadini e formazione dello spirito pubblico,” *Basilicata Regione Notizie* 24, no. 3 (1999).

<sup>98</sup> I have drawn most of Rocco Scotellaro’s biographical information from Nicola Tranfaglia’s “Introduction” to the 2006 Laterza joint edition of *L’uva puttanella. Contadini del Sud*. Perhaps because Scotellaro’s own autobiography, *L’uva puttanella*, was published soon after his death, and perhaps because Scotellaro’s winning the prestigious Viareggio Prize in 1954 for his collection of poems, *È fatto giorno*, provoked the acrimonious debate known as the “caso Scotellaro,” there seems to be no comprehensive biography on Rocco Scotellaro that is not at the same time, and perhaps foremost, a critical analysis of his literary work or an abridgment of the various positions within the “caso Scotellaro.” Among the critical analyses, see Laura Parola Sarti, *Invito alla lettura di Rocco Scotellaro* (Milano: Mursia, 1992); Manlio Rossi-Doria, ed., *Il sindaco poeta di tricarico* (Rome, Matera: Basilicata Editrice, 1974); Pompeo Giannantonio, *Rocco Scotellaro* (Milano: Mursia: 1986); and the interpretive study provided by Giovanni Battista Bronzini, *L’universo contadino e l’immaginario poetico di Rocco Scotellaro* (Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, 1987), which also presents an exegesis of Scotellaro’s symbolism and a transcription of previously unpublished material of Scotellaro’s, such as folk songs and tales. For a critical bibliography, refer to Franco Vitelli’s *Bibliografia critica su Scotellaro* (Matera: Basilicata Editrice, 1977).

Levi lost the election in both colleges, but in the following years he developed a strong bond of friendship and professional admiration for Scotellaro. When in 1950 Scotellaro, a thorn in the side of local authorities (then still predominantly Fascist), was unjustly accused of corruption and jailed, no one fought harder than Levi for his acquittal and release. During his 40 days of incarceration, Scotellaro read *Cristo si e' fermato a Eboli* to his fellow inmates, an event he later recounted in his autobiography *L'uva puttanella*. And it is precisely the *intertextual* relationship between Levi and Scotellaro that proves most interesting for our discussion here, for the interpretation of the works of Scotellaro after the young poet's death in 1953 presented Levi with an opportunity to react to the challenge posed to his authority by those same texts. Levi's construal of Scotellaro's work became a post-*Cristo* strategy for recapturing the authority to "rule over" the South in a time of major social turmoil in the region.

When Scotellaro died suddenly at the age of 30, most of his works lay incomplete and unpublished. With the exception of a few single poems that had already been published and of collections of poems published in the 1970s and early 1980s, the bulk of Scotellaro's works were published within a couple of years of his death. Among these, a study of the agrarian economy of the South, published in 1954 with the title *Contadini del Sud* ("Farmers of the South"), was prefaced by Manlio Rossi Doria, a key figure of Leftist Meridionalismo and at the time Scotellaro's professor at the Institute of Agrarian Economy in Portici, where Scotellaro had gone after abandoning politics in 1950. This first edition, which introduced Scotellaro to Italian readers for the first time, bore on its front cover not a photograph of Scotellaro but a portrait of him painted by Carlo Levi. Thus, even upon this work, which of all of Scotellaro's works was the least to be impacted by Levi's influence, was in a sense "framed" by Levi's gaze. However, the two other significant works of Scotellaro bore a much more direct involvement on the part of Levi. In 1954 Mondadori published a collection of Scotellaro's poems (selected by Levi out of over four hundred poems in his possession) under the title of the most famous of these, *E' fatto giorno* (translated into English under the title *The Sky With Its Mouth Wide Open*<sup>99</sup>, but literally meaning "The day has come"), subsequently awarded the Pellegrino and Viareggio prizes, while the following year, in 1955, Laterza published Scotellaro's autobiography, *L'uva puttanella* ("The Bloody Grapes"). Both of these works were prefaced by Carlo Levi, and the front cover of the autobiography also bore a portrait by Levi. However, this is not a portrait of Scotellaro but a portrait of a young Lucanian mother and her little boy, once again enclosing Scotellaro's autobiographical writing within Levi's own gaze. This gesture could be interpreted as a sign of fear of resemblance, for Levi had in fact once referred to portraiture as a confirmation of the "resemblance" between the painter and his subject:

Si usa dire che le figure dipinte non soltanto, come è naturale, rispecchiano lo stile, la forma, il gesto, il carattere del pittore, ma che gli assomigliano, come se egli andasse negli altri cercando e rintracciando se stesso, e di se stesso proprio le fattezze [...] il ritratto e l'immagine dell'altro come se stesso.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Translated by Paul Vangelisti. Los Angeles: The Red Hill Press, 1976.

<sup>100</sup> Carlo Levi, *Levi si ferma a Firenze*, ed. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti (Firenze: Alinari, 1977), 20.

In his autobiography, Scotellaro had referred to his friendship with Levi as “un amore della propria somiglianza.”<sup>101</sup> Levi’s negation of this “terrifying resemblance” serves to remove the partial presence from the space of the canvas, the page and the nation. Perhaps it was a resistance to her own invalidation that led Giulia “the witch,” Levi’s servant in the *Cristo*, to refuse to have her portrait painted by Levi, rather than, as Levi naturally assumed, primitive superstition.<sup>102</sup>

Though I will only discuss Levi’s Prefaces of *È fatto giorno* and *L’uva puttanella* it is worth mentioning that *Contadini del Sud*, part of a larger project that Scotellaro was not able to complete, is in itself a fascinating counter-argument to the Southern passivity thesis propounded by Levi. Composed of a series of interviews Scotellaro conducted of agricultural laborers across the South, it demonstrates a vitality of thought and action and a depth of consciousness in the peasantry that finds no parallel in Levi’s petrified characters. With *È fatto giorno* and *L’uva puttanella*, this complexity of experience naturally bears a more personal stamp. The poems in *È fatto giorno*, including the homonymous poem, do not speak only of the oppression of the peasants but also of their resistance to it. In some of these, such as “È fatto giorno,” this resistance appears like a menacing announcement:

È fatto giorno, siamo entrati in giuoco anche noi  
Con i panni e le scarpe e le facce che avevamo [...] (*È fatto giorno*, no date)

La stagione che alimenta  
l’orgasmo tutto nostro è questa: [...]  
Gridano al Comune di volere  
il tozzo di pane e una giornata  
e scarpe e strade e tutto.  
E ci mettiamo a maledire insieme,  
il sindaco e le rondini e le donne,  
e il nostro urlo si fa più forte [...] (*E ci mettiamo a maledire insieme*, 1947)

Ma nei sentieri non si torna indietro.  
Altre ali fuggiranno  
dalle paglie della cova,  
perché lungo il perire dei tempi  
l’alba è nuova, è nuova. (*Sempre nuova è l’alba*, no date)

The titles alone of these poems are suggestive of Scotellaro’s faith and dedication to radical political activism. Many of these poems are narratives of rebellion, the voices of the exploited raised to curse, not bless, their oppressors.

Levi’s Preface to these poems functions to reaffirm his own authority by un-authorizing Scotellaro. He begins by distinguishing between poems written before 1946, the year in which Scotellaro became mayor, and those written after. According to Levi, the form with which Scotellaro wrote the earlier poems could only have been “borrowed” (“presa a prestito”), meaning that Scotellaro had yet to form an autochthonous writing

<sup>101</sup> Rocco Scotellaro, *L’uva puttanella* (Bari: Laterza, 2006), 73.

<sup>102</sup> See Muscetta, “Leggenda.”

style.<sup>103</sup> But with the war over, the “indeterminate adolescence” of Scotellaro and “his world” comes to an end. Levi portrays 1946 as a new beginning, both for Scotellaro as a man and for the South as a historical subject:

[I]l Mezzogiorno pare si sia destato da un lunghissimo sonno, è cominciato il moto contadino, che è l’affermazione dell’esistenza di un popolo intero. In questo popolo risvegliato per la prima volta, per la prima volta vivente e protagonista della propria storia [...] Rocco vive la propria giovane vita [...] perché il suo sviluppo di uomo è tutt’uno con il nuovo germogliare di quel popolo contadino.<sup>104</sup>

Here Levi carries out his customary practice of placing the South in a historical vacuum, ignoring the long list of historical precedents of peasant uprisings in the South. Instead, Levi describes this South as somehow “awakening” and “coming alive” for the first time in 1946. By the following paragraph, there is a strong indication that Levi is positioning himself as the author of this presumed “great awakening.” 1946 is also the year of Levi’s first encounter with Scotellaro, and, as it soon becomes clear, it is *this* event that forms, in Levi’s mind, the crux that births both Scotellaro and the new South:

(Risale a quel tempo, a maggio del ’46, il nostro primo incontro [...] che forse contribuì [...] alla sua presa di coscienza del mondo contadino di cui faceva parte, e al suo guardarlo per la prima volta con distacco e amore, al suo farne poesia, attraverso un linguaggio libero, personale, non letterario.)

Questa sua maturazione e liberazione nell’azione (un ospedale, una strada, una occupazione di terre, una discussione sindacale, sono, in un mondo nuovo, profonde verità poetiche) creano il grande periodo della poesia di Rocco del ’47-’48.<sup>105</sup>

It now appears as though it is Scotellaro’s encounter with Levi, and not his own personal experiences and political formation, that for the first time gives the young revolutionary the critical ability to really see (and love, even) his own land and people. It is this encounter that “matures” the poet and “liberates” the southern people, allowing for the construction of a hospital, the paving of a road, the land occupations, and other important battles. In keeping with his role as creator of Lucania already established in *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, Levi thus establishes himself as the architect of this “new” world as well.

Just as Levi’s *Cristo* had not found unanimous approval, so too did Levi’s first appropriation of Scotellaro stir an acrimonious controversy that lasted for decades, the so-called “caso Scotellaro.” Though a divergence of appreciation and judgments had developed around the figure and works of Scotellaro after his death, the controversy was more broadly political and cultural than strictly literary.

What had intervened, between the end of the war and the publication of Scotellaro’s works in the mid 1950s, was the publication in Italy of Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* begun in 1947. Discussions over the role of intellectuals in the organization of culture irrupted to the forefront of Leftist debates in every sphere of

<sup>103</sup> Carlo Levi, “Preface,” in *È fatto giorno 1940-1953*, by Rocco Scotellaro (Milano: Mondadori, 1954), 9.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

cultural and political life, including the “caso Scotellaro,” which became a platform from which to launch the significance of Scotellaro’s *oeuvre* – and its Levian interpretation – for the Southern Question. In more general terms, the Scotellaro case pointed to the need to identify, or redefine, the revolutionary subject in post-Resistance Italy. The war had drawn to a close, and with that closure also came the end of the heroic deeds of the Resistance. Delineating a cultural strategy now entailed paying particular attention to oppressed social groups or classes previously ignored or disenfranchised. Aside from the proletariat, this meant especially the peasantry and the emigrants of the South. It is around interest in such groups and alliances as agents of social transformation in the Italy of the 1950s that the “caso Scotellaro” exploded. Were peasants and emigrants potentially revolutionary subjects? What sorts of changes were they bringing about in national culture and consciousness? Was their hitherto marginalized culture capable of speaking to broader social and political struggles? More broadly, what was to be the role of the South in the social and political renewal of the nation? And what was to be the task of the “organic intellectual” in all this? These were the questions that arose in the intellectual debates of those years that involved not only chief figures of the literary world but also filmmakers, philosophers, anthropologists, politicians, economists. The “caso Scotellaro” thus provides a cross section of the socio-cultural strategies of the Italian Left in the 1950s and affords a view of its chief concerns over the struggles still ahead. Nor were such debates settled in any way then or in successive decades, when the Scotellaro case would periodically reemerge like an instrument of reassessment, as it did with the 1960 release of Luchino Visconti’s film, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, the subject of the last chapter.

The occasion in which the “caso Scotellaro” erupted within leftist circles was a convention held in Matera in 1955 titled “Rocco Scotellaro, intellettuale del Mezzogiorno.” The previous year, Rocco Scotellaro’s collection of poems, *È fatto giorno*, had won the Viareggio Prize. More than the lyrical quality of Scotellaro’s poetry, what was at issue was the political relevance of Scotellaro’s work in the postwar South. Southernist exponents of the Communist Party, like Mario Alicata, Carlo Salinari, Carlo Muscetta and Giorgio Napolitano, argued that, under the influence of Carlo Levi and Manlio Rossi-Doria, Scotellaro had produced an anti-Gramscian “aestheticized primitivism” of the South that separated peasant culture from the rest of southern Italian (and Italian) society and placed it at a historical standstill. Both Levi and Scotellaro, according to Alicata, had misunderstood the fundamental teachings of Gramsci about the Southern Question and cultural change. Scotellaro had neglected to construct a vision of cultural renewal in the South, and he, like Levi, had failed to understand the necessity for the southern peasantry to form with the northern proletariat an alliance that alone could transform structures of oppression. In the words of Pino Iorio, “le carenze del lucano, in sede politica, riflettono il mito, sentimentale e perciò forse un po’ romantico, d’un mondo agreste, nel Mezzogiorno, rassegnato ed immobile, segnale d’autonoma civiltà.”<sup>106</sup>

The Socialist Pietro Nenni defended Scotellaro’s work by describing it as still permeated more by a sense of hope than of resignation, and by accusing the Communists of being resentful of representations of social groups that traditionally had not been led by the Italian Communist Party. Ultimately, the “caso Scotellaro” marked a rupture

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<sup>106</sup> Pino Iorio, *Limiti e lezioni di Rocco Scotellaro* (Napoli: HYRIA, 1980), 4.

within Leftist politics (between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party) on the appropriate political agenda for the South.<sup>107</sup>

Naturally, the debate over the significance of Scotellaro's legacy regarded Levi's *Cristo si e' fermato a Eboli* very closely, so it is no coincidence that the first, and most memorable, response to Levi's interpretation of Scotellaro, penned by Mario Alicata, was titled, "Il Meridionalismo non si puo' fermare a Eboli" ("Meridionalismo" Cannot Stop at Eboli," 1954). Though he does not explicitly define Levi's novel an imperialist work, Alicata nonetheless sharply condemns the novel on the grounds of its negative impact on the emancipation of the South from structures of oppression. To begin with, Alicata took issue with the othering of the South as a mysterious, ineffable "essence." Paraphrasing Gramsci, Alicata condemns Levi's "orientalization" of the South as an aesthetically astute but politically sterile maneuver: the return to an interest in the South, he explained, had unfortunately been accompanied by the less legitimate tendency to consider the South "come un enigma ancora da decifrare, come una terra arcana e misteriosa ancora tutta da studiare e tutta da rivelare nella sua 'essenza' nascosta e nelle sue 'apparenze' molteplici, insomma, per usare una efficacissima immagine di Gramsci, come un lontano 'Giappone', del quale basta occuparsi con accenti di umana simpatia."<sup>108</sup>

In dominant Italian culture, Alicata proceeded, everything had been produced and organized to attenuate, marginalize, and even conceal, in the North but especially in the South, the true substance of the Southern Question, while at the same time also drawing from the South what was no doubt the richest discursive thread in modern Italian culture and thought.<sup>109</sup> Precisely because this rich tradition had ensured the success of Levi's novel, Levi had every reason to reproduce that discourse which tended to obscure rather than reveal true relations of power behind the disadvantaged position of the South. The danger of portraying the South as a mystified, obscure subject, Alicata continued, was that this confusion was carried over into political life. The task of critical scholarship was to demystify the problems of the South, which required going beyond simply denouncing the way things were to explaining important questions of history, politics and economy in order to delineate the way things should become.

According to Alicata, this was the central problem with Carlo Levi's stamp of 'meridionalismo,' especially as articulated in his *Cristo*, and within which Levi was attempting to collapse the legacy of Scotellaro. The Levian stamp of "meridionalismo," Alicata accused, would have liked not only for Christ but for critical thought in general to have stopped at Eboli. Alicata's acute analysis saw in the *Cristo* more than just an expression of Levi's personal philosophy, recognizing instead the articulation of a whole discourse common among the intellectuals of the bourgeoisie, both North and South, and

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<sup>107</sup> For their contributions to this debate, see Mario Alicata, "Cristo non si può fermare a Eboli," in *Omaggio a Rocco Scotellaro*, ed. Leonardo Mancino (Manduria: Lacaita, 1974); Carlo Salinari, "Tre errori a Viareggio," in *Omaggio a Rocco Scotellaro*, ed. Leonardo Mancino (Manduria: Lacaita, 1974); Carlo Muscetta, "Rocco Scotellaro e la cultura dell' 'Uva puttanello,'" *Società* 10, no. 5 (1954); Giorgio Napolitano, "Personaggi nuovi delle campagne del Sud," *Incontri, Oggi*, September 1954; and Pietro Nenni, "Il socialismo contadino nella poesia di Scotellaro," *Avanti!*, 29 August 1954. Most of the papers articulating these different positions were later collected in the anthology titled *Omaggio a Scotellaro*, edited by Leonardo Mancino.

<sup>108</sup> Alicata, "Il meridionalismo," 137.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

now part of the dominant national culture.<sup>110</sup> Unfortunately, the thesis of the South's "immobility" and "eternal primitivism" was conveniently adopted and reproduced by conservative political factions resistant to sweeping social change in the South, so that Levi's novel served to justify the perpetuation of the North-South relationship of inequality and dependence.

The legacy of Rocco Scotellaro, Alicata concluded, deserved to reflect the much richer and more complex mixture of intellectual influences, of Levi, Dorso and Rossi Doria but also of Gramsci and of Scotellaro's own political militancy in the Italian Socialist Party.<sup>111</sup> Many of Scotellaro's writings testify to his tribulations as a young southern intellectual confronted with the teachings of a national political ideology often difficult to adopt or translate into his local culture, which was neither "pre-Christian" nor "Christian" but "Socialist."<sup>112</sup> This, Alicata insisted, was a more realistic interpretation of Scotellaro's legacy than the "excessive," and perhaps interested, adoration displayed by Levi. Criticizing Levi's authorship of Scotellaro's "presa di coscienza," Alicata accused Levi of having built "for himself and for others" a myth around the young poet's figure that amounted to a "new chapter" of his *Cristo* – a veiled accusation that Levi had aggrandized his own figure through the appropriation of Scotellaro.

Levi's chance to defend himself against these accusations presented itself with his writing the Preface to Scotellaro's *L'uva puttanella*, the following year. His reply to Alicata and the other Marxists consisted in denying that political economic analyses can enact transformative processes. Moreover, his novel could never have been "realistic" because his experience of confino itself was not realistic, as were not (incredibly) the peasants' oppression, hunger, poverty and malaria. Levi's tribute to history didn't go past attributing the isolation of the South to a vague "centuries-old historical relationship that has kept peasants in the margins of national life, and that has pushed them outside of real history."<sup>113</sup> However, Levi in no way acknowledges his own role in having pushed them outside of history.

Part personal defense, part ingenious appropriation, Levi's preface of *L'uva puttanella* is a much more complex text to examine in terms of what it accomplishes, nor is this surprising given that the autobiography at hand was a multifaceted work of postcolonial writing. Consisting mainly of various fragmentary notes and sketches compounded by a series of letters written to friends and publishers, it reflects Scotellaro's innovative approach to writing that went against the canonical forms and values of the dominant literary culture. In a letter written the day before his death, Scotellaro referred to it as "the novel I will not finish;"<sup>114</sup> while to his editor he had once declared, "you will never find the order that is not there, nor have I ever wished for my things to have order."<sup>115</sup>

As though pointing to his own act of creating Scotellaro, of which the portrait on the cover is a reminder, Levi reaffirms the "birth" of Scotellaro's world and its self-awareness: "Qui vive il mondo contadino nella sua nascita difficile e dolorosa."<sup>116</sup> Levi

<sup>110</sup> Alicata, "Il meridionalismo," 147.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>113</sup> Levi, "Preface," *L'uva puttanella*, 26.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 5.



returns repeatedly to this moment of birth of a peasant world heretofore dead to modernity: “If we spoke of that immobile world it was so that it would move;”<sup>117</sup> “[Q]uel mondo senza storia, non era un idolo mentale ma un punto di partenza tuttavia presente [...] [L]’uva puttanelle è il mondo contadino che per la prima volta si muove, che per la prima volta prende coscienza di sé.”<sup>118</sup> What’s more, this history-just-begun, a tabula-rasa somehow rife with novel struggles, is the result not of social-structural changes but of the moral and psychological traits of extraordinary individuals such as Rocco Scotellaro “who allow, for the first time, the peasant to think.”<sup>119</sup> However, though Scotellaro is celebrated as an “extraordinary” individual, his position as author is gradually undermined. There is reason to doubt that Levi is not reflecting only on Scotellaro’s life and work when he asks, “Che cosa è l’autorità? Che cosa è l’organizzazione? Che cosa è il potere sugli uomini?”<sup>120</sup>

Positioning himself as author of Scotellaro’s “maturity” and “inspiration” serves to reclaim power over the colonial other’s writing and to rearticulate it as his own, thereby granting himself the power to “liberate” the South. The weakening of Scotellaro’s authority in fact first appears as a relationship of mentoring and encouragement: “Rocco venne un giorno da me, nell’estate del ’50 [...] e mi lesse con molta trepidazione i primi quattro capitoli. Li trovai splendidi e originali, e non gli nascosi il mio entusiasmo: lo lodai anzi tanto che quello spirito sensibilissimo e delicato ne fu indotto, quasi per un eccesso di senso di responsabilità letteraria, a sospendere per qualche tempo il lavoro [di sindaco].”<sup>121</sup> Levi thus suggests he induced Scotellaro’s literary career.

In describing the work’s project from notes and outlines in his possession, Levi again removes Scotellaro from a position of authorship: “Ma già il piano dell’opera si allargava [...] Di schemi dell’opera, che non fu poi mai scritta, se ne trovano molti tra le sue carte. Il libro doveva dapprincipio essere diviso in tre parti, poi in quattro e infine in cinque; la collocazione degli episodi variava nei diversi prospetti, come il loro numero; i personaggi, dapprima pochi, crescevano, negli elenchi, fino a lunghissime liste di pagine e pagine.”<sup>122</sup> Levi’s selection of this outline, among many, is significant: “Parte prima. Dimissioni spiegate: sfiducia nell’autorità: *l’autorità non sarebbe mai stata nostra*. Parte seconda. Il carcere, gli uomini non fanno mai comunione. Parte terza. La libertà. I grandi ideali di fraternità e di giustizia dipendono da almeno due uomini.”<sup>123</sup> This selection is crucial because it both justifies and forms an outline of sorts of Levi’s own creation of the South: first, there is the establishment of the peasants’ (and Scotellaro’s) lack of authority and substitution with Levi’s own text on Lucania; secondly, there is the confinement of Lucania in a closed enclave that takes power of movement and of change away from it; and thirdly, the confirmation from Scotellaro that the “liberation” of the South depended on an intertextual relationship between himself and Levi.

But the problem posed by Scotellaro’s writing remains: it constitutes a partial presence in the writing of the nation that forces the rearticulation of its identity, alienating

<sup>117</sup> Levi, “Preface,” *L’uva puttanelle*, 28.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, emphasis added.

it from its “whole” essence. Scotellaro’s testimony was not circumscribed to Lucania or the South but broke through the Levian border to encompass the entire nation, of which the South was an equal, constitutive component. Significantly, the passage that gives *L’uva puttanello* its title, is the one that describes this new relation of the South to the rest of Italy: “L’ordine che non c’è non lo troverete come appunto è nel grappolo d’uva che gli acini sono di diversa grandezza anche a voler usare la più accurata sgramolatura. Questi sono acini piccoli, apireni, seppure maturi, *che andranno ugualmente nella tina del mosto il giorno della vendemmia. Così il mio paese fa parte dell’Italia.* Io e il mio paese meridionale siamo l’uva puttanello, piccola e matura nel grappolo per dare il poco succo che abbiamo.”<sup>124</sup>

If Silone’s *Fontamara* served a function that was metaphorical, in the sense that the peasants stood for all the colonized, Scotellaro’s *L’uva puttanello* accomplished a much more terrifying feat, from the colonizer’s point of view, for its function was metonymical, in that the South was included as an integral part of the nation. This function is not fulfilled only by the content of the text, by what is stated about the “bloody grapes,” but also by the language used to express this South. Differently from Silone, Scotellaro does not write in standard Italian. Though he also does not use dialect, which would have been incomprehensible to the majority of Italian readers, Scotellaro expresses himself in a vernacular hybrid infused with the rhythm and lexicon of the Tricarico dialect.<sup>125</sup>

Scotellaro’s chief aim, however, is not universal comprehensibility. Through a series of linguistic strategies, Scotellaro seeks to abrogate the language of the canon and to change it. At the lexical level, there are some words drawn from the dialect of Tricarico, but the text is rich mostly with colloquial expressions that place together words in combinations unfamiliar to most readers, such as “in prima” for “prima di tutto,” and “mi dette la voce” for “mi parlò.”<sup>126</sup> The scarce punctuation also serves to give a faster rhythm different from that of the travelogue’s contemplative gaze. Sentences are often separated with commas rather than periods: “Con questa borsa, se non partivo, dovevo apparire stravagante, io stesso credevo di sapere le loro supposizioni e i commenti, altre cose pensavo da me;”<sup>127</sup> or begin with a “che” unrelated to the previous clause: “Ma le mie parole non gli giungevano, tra il tanfo e il vento del telefono, che lui continuava a dire: - Alla Stazione?”<sup>128</sup> At other times, the clauses alternate confusingly rather than following a linear logic: “Erano ora rimasti il filo di ferro tra le canne e le lamiere, nudo e arrugginito, e sarmenti secchi nella rotonda.”<sup>129</sup> The “nudo e arrugginito” refers to the “filo di ferro,” but it is placed after the “canne e lamiere.” The stringing together of clauses also results in the subject of the sentence changing suddenly: “Ci chiamavano ai funerali in città, puliti con le candele in mano recitando le preghiere.”<sup>130</sup> Similarly, Scotellaro often upsets the subject-verb agreement: “La vigna non era stata ancora zappata, aveva

<sup>124</sup> Levi, “Preface,” *L’uva puttanello*, 8, emphasis added.

<sup>125</sup> For a somewhat similar interpretation of Scotellaro’s syntactic strategies in *L’uva puttanello*, see Torriglia, *Broken Time*, 126.

<sup>126</sup> Scotellaro, *L’uva puttanello*, 4.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

ragione il padre a predire che, morto lui, i figli saremmo stati dei vermi.”<sup>131</sup> At other times, he mixes verb tenses: “Mi succedevano tanti fatti, e la decisione di abbandonare il mio posto era stata così necessaria che mi pareva [...]”. The frequent use of the imperfect tense may be an indication of a strong oral narrative tradition still very present in the writing style. However, the mixing of verb tenses, the offsetting of clauses and subject-verb relations all indicate a general disruption of the cause-effect order governing the linguistic and literary practices of the dominant culture. Hence Scotellaro’s warning to his editors, “L’ordine che non c’è, non lo troverete mai, né io ho voluto le mie cose con ordine,” a wish further reflected in the non-linear temporal structure of the narrative in his autobiography.

Beyond the technical function of these figurative devices to convey the lifeworld of the indigenous population, they fulfill above all a political function insofar as they relate to the exercise of power. The unusual stylistics of Scotellaro’s writing are a metonymic act: if the foreign reader must slow down and make an effort to understand the language being used and the culture being described, the differences in the text serve to prevent that the word of the other be simply absorbed and annulled. These linguistic choices thus stand as markers of the authority that Scotellaro reclaims for himself and for the southern “bloody grapes” as a whole, making this a post-colonial text par excellence.

The metonymic aspect of *L’uva puttanella* threatened to tear down of the wall Levi had so laboriously erected between nation and colony, shattering the always already shaky standing of the colonizer. As his Preface to that work draws to a close, we can feel Levi intensifying his efforts. After remembering his first encounter with the young poet-mayor in 1946, “Arrivato sulla piazza di Tricarico, mi venne incontro un giovane, piccolo, biondo, dal viso lentiginoso, che sembrava un bambino: era Rocco, che mi si avvicinò col viso aperto dell’amicizia”,<sup>132</sup> Levi recalls his return to Grassano, where three days earlier he had been chased out of town, and suddenly, “la situazione, di per sé, si era capovolta, e tutto il paese attendeva in piazza, impaziente e consapevole, una parola di libertà.”<sup>133</sup> The “word” that Levi authored was obviously a metaphor for the rise of Scotellaro as a revolutionary and for the birth of the South as a historical subject, as confirmed by Levi’s concluding words: “Rocco crebbe coi suoi paesi, dal silenzio dell’infanzia *alla virile parola* di oggi [...] Un mondo è cambiato, e, nei suoi paesi, porta il segno della sua opera. Un mondo è nato all’esistenza, ha imparato a parlare [...] *Altri ha forse dato a questo mondo, per amorosa intuizione, una parola*, un impulso, una rivelazione di se stesso, una coscienza insieme poetica e attiva. Ma Rocco Scotellaro è la prima grande voce che nasce dal suo interno, dalla sua umile vita nascosta.”<sup>134</sup> The mere existence of a colonial other who responds with equal pressure is so shocking for Levi, and the resemblance so terrifying, that he claims only for himself the power to give it the “word.”

### Conclusion

It was Levi who took charge of erecting Scotellaro’s funerary monument and, against the wishes of some of the locals, assigned its design to an architectural firm from

<sup>131</sup> Scotellaro, *L’uva puttanella*, 4.

<sup>132</sup> Levi, “Preface,” *L’uva puttanella*, 36.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 37, emphasis added.

Milan.<sup>135</sup> The monument manages to embody to an extraordinary degree all the contradictoriness of Levi's relationship with the dead poet: in jarring contrast to the local architecture, it is an imposing, austere wall made of gray block stones and enclosing in its center a narrow opening that allows a tapered view of the valley of Basento to the East, which the monument in part obstructs. Engraved on one of the stones is the last stanza from Scotellaro's poem, *Sempre nuova e` l'alba*. Levi also took it upon himself to place a memorial plaque outside Scotellaro's house that reads, "il poeta della liberta` contadina."<sup>136</sup> In recalling his involvement in its placement, Levi makes a remarkable choice of words: he did not have the memorial plaque erected, placed, installed or even affixed, but rather "*murato*" ("immured," "walled-in").<sup>137</sup> While in Italian "*murare*" may also mean to affix an object to a wall, its primary meaning is to "wall in." Levi's immuration of Scotellaro, like that of the colony, was the quintessential gesture of colonial ambivalence. In its frantic race between "narcissism and paranoia," between Scotellaro's skeptical admonition that "nessuno puo` rivivere con la sua scrittura. Tutti restano nella nicchia d'aria che muovono,"<sup>138</sup> and his revolutionary warning that "Altre ali fuggiranno / dalle paglie della cova / perch  [...] / l'alba   nuova,   nuova," Levi's script obsessively conjures and interdicts the terrifying presence.

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<sup>135</sup> Carmela Biscaglia, "Rogers e il monumento funebre a Scotellaro," *Oggi e domani* 22, no. 2-3 (1994): 11.

<sup>136</sup> Levi, "Preface," *L'uva Puttanella*, 20.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

## CHAPTER 2

### ***THE WAY WE NEVER WERE: FASCISM AND ABSOLUTION IN NEOREALIST EMIGRATION NARRATIVES***

Building a strong national identity was not a preoccupation exclusive to the Fascist regime but was pervasive of Italian politics and culture in the postwar period as well. A combination of factors had produced one of the most severe crises in Italian national identity since the nation's founding. Aside from regional divisions that had historically inhibited the formation of national cohesion, the experience of the war, then civil war, the fall of Fascism, and foreign occupation, all converged to place enormous strain on Italians' already tenuous identification with their nation. Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, discussed in the previous chapter, was seminal in re-signifying Italian national identity in the shaky transition from war to liberation by re-consolidating national space around the imaginary boundaries enclosing Italy's first colony, the South. But the process of imagining the nation can also involve movement across categories that are temporal rather than spatial. Communal identities such as those of nationhood are almost always shaped by collective memory, through the "recollection" of a shared past. Thus, if Levi had traveled through a dimension that was largely temporal in order to delineate a spatial separation between the nation and its double, other cultural representations in the aftermath of the war moved over space to accentuate a difference that was at once temporal and moral, between a virtuous postwar now and a corrupt Fascist then. The postwar reconstruction of Italy thus erupted as a moral problem as much as a material and political one. "Reconstruction" therefore also entailed producing interpretations of the recent past capable of shaping Italians' memories of their involvement with Fascism. The once disparaged figure of the emigrant was revisited, becoming a central figure in the movement across the moral map of the nation. This chapter will examine how reconstruction-era portrayals of emigration, such as Mario Soldati's *Fuga in Francia* (1948) and Aldo Fabrizi's *Emigrantes* (1949), employed the topos of emigration to construct a narrative of redemption capable of creating a "new" Italy with a clean conscience. The comparative and contextual analysis of these films will moreover reveal the center-Right's "transformist" exploitation of neorealism as part of its attempt to restore a conservative cultural-political hegemony.

### The “Solution” of Emigration

The centrality of the topic of emigration in the political and economic discourses surrounding reconstruction was motivated by the resumption of emigration on a massive scale after the war. During the Fascist regime, Italians had been prohibited from emigrating by a 1939 law aimed at preventing internal migration and urbanization while encouraging military conscription and the colonization of Africa.<sup>1</sup> However, the ban had not stopped large numbers of Italians from continuing to cross the nation’s borders illegally each year in search of work or political asylum. With the fall of the regime and the end of the war, emigration resumed the massive proportions it had reached in the interwar period. Aside from its more sustained dimension with respect to emigration at the turn of the century<sup>2</sup>, postwar emigration differed from its previous episodes by destination. Of the 1.1 million Italians who emigrated “officially”<sup>3</sup> between 1946 and 1950, more than half went to European destinations, a tendency that only strengthened with time, until Europe came to absorb around 85% of Italy’s migrant labor force during the economic miracle.<sup>4</sup> This choice was not always spontaneously determined by the emigrants themselves, many of whom would still have chosen the Americas, but was contingent upon a series of factors, chief among which were the accords drawn between Italian postwar governments and other nations. The project to render Italy’s workforce more “flexible,” for instance, was conceived as a necessary component of the fledgling European common market and met the favor of American military and industrial planning intent on preventing the rise of Communist sympathies among the poorest sectors of the Italian population, particularly in the South. As a result, Italy’s emigration politics became a point of intersection for Italian, European, and American politico-economic interests in the shadow of the Cold War. Not surprisingly, then, the third – and most significant – aspect to distinguish postwar emigration from its previous stages was the unprecedented involvement of the Italian government in an official capacity in actively encouraging, selecting, recruiting, and generally directing the emigration of its (predominantly male) workforce through an “assisted emigration” program.

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<sup>1</sup> With respect to internal migration, the ban was not repealed until 1961. For more on this, see Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> Even at the height of postwar emigration, during the economic boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s, some 1.6 million Italians expatriated compared to 3.3 million between 1906-1910.

<sup>3</sup> Not included in these “official” figures are seasonal forms of emigrant labor, particularly strong in the case of France and Switzerland, which could last from a few weeks to several months. Also excluded from these statistics are figures relating to “clandestine” emigration, which continued to be quite strong even after Italy’s introduction of the “assisted emigration” program, and which for obvious reasons remained extremely difficult to document. Compounding this problem was the ISTAT’s tardy attention to emigration to European destinations, which it did not begin to record until after 1953. However, in *Lavoro in movimento. L’emigrazione italiana in Europa 1945-57* (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2008), Michele Colucci estimates that in the case of France alone, where Italian clandestine emigration was perhaps the highest, the numbers were in the tens of thousands each year. Paul Ginsborg cites a separate survey conducted by the University of Naples that found that “between 1951 and 1971 4,200,000 persons had emigrated from the South, out of a total population at that time of some eighteen million.” Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics 1943-1988* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p. 501. These figures suggest that clandestine emigration was much higher than official estimates revealed.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Golini and Flavia Amato, “Uno sguardo a un secolo e mezzo di emigrazione italiana,” in *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana* 1, ed. Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2001), 50.

The coverage of emigration in official and popular channels of communication was indicative of the nation's ambivalent approach to the phenomenon: on the one hand, in the *Cinegiornali* newsreels and other propagandistic material, it represented emigration as a humanitarian and well-organized program that allowed Italian workers to play an active role in postwar reconstruction by continuing in their tradition of "building the world."<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, representations of emigration on the silver screen remained minor when compared to the size and import of the phenomenon itself, and often met with unofficial ostracism when they portrayed emigration in a critical light. This was the case with Pietro Germi's film *Il cammino della speranza* (1950), which recounted the plight of a group of unemployed Sicilians attempting to emigrate illegally into France. The film was denied designated government funds because it shined an unflattering light upon Italian emigration policy.

The general discouragement of errant representations of emigration was in large measure due to the less than conscientious role the State had played in opening a new season of mass emigration. In both internal and foreign affairs, emigration had presented itself as a convenient "release valve" once more. With the war still raging, some of the country's leading political and industrial exponents – among whom were members of the northern CLNAI resistance – began to plan strategically for the resumption of mass emigration. Foreseeing that Italy would lose the war and anticipating the socio-economic impact of such a turn of events, they expected two major problems to follow the return home of Mussolini's defeated soldiers and colonists: the first was mass unemployment; the second was a diffuse and dangerous feeling of resentment.<sup>6</sup>

Appearing as a solution to a shared set of fears, emigration thus became the target of a concerted political effort. As early as 1942, with many feeling the end of the war to be imminent, initiatives were taken across the political spectrum to gear up for peace accords and then reconstruction. Emigration figured prominently in both these processes. In a 1942 pamphlet titled *Le idee ricostruttive della Democrazia Cristiana*, Alcide De Gasperi, founder of the Christian Democratic Party and prime minister of eight consecutive coalition governments from 1945 to 1953, identified emigration as the necessary precondition for postwar reconstruction; in 1943, Ludovico D'Aragona, of the Socialist camp, also underscored the importance of relaunching mass emigration, albeit with the proviso of protecting migrant workers; and in 1944, Ugo La Malfa of the Italian Republican Party called European emigration the "new solution" to the enduring Southern Question. He was joined by Guido Dorso, who prophesied that the emigrants' remittances home would finally turn the Italian South into a "great orchard."<sup>7</sup>

Yet the benefits believed to ensue from the renewal of mass emigration were not always accompanied by a political strategy that kept in mind the emigrants' best interests, and often betrayed an appalling cynicism. Recent archival research has revealed that already during the war the Italian provisional government initiated bilateral agreements to prevent the return of thousands of Italian prisoners of war being held in Europe and Africa, negotiating for their use as cheap labor by the Allied governments holding them

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the variety of channels for postwar propaganda, see Francesca Anania, "Cinegiornali, radio, televisione," in Bevilacqua, *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana* I, 515-35.

<sup>6</sup> See Sandro Rinauro, "La disoccupazione di massa e il contrastato rimpatrio dei prigionieri di guerra," *Storia in Lombardia*, no.2-3 (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Colucci, *Lavoro*, 41-51.

captive.<sup>8</sup> These early negotiations were not motivated only by Italian fears of being unable to reabsorb its unemployed masses, though of course this concern would guide most of Italy's postwar agreements; nor were the Italians always exchanged for material goods, as in the case of the 1945-1946 accord with Belgium that traded cheap mining labor for coal. In the case of the first accord with France, Italy simply "gave away" its prisoners in exchange for an alleviation of its responsibilities in the war and hence a more favorable treatment in the upcoming peace accords. Since France was essentially given carte blanche on their employment, many of the prisoners found themselves coerced into the French Foreign Legion, fighting France's colonial wars from Indochina to Algeria. This early Italo-French agreement is perhaps the most concrete example of the use often made of Italian emigrants to absolve the nation from the stain of Fascism.

### The Privileged Sphere of Cinema

In the years following the war, cinema assumed an increasingly important role in shaping the socio-cultural behaviors, attitudes, and memories of Italians regarding the war, the regime, poverty and emigration. This leading role played by cinema, so fundamental for understanding Italian postwar culture, depended on a series of factors. Though cinema had occupied a central place in Italian popular culture as early as the 1930s, it was in the 1940s that Italian audiences became the largest in Europe. Between 1938 and 1950, Italian film audiences doubled, and by the mid 1950s, they were going to the movies more frequently than any other European population.<sup>9</sup> According to Brunetta, by 1957 Italy was second in the world only to the United States for number of cinemas per capita.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, the advent of neorealism was especially significant in making Italian cinema second in the world after Hollywood. It was with the beginning of neorealism in 1945 that cinema established itself as the art form most closely linked to society, depicting ordinary subjects and the travails of their everyday lives. As Gundle has argued, "Italian cinema became a source of recognition and even consolation for millions of people uprooted or disoriented by a vast and bewildering process of social transformation. This gave it a cultural function of great significance at a time when audiences elsewhere were in steep decline."<sup>11</sup> By representing problems and classes of people previously excluded from mainstream representations, neorealism gave renewed vigor to Italian cinema at a time of great economic hardship. These very characteristics, however, also served to turn cinema into a crucial battleground for the political and social conflicts investing the nation after the war.

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<sup>8</sup> Besides Colucci's *Lavoro in movimento*, see Agostino Bistarelli, *La storia del ritorno: I reduci italiani del secondo dopoguerra* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007); and, by Sandro Rinauro, the already cited "La disoccupazione di massa"; "Prigionieri della Francia ed emigrazione di massa nella politica economica della ricostruzione, 1944-1948," in *Studi e ricerche di storia contemporanea*, 51 (1999); and "Una prigionia interminabile: gli italiani dalla detenzione nei campi francesi alla guerra d'Indocina. 1940-1954," in *1943-1945. La lunga liberazione*, ed. Eric Gobetti (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Gundle, "From Neorealism to Luci Rosse: Cinema, Politics, Society, 1945-85," in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Robert Lumley (London: Macmillan, 1990), 200.

<sup>10</sup> Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano, 3. Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico 1945-1959*. (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 2000), 619.

<sup>11</sup> Gundle, "From Neorealism," 197.



And finally, cinema was itself an instrument of social change, acting as mediator in the transition from Fascist state to capitalist republic.<sup>12</sup> The power of film lay in the fact that it did not just reflect social reality but also helped to shape it in important ways. The enormity of the emigration phenomenon, for instance, produced a subculture which was equally significant in shaping Italian society at this time. As Forgacs and Gundle point out, Italians' "imagined sense of place" in the postwar years was determined by a cultural consumption that depended on the movement of both cultural products, of which cinema is the primary example, and people to other regions or nations. The geographic and social mobility provided by cinema and migration thus assume a primary role in re-shaping a devastated national identity after the war, in that "they served, for many people, particularly working-class people and peasants whose physical mobility was often limited, to redefine their sense of community by breaking down boundaries and enlarging their purviews in both a physical and a mental sense."<sup>13</sup>

### Defining Neorealism

Neorealism undeniably played the leading role in casting emigration narratives in such a way as to provide a "solution" to national regeneration. If the primacy of cinema in shaping Italian postwar culture is unquestionable, the exact nature of neorealism has been a far more complex and contested issue. What is certain is that the neorealist movement managed to embody all the major anxieties, novelties and continuities running through Italian society at this time. In films such as those examined here, neorealism helped to construct a "new" Italian subject by creating a specific relationship between the emigrant figure and the temporal emblems of past and future. Haunted by the past yet seeking and deserving a fresh start, these figures were meant to be representative of the Italian population at large – honest, hardworking civilians standing at a moral and historical crossroad – while providing a figurative absolution for Italy's troubled past.

If Italian neorealist cinema continues to be the object of controversy today, this is in part due to the fact that its own emergence bore an uncomfortable relationship to that past. Calling into question the justification for the prefix "neo," most of the debates have generally concerned either the aesthetic roots of neorealism in the Fascist film industry or the (in)adequacy of the movement's denunciation of Fascism. Hence the positions within this debate have tended to focus on either "continuity" between the two periods or "rupture."<sup>14</sup> Defining neorealism, then, entails taking a position with respect to whether postwar culture could rightfully be proclaimed an innovation, aesthetically and morally,

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<sup>12</sup> David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> For arguments on "continuity," see Lino Micciché, *Il neorealismo cinematografico italiano* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1975); Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "Liberation: Italian Cinema and the Fascist Past, 1945-50," in *Italian Fascism: History, Memory and Representation*, eds. Richard J. Bosworth and Patrizia Dogliani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); and Anna Maria Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map of Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). For arguments on "rupture," see André Bazin, *What is Cinema? II*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); and Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

or whether it should be seen as an arena so loaded with Fascist residues as to become a launching pad for its restoration in the form of neo-Fascism.

Part of the problem with defining neorealism according to a continuity-rupture dichotomy lies in the loose cohesion among films and filmmakers who often varied greatly in style, intent, and political conviction. In fact, it was not until 1952, in an essay titled “Alcune idee sul cinema,” that Cesare Zavattini, the “philosopher” of neorealism, set out to retroactively define the “rules” of neorealist filmmaking, listing on-location shooting, long takes, attention to contemporary and realistic subject matter, use of non-professional actors, open-ended plot, realistic dialogues, and use of vernacular language.

To further complicate matters, the 1970s saw the emergence of revisionist accounts that challenged received notions about Fascist cinema and raised uncomfortable questions about its relationship to neorealism. Many of the aesthetic rules of neorealism, such accounts pointed out, were in fact already observed by the realist cinema of the 1930s, when the well-nurtured cinematic *auteurism* of the *Cinema Nuovo* group assembled around Umberto Barbaro had already begun to call for a realistic cinema.<sup>15</sup> Leo Longanesi, a journalist and writer known for his strong support of Fascism, wrote in 1933:

We should make films that are extremely simple and spare in staging without using artificial sets – films that are shot as much as possible from reality. In fact, realism is precisely what is lacking in our films. It is necessary to go right out into the street, to take the movie camera into the streets, the courtyards, the barracks, and the train stations.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, most of the directors involved in the neorealist movement, including Roberto Rossellini, who was also one of its founders, had been major exponents of the Fascist film industry. Rossellini’s inauguration of the neorealist season with *Roma città aperta* in 1945 and *Paisa’* in 1946 bore echoes of his prewar fascination with the realist techniques of filmmaking, such as the use of nonprofessional actors and authentic outdoor and indoor shooting locations. In addition, his apprenticeship with the regime’s favorite documentarist, Francesco De Robertis, had taught him to appreciate the combination of fiction with documentary. As Alessandrini’s assistant director on *Luciano Serra, pilota* (1938), Rossellini supervised the African footage that comprised almost half the film. Later on, in his directorial debuts *La nave bianca* (1941) and *Un pilota ritorna* (1942), shot on assignment for the Ministries of the Navy and the Air Force, Rossellini had incorporated actual military documentary footage, a technique that would later make up one of the distinguishing features of *Paisa’*.<sup>17</sup>

Nor was Rossellini the only filmmaker whose artistic roots were uncomfortably compromised by Fascism. Indeed, there were few film directors at work in the postwar era who had not been educated and trained under the Fascist cinematic “corporation.” Aside the more famous Blasetti and Camerini, there were also Carlo Bragaglia, Guido Brignone, Carmine Galleone, Augusto Genina, Camillo Mastrocinque, Francesco De Robertis, Pietro Francisci, Mario Mattioli, Vittorio De Sica, Luchino Visconti, Luigi

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. For more on the cinema of Roberto Rossellini, see Peter Brunette, *Roberto Rossellini* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

Zampa, and Mario Soldati, to name only the most well-known. The “new” faces of the neorealist school were in fact far fewer, including future icons of Italian cinema like Michelangelo Antonioni, Luigi Comencini, Pietro Germi, Carlo Lizzani, Giuseppe De Santis, Luciano Emmer, Federico Fellini, and Dino Risi.<sup>18</sup>

Paradoxically, it was the degree to which postwar cinema was felt to be compromised by its roots in the artistic heritage of Fascism that in part explains its interpretation, at least at home, as a complete rupture. As Bondanella has observed, “Critics, film historians, politicians, and even veterans of the film industry who had learned their trades during the fascist period had every interest in emphasizing the originality and revolutionary quality of what succeeded the fascist cinema – Italian neorealism – and to denigrate everything that came before.”<sup>19</sup> Hence the scarce attention paid, until very recently and even by film historians and scholars, to the cinema of the Fascist era, and the frequent dismissal of it as propaganda “tout court.” Consequently, more accurate assessments of the film production under Fascism emerged relatively late, a factor that did not help scholarship to grasp all the complexities of the cinema that was to follow it either. In any event, such assessments revealed that in reality fascist cinema had been much more concerned with emulating Hollywood’s commercial successes and escapist forms of entertainment than with producing political mobilization.

At the opposite end of the debate, however, an extreme revisionism contended that only a handful of films had been “really” fascist. However, this argument proves equally unsatisfactory for numerous reasons. To begin with, it underplays the ideological power of films in general, even those seemingly most innocuous. In the second instance, it finds agreement with all those who, like Benedetto Croce, were anxious after the war to depict Fascism as an anomaly, a fluke accident that need not motivate a search for social-structural causes, and consequently the transformation of these. And finally, the “few rotten apples” theory does not explain why the great majority of filmmakers would have been so anxious to disavow fascist cinema so utterly after the war. As Brunetta has argued,

During the entire postwar period, efforts were made, from the historical point of view, to regard the phenomenon of fascist cinema as marginal and episodic and to identify as genuinely fascist only films dealing directly with fascism or the fascists. The part of the film industry that collaborated with fascism, accepted all its directives, or attempted to conform to the climate created by the regime was not taken into consideration. The prevailing contention that only about a dozen propagandistic films were made is only partly true. The truth is that the film industry did not miss any of the regime’s identification with great moments of history, that it followed and registered all the ideological changes at the top as well as the basic choices of the regime’s cultural policy, thus reflecting, even in films that were seemingly not directly propagandistic, the fundamental fascist directives.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Micciché, *Il neorealismo*, 17-18.

<sup>19</sup> Bondanella, *The Films*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano, 1895-1945* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1979), 381.

As the divergence between these positions suggests, neorealism embodied all the contradictions of the time period it spanned, expressing both a certain continuity with the past but also a rupture that was in some respects as radical as it was influential. Ironically, one often-overlooked source of rupture was the war itself. The devastating effects of the war altered not only the material conditions of life and of filmmaking but also the psychology of individuals and their capacity to see “reality.” For Gilles Deleuze, for instance, Italian cinematic neorealism was chiefly an effect of this rupture with former ways of representing and experiencing reality. With neorealism, Deleuze identified a passage from the “movement-image” of classical, prewar cinema, to what he calls the “time-image.” Deleuze argued that the sensory-motor schema of traditional cinema had been transformed by the experience of warfare, giving way to the extension and predominance of time over action as developer of the image or shot. The function of the image was no longer to create action but to make the relationships of time decipherable. The characters of neorealism therefore are transformed from “actors” to “seers” who witness and record rather than react. The crisis of the movement-image (which may be interpreted loosely as equating the crisis of modernity or of the nation-state) began with Hitchcock’s introduction of the “mental image” that represents webs of relations through camera work rather than through narration. In order for this mental image to be realized, however, it must be made by the viewer, who, no longer seen as a passive absorber of ready-made significations, is a thinking subject who reacts and “knows” these relations, thereby completing the making of a film. According to Deleuze, in films like *Rear Window*, *Spellbound*, and *Vertigo*, Hitchcock accomplished this transformation by subjecting his characters to various injuries, traumas or phobias that cause a rupture in their sensory-motor links and force them to react within the rules of the mental image. This had the effect of reducing the heroes of cinema to a pure optical situation, like the spectators of the film.<sup>21</sup>

Following the devastating effects of the Second World War, Italian cinematic neorealism brings this crisis to completion, amplifying it to social and epochal dimensions. The hero of classical cinema is definitively reduced to “a kind of viewer. He shifts, runs and becomes animated in vain, the situation he is in outstrips his motor capacities on all sides, and makes him see and hear what is no longer subject to the rules of a response or an action... He is prey to a vision, pursued by it or pursuing it, rather than engaged in an action.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Deleuze’s description effectively calls to mind the frantic meanderings of Antonio Ricci in De Sica’s neorealist masterpiece, *Ladri di biciclette* (1948). For Deleuze, then, neorealism is more than a representational break with the past. Its rupture is phenomenological.

French film critic André Bazin also interpreted neorealism more in terms of rupture than of continuity. For Bazin, however, the central characteristic making neorealism unlike anything that had preceded it was fundamentally moral. Unlike in France, where the cinematic insistence on recounting the Resistance had turned this topic into a legend, in Italy the focus of neorealism was less on the past than on the new, on the moral, economic and social consequences ushered in by the Liberation. According to this interpretation, Italian neorealism was less interested in creating a historical subject than

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<sup>21</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 198-205.

<sup>22</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 3.

in expressing the creation of a new one. Another distinguishing feature of the Italian liberation was that the Allied occupation had meant the installation of a new political order rather than a return to the pre-war situation, as in France. Hence Italian cinema's greater interest in the quotidian, almost pedestrian, day-to-day events that witnessed this transformation taking place, the "truth content" of a new form of existence. "The war," Bazin observed, "is felt to be not an interlude but the end of an era. In one sense Italy is only three years old."<sup>23</sup> Thus for Bazin, too, neorealism represented a complete rupture with the past, both at the level of content and of form, amounting to no less than a "renaissance [...] spontaneously generated" of the new Italian subject.

### Neorealism and the Redemptive Mission

The contradictoriness of neorealism thus lies in its use of techniques learned under Fascism to create a new moral subject. While, as we shall see, this was not always the case, it can be argued that, at least with respect to early neorealism, the justification for the "neo" prefix sprang from the movement's moral charge: while the continuity registers on the level of aesthetics, the novelty erupts on the political and moral plane. If certain formal elements of neorealism were traceable to the films of the 1930s, its content was not. The novelty of neorealism was on the object of its gaze, its concern with common people, the marginalized, the poor, and with their real-life situations that were neither heroic, nor aristocratic, nor "beautiful." Most importantly, however, the neorealist gaze tended to be critical of those circumstances rather than clinically neutral.

Millicent Marcus, for instance, has argued that the consensus among neorealist directors and the movement's differentiation from prewar cinema was more ethical than aesthetic. Marcus in fact cites a "shared moral commitment" which "united filmmakers 'from above,' dissolving their petty stylistic differences into basic agreement on the larger issues of human concerns and general world view."<sup>24</sup>

Among the filmmakers and producers of neorealism there was in fact wide consensus on the movement's moral commitment. Rossellini himself always felt much more comfortable discussing the moral rather than the aesthetic unity of neorealism, and in a 1953 interview told *Cahiers du Cinéma*, "what do we really mean by such a word [neorealism...] For me, it is primarily a moral stance from which to observe the world."<sup>25</sup>; and again, with respect to filming *Roma città aperta*, he declared, "We were maintaining a moral position more than a style."<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Vittorio De Sica, recalling his first postwar film, *Shoeshine*, identified a similar redemptive task:

The experience of the war was decisive for us all. Each felt the mad desire to throw away all the old stories of the Italian cinema, to plant the camera in the midst of real life, in the midst of all that struck our astonished eyes. We sought to liberate ourselves from the weight of our sins, we wanted to look ourselves in the face and tell ourselves the truth, to discover what we really were, and to seek

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<sup>23</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema*, 20.

<sup>24</sup> Marcus, *Italian Film in Light*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Roberto Rossellini, *My Method. Writings and Interviews*, ed. Adriano Aprà (New York: Marsilio, 1995), 47.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted by Hugh Gray, "Translator's Introduction," in *What is Cinema, II*, by André Bazin, 14.

salvation.... *Shoeshine* was a small stone, a very small stone, [but it] contributed to the moral reconstruction of our country.”<sup>27</sup>

But perhaps the goal of neorealism was best summed up before the war had come to an end by Umberto Barbaro, the future director of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia that was to become the cradle of cinematic neorealism: “If we in Italy wish to abandon once and for all our trashy histories [...] we must try the cinema of realism.”<sup>28</sup>

Thus more than an interest in “things” for their own sake, the neorealist method was a “moral weapon”<sup>29</sup> to be used against the past in order to secure absolution for the nation’s sins. Neorealism thus became both an “instrument leading to knowledge about reality,”<sup>30</sup> 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. As Millicent Marcus has argued, “The rebirth of the Italian national identity will thus owe as much to the cinema as it does to the various political and cultural movements we normally associate with the rise of a new social order.”<sup>31</sup>

Neorealism’s redemptive mission helps to explain why it became the privileged medium for representing the figure of the emigrant, which at this time registers an important shift. In 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century literature, up to and including the Fascist-era<sup>32</sup>, emigrants had been objects in need of redemption. Even when justified by economic circumstances, their departure was usually interpreted as a form of abandonment and betrayal, and represented a “blood letting” of the country’s resources, an illness that threatened the well-being of the nation. During the Fascist *ventennio*, the ban on emigration did not prevent emigration from becoming a recurring theme in the regime’s film production. From *Camicia nera* (1933) to *Passaporto rosso* (1935) and *Il grande appello* (1936)<sup>33</sup>, the spin on emigration found agreement with the regime’s fondness for “bonifiche,” or reclamation-rehabilitation projects. In all these films, the prevailing message was that the emigrants could be “redeemed” if they returned to put their labor and resources at the service of their mother country, or to answer the call of duty in times of war. Above all else, however, emigrants could be forgiven and reclaimed as parts of their nation if they sacrificed themselves for their *patria*. After the war, and more specifically with the advent of neorealist cinema, the emigrant ceases to be an object of redemption and becomes an agent of salvation, carrying forth the nation’s absolution by

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Marcus, *Italian Film in Light*, xiii – xiv.

<sup>28</sup> Elio Petri, quoted in Marcus, *Italian Film in Light*, 86.

<sup>29</sup> Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from 1942 to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 71.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Marcus, *Italian Film in Light*, xiv.

<sup>31</sup> Marcus, *Italian Film in Light*, xv.

<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, Edmondo De Amicis’ 1889 emigration novel, *Sull’Oceano* (Milano: Garzanti, 1996); Giovanni Pascoli’s 1904 poem, “Italy – Sacro all’Italia raminga,” in *Primi Poemetti*, <http://www.fondazionepascoli.it/testi3.htm> (accessed April 5, 2008), and his 1911 speech, “La grande proletaria si e’ mossa,” published in *La Tribuna*, 27 November 1911; Enrico Corradini’s novel, *La patria lontana* (Milano: Treves, 1910); and Ignazio Silone’s 1936 novel, *Vino e pane* (Milano: Mondadori, 1955).

<sup>33</sup> *Camicia nera*, directed by Giovacchino Forzano. Istituto Luce, 1933; *Passaporto rosso*, directed by Guido Brignone. Tirrenia Film, 1935; *Il grande appello*, directed by Mario Camerini. Artisti Associati, 1936.

mediating with the Fascist past. Paradoxically, where the *factual* solution provided by mass emigration entailed a dispersal of people and forces seen as a threat to national security, the *figurative* (ab)solution provided by emigration served to draw divergent and scattered identities together into a cohesive national whole.

Indeed, among the chief functions of neorealism, Gian Piero Brunetta has significantly identified that of *riappaesamento* – a term that tellingly encompasses both “re-acquaintance” and “re-nationalization.” According to this function, “ci si fa interpreti della nascita di *un italiano nuovo*, prodotto di molte contraddizioni, senza verita` o certezze, che guarda al futuro in modo tutt’altro che sicuro, e che per il momento ha saputo *riscattarsi* dalla sua adesione al fascismo attraverso la sofferenza della guerra.”<sup>34</sup> Through the emigrants’ mediating role in this process of national “re-acquaintance,” Fascism is at once acknowledged and displaced, and a true confrontation with the Fascist past is deferred in favor of a politics of national reconciliation. “Le immagini del cinema del dopoguerra, parlo di quelle di registrazione a caldo, pur nella loro carica di denuncia, scelgono la strada non della rappresentazione mostruosa, teratologica, della guerra, del fascismo, del nazismo, quanto una rappresentazione in cui il *sacrificio* possa essere interpretato con un ruolo *catartico*.”<sup>35</sup>

With the exception of Rossellini’s *Open City* and *Paisa`*, which belong to the loosely labeled “war trilogy,” other neorealist classics steered wide of depictions of the war, the Resistance, and the Fascists.<sup>36</sup> It was the “ordinary” Italians, the surviving casualties of the war who filled the screen: the orphans (*Sciuscia`*, *Paisa`*), the unemployed (*Ladri di biciclette*, *Miracolo a Milano*), and the emigrants (*Fuga in Francia*, *Emigrantes*, *Il cammino della speranza*), embodying the self-sacrifice that allowed Italy to move forward without looking back too carefully. As Brunetta observes, “il cinema neorealista consente all’Italia, più di qualsiasi azione diplomatica e politica, di riprendere, non da paese vinto e subalterno, un dialogo con il resto del mondo, presentandosi con tutte le carte in regola a favore del riscatto del suo popolo.”<sup>37</sup>

The characters populating neorealist films tended to represent the “stock” figures of Italian nationhood. There is the priest for Catholicism and Christian values, the mother and father for the family and unity, the children for hope and the future, and the elderly and authoritative figures for the past. Within this milieu, emigrants represent the changing face of Italy, one that is free of the roots that bind to a place or to human relations; but most of all, emigrants represent a fresh start for a nation that is turning its back on history to recapture a lost productivity and a cleansed dream of prosperity. Because their rootless, stateless condition is implicitly one of a lack of national identity, they mediate the ambivalent relationship with the nation for millions of Italians whose sense of self, following the crisis in national identity, has similarly been compromised. The emigrants with no home stand in for the Italians with no national identity, and whose sense of Italianness is visually reinforced through the gestures of moral catharsis enacted on the screen. The emigrant’s journey thus becomes the “riappaesamento” of the audience within a cohesive nation.

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<sup>34</sup> Brunetta, *Storia cinema italiano*, 3, 366; emphasis added.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 367; emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup> Actually, Rossellini’s films also avoided depicting Fascists, preferring to cast evil and sexually deviant Nazis as the counterparts to simple, honest, and solidary Italians.

<sup>37</sup> Brunetta, *Storia cinema italiano*, 3, 368.

Mario Soldati's *Fuga in Francia* (1948)

Known for his novels as much as for his films, Mario Soldati (1906-1999) had been a central figure of the Italian cultural scene since the 1930s. He achieved national prominence in 1935 with the publication of what would remain the most widely-read of his literary works, *America primo amore*, a youthful account of his “failed emigration” to the United States during the Great Depression. More personal anecdote than social commentary on the emigration phenomenon, *America primo amore* compared the experience of emigration to a “first love” because of the illusion it produced of being able to escape outside oneself and give oneself completely to another. Soldati’s strong aversion to Fascism had driven him to the United States, where he had attempted to turn an initial fellowship at Columbia University into a permanent emigration. But overwhelmed by nostalgia and unable to procure dignified work once his fellowship ran out, Soldati decided to return to Fascist Italy and make amends. The result was *America primo amore*, in which both the United States and emigration are portrayed in conflicting hues. Emigration appears both as a liberating escape from the strictures of tradition and as a form of sickness:

“[D]urante il mio primo soggiorno americano, credevo che fosse possibile evadere: cambiare di patria, di religione, di ricordi e di rimorsi. E vissi più di un anno nella morbosa persuasione di esserci riuscito. Il primo amore e il primo viaggio sono malattie che si somigliano.”<sup>38</sup>

But the most important aspect of *America primo amore*, one which contributed to its instant success, was its significant contribution to the anti-modern discourse pervasive in the Fascist culture of the 1930s. Within this discourse, the United States served as a target upon which to dislocate Italian fears about the destabilizing power of modernity. Soldati’s observations of life in New York strike all the nerves of this anxiety, from the advent of female emancipation to shifting racial boundaries, the power of mass culture (especially cinema), and the pervasiveness of consumerism.<sup>39</sup>

Having returned to Italy in financial straits and in need of a job, Soldati took up scriptwriting to make ends meet more than out of any personal commitment to cinematic art. A friend of Carlo Levi’s<sup>40</sup> since childhood, Soldati had strong ties to the world of the Turinese bourgeoisie, and did not have great difficulties landing a cinematic career under the regime, entering the newborn state organization of the Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia. Among his first screenplays were *La tavola dei poveri* (1932) and *La contessa di Parma* (1937), both directed by Alessandro Blasetti, whose Fascist propaganda film *Vecchia guardia* (1934) was to become one of Hitler’s favorite films,<sup>41</sup> and *Gli uomini, che mascalzoni!* (1932) and *Il signor Max* (1937), directed by Mario

<sup>38</sup> Mario Soldati, *America primo amore* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2003), 93.

<sup>39</sup> For more on this interpretation of *America primo amore*, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 39-45.

<sup>40</sup> Levi painted the front cover for the first edition of *America primo amore* for his friend Soldati. When the police came to Levi’s house to arrest him for antifascist activities, Levi was in the company of Soldati, and asked the guards to kindly wait while he put the finishing touches on the painting. See Carlo Levi’s account of this episode, “La copertina dell’America,” placed as an Appendix to the 2003 Sellerio edition of Soldati’s *America primo amore*.

<sup>41</sup> Liehm, *Passion and Defiance*, 28.



Camerini. Blasetti and Camerini were both major filmmakers of the 1930s, and their films, especially those just cited, were among the greatest successes of the Fascist film industry. Soldati was particularly influenced by Camerini, for whose colonial film *Il grande appello* (1936), set during the Ethiopian War and shot on location in Africa, Soldati wrote the script. “[T]ellingly, [the film] recounts the transformation of a cynical Italian emigrant into a duty-bound patriot who sacrifices his life in the Ethiopian War.”<sup>42</sup>

Camerini was also one of the chief exponents of “calligraphism,” a label coined by Giuseppe De Santis to describe the cinematic style of “beautiful writing,” where formalist preoccupations and the focus on subjects of the literary past resulted in films with “beautiful” costuming, décor, and photography. Despite Soldati’s collaboration on Fascist propaganda films, his own cinematic works, both before and after the war, were quintessentially “calligraphist.” Aside from the luxurious “white telephone” films,<sup>43</sup> – romantic comedies and sentimental dramas with strong emotional impact but scarce resemblance to everyday life – he became known mostly for bringing to the screen the literary works of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie, such as Antonio Fogazzaro’s *Piccolo mondo antico* (1941) and *Malombra* (1942), establishing himself as one of the chief exponents of that “calligraphism” so lambasted by the *Cinema* group calling for greater realism. His films became known for their smooth, almost glossy visual texture and refined elegance, but narratively he remained tied to conventional devices, such as the “written letters that fill the screen, windows that close on one season and open on another, trees and the sky that change their appearance in order to mark the passing of time,” so criticized by De Santis in one of his *Cinema* articles.<sup>44</sup> All this marks his uncharacteristic turn to neorealism in the postwar era with *Fuga in Francia* all the more striking, especially given not only the sudden but also temporary nature of this conversion. After this brief stint with neorealism, Soldati returned until the end of his film career to the elegant compositions that had been his hallmark.

But *Fuga in Francia* was more than an aesthetic conversion, however temporary: it fulfilled a function of “purification” for Soldati himself for his association with Fascism, a need the director had felt quite urgently since the end of the war. After the proclamation of the Armistice in 1943, Soldati fled from Rome to liberated Naples, now occupied by the Allies. Until the end of the war, he shared an apartment with Riccardo Freda, Stefano Vanzina (Steno), Dino De Laurentiis, and Leo Longanesi. All of them were friends and more or less directly tied to the Roman world of cinema, but Longanesi – the same who had called for greater realism in cinema in the 1930s – was also a fervent Fascist. In an interview conducted some years later, Soldati recalled his strong need to “purify” his friend: “Longanesi era fascista, ma lo stesso io gli ero amico. Una delle mie ambiguità. D'altronde io cercavo di comprendere ... di capire ... Longanesi [...] era rimasto in odore di peccato, per lui ci voleva l'assoluzione, e perché lui ottenesse questo lo portai a casa di Benedetto Croce. Sai, Croce era per gli intellettuali il numero uno

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<sup>42</sup> Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 44.

<sup>43</sup> As Liehm explains, “there were almost no white telephones in Italian films, as is often asserted. The nickname probably originated because of the presence of white telephones in American movies, which became the symbol of upper-class affluence in Italy.” *Passion and Defiance*, 322.

<sup>44</sup> Liehm, *Passion and Defiance*, 34.

dell'antifascismo, era lui che poteva dare l'assoluzione, e io che gli avevo portato Longanesi da fascista glielo riportai una seconda volta 'convertito'."<sup>45</sup>

In July of 1944, Soldati became the Secretary of the Socialist Cinema Union. A few days later, a "purge committee" was established that brought together Umberto Barbaro, Mario Chiari, Luchino Visconti, Mario Camerini, and Mario Soldati. The committee composed a list of all the filmmakers who had collaborated with the regime, but in the end only three directors, Goffredo Alessandrini, Carmine Gallone, and Augusto Genina, were punished – with a six month suspension from work. "Soon after that, the decision of the commission was revoked, and the film purges were over and closed."<sup>46</sup> Collective collaboration with the dictatorship had been very widespread in the film industry, where a system of combined censorship and patronage had rendered collaboration with the government difficult to avoid. So it was that "[e]ven those who had chosen to work for Salò did not see studio privileges suspended. The documentary filmmaker Francesco De Robertis, who had been a major figure in Salò cinema, continued to make military films in the post-war period."<sup>47</sup>

The half-hearted purge of the film industry – the regime's "strongest weapon" – in effect reflected a wider reluctance in postwar Italy to rid the nation's political, economic, and cultural spheres of fascist elements. Thus, Mario Soldati's claim, with reference to his role in the purge committee, "Non abbiamo voluto fare niente, perché tutti avevamo partecipato, più o meno,"<sup>48</sup> summarized the attitude of most filmmakers – and Italians – after the dictatorship. Yet the making of *Fuga in Francia* a few years later demonstrates a nagging concern or embarrassment for Soldati over his collaboration with Fascism. Just as *America primo amore* had served to "rehabilitate" him within the regime,<sup>49</sup> *Fuga in Francia* was an attempt to purge himself – and the Italian people – of the stain of Fascism. Moreover, given the moral charge of neorealism, it is not surprising that Soldati should have turned to this style, otherwise so alien to him, for a project of national redemption.

When *Fuga in Francia* was released in 1948, Italy was still in the midst of post-war reconstruction, and aimed at projecting an image of social and economic recovery at odds with the poverty and backwardness suggested by the film's focus on emigration. Partly inspired by a true story, the film narrates the attempt of an ex-Fascist hierarch, Riccardo Torre, to escape to France so as to avoid prosecution in Italy. Accompanied by his young son, Fabrizio, he travels in disguise, concealing his true identity to everyone they encounter. Along the way they join a group of three emigrants – Tembien (played by Pietro Germi), a resistance fighter who has lost his little boy during the war, his brother Gino, and the ambiguous *il tunisino*, all of them similarly attempting to cross the French border illegally in search of work. On the eve of their border-crossing, they all spend the night in a local tavern, where Gino has a romantic tryst with Pierina, the barmaid. Tension develops when Pierina recognizes Torre as her old employer. Desperate to

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<sup>45</sup> Lajolo, Davide, *Conversazione in una stanza chiusa con Mario Soldati*. Milano: Frassinelli, 1983. Quoted in Salvatore Silvano Nigro, "Tristia," in *Fuga in Italia*, by Mario Soldati (Palermo: Sellerio, 2004), 15.

<sup>46</sup> Liehm, *Passion and Defiance*, 329.

<sup>47</sup> Ben-Ghiat, "Liberation," 91.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Emiliano Morreale, *Mario Soldati. Le carriere di un libertino* (Genova: Le Mani, 2006), 35.

<sup>49</sup> Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 43-44.

preserve his anonymity, Torre murders her before she is able to report him to the police. But the emigrants discover Torre's true identity before reaching the border. Resisting the temptation to simply execute him, they decide to hand Torre over to the authorities, even though this means jeopardizing their own plans of clandestine emigration. Torre manages to elude them and enters France, where in a shoot-out with the emigrants he injures his son, Fabrizio. Carelessly abandoning Fabrizio, Torre escapes yet again, but he is caught thanks to the joint efforts of the Italian and French police forces. Because of their heroic gestures, the emigrants are allowed to stay in France, where Tembien, moved by fatherly affection, presumably adopts Fabrizio.

Emigration itself is of course not the real subject of *Fuga in Francia* but provides an expedient for articulating two other inter-related themes. The first is that of the complicity of Italy's older generations with Fascism; the second is what relationship the younger generations – those not responsible for having supported the dictatorship – should develop with the Fascist past of their nation. On both these issues, the film largely embodies Italy's own ambivalence, somewhat mirroring the hasty and inconclusive achievements of the purge committee on which *Soldati* had sat.

The first theme is developed with great skill in the film's opening scenes, where *Soldati* depicts the collusion and hypocrisy of the ecclesiastical authorities, as they continue to provide a network of support for the ex-hierarchs of the regime. *Soldati* renders the intimacy between religious and political institutions masterfully when he has the rector of a religious college, a high priest, receive the fleeing Torre, who has come to him for help disguised as a cleric. The priest never acknowledges their old friendship, not even when Torre calls him by his first name, Giacomo, and asks, somewhat bewildered, "Ma come, non mi riconosci?" Though Torre and Giacomo grew up together and were close friends in the same school, the priest insists throughout their exchange on countering Torre's familiar use of "tu" with the formal and distant "Lei." Nonetheless, he admits Torre into his bedroom and efficiently provides him with money and a more inconspicuous disguise.

This first section of the film is driven by *Soldati*'s desire to "unveil" the Church's two-faced support of Fascism. The Church continues to collaborate with Fascism while also hypocritically denying its collusion in the past. As Torre changes into his new clothes in the priest's bedroom, he reminisces aloud about their past together: "Quanti anni sono passati. 1912, 1913, ti ricordi? Quando suonava, io e te ci rifugiavamo in palestra. Allora, a nessuno dei due piaceva il collegio, e avevamo sempre il pensiero di scappare. Ti ricordi, Giacomo, i nostri progetti di fuga?" The priest replies icily, "No. Non ricordo," before turning his back to Torre. The very same religious authorities that should be denouncing the dictatorship and its war crimes demonstrate instead an iron will to deny their own complicity. Torre and the priest are thus represented as equals in a variety of ways: through their common past; through their friendship and connections; through their exchange of clothing (Torre initially appears disguised as a priest, then the priest gives him civilian clothes that fit, "forse ho un abito che le andra' bene"); but also through the similar low-angle close-ups of their faces during their first exchange, which imply that the Fascist and the priest both share the same power relationship with respect to the audience and, by extension, the Italian population.

Torre and Giacomo stand for the leading authorities of the Italian nation during the ventennio and, apparently, beyond. This point is very effectively reinforced by

flanking the Fascist hierarch with the religious “father.” Hence, Fabrizio’s perplexed question, “Papà, ma sei qui?” when he discovers his father sneaking into the school dressed in a priest’s frock, is an admonition to the new generations about the tenacious web of power relations constructed by the Fascist regime.

The new generation’s confrontation with the nation’s troubled past is represented through the contrast between Fabrizio’s relationship with his father on the one hand and that which develops between him and the emigrant Tembien on the other. Largely ignored when not exploited by his uncaring father, Fabrizio begins to grow fond of Tembien. Indeed, Tembien is a sympathetic character in every way that Torre is not. An ex-resistance fighter who liberated Italy from Nazi-Fascism, he is a simple, honest, and morally upright worker who has been forced into his clandestine condition by unemployment: “In fondo, noi vogliamo soltanto lavorare. E’ colpa nostra se in questo paese non se ne trova piu’?” Though poor, he is unfailingly generous and benevolent towards his fellow human beings. But most of all, Tembien is a fatherly figure who takes a genuine interest in Fabrizio’s well-being. Teaching by example, he demonstrates that high principles should always trump personal gain. Torre, on the other hand, bears all the qualities that stand for the corrupt Fascist past: he is selfish, greedy, and dishonest. He has no qualms about abandoning his son when he is no longer a convenient accessory of his escape, and he stops at nothing, not even murder, to obtain his immoral goals. As a man, a father, and a citizen he is a disgrace, and he represents that part of the corrupt past that the new generations should repudiate. In fact, once he has realized the true nature of his father, Fabrizio does precisely that, claiming to the French authorities, “I do not know him.”

Yet there is a sense in which the confrontation depicted by *Soldati*, based on such extreme stereotypes as Torre and Tembien, is also a form of forgetting. Torre, the next thing to a psychopath, is anything but the common Italian, and in the gap between him and the Resistance fighter Tembien there is an enormous void that neorealist films never filled with the common Italians who had given their consent – however actively or passively – to Fascism. For instance, in Rossellini’s third “war trilogy” film, *Germania anno zero*, also of 1948, a young boy kills his sick “burdensome” father upon the indirect suggestion of another figure of authority, his former school teacher. In *Fuga in Francia*, the responsibility for Fascist collusion is similarly attached to figures of authority, not only narratively but also formally: Torre is filmed so as to hover over the other characters in the film; his portly presence fills the screen with its suggestion of the encumbering weight of Fascism, while low-angle close-ups of his face are intercut with high-angle shots of the hapless Pierina in tense anticipation of their confrontation and its fatal outcome. Thus the neorealist project to create new, morally-cleansed Italians was achieved by creating subjects who were *a priori* innocent, and, like the violently murdered Pierina, victims of “a few bad apples.”

Redrawing Italy’s moral map according to a binary logic of victim-executioner entailed a new iconography of border-crossing that emerged after the war. Contrary to traditional emigration literature, in which the ship’s crossing of the Equator invariably introduced forms of sickness, madness or even death among the emigrants, border-crossing in postwar emigration narratives represents an act of transformation and rebirth. Since the emigrants, in their new capacity as agents of national absolution, must no longer redeem themselves but the nation, their movement across national boundaries

represents a form of collective “healing,” a “cleansing” of the nation’s corrupt past, as symbolized by the “recovery” of the injured Fabrizio after he has repudiated his father on the other side of the nation’s border.

Aldo Fabrizi’s *Emigrantes* (1949)

So powerful is the postwar iconography of redemptive border-crossing within the nation’s new moral map, that it superimposes itself even upon narratives still employing the ocean voyage model of emigration, such as the 1949 film *Emigrantes*, directed and starred by Aldo Fabrizi. In 1945, Fabrizi had starred in Rossellini’s *Roma città aperta* as don Pietro Pellegrini, a character inspired by the figures of don Pietro Pappagallo and don Giuseppe Morosini, who were executed at the Fosse Ardeatine and at Forte Bravetta, respectively, by the German army occupying Rome. After this memorable performance, Fabrizi became not only one of the most prolific actors of Italian postwar cinema but also, along with Anna Magnani, one of the figures most closely associated with neorealist cinema. Moreover, his role as a holy victim of Nazi persecution helped pave the way for the figurative exoneration of ordinary Italians – and, with the exception of *Fuga in Francia*, of the Catholic Church – from the sin of Fascism. Four years later, Fabrizi made his directorial debut with *Emigrantes*, which appealed to a more popular audience and was commercially more successful than *Fuga in Francia*, at home and abroad. In Argentina, where the film was partly set, both Evita Peron and Italian film star Amedeo Nazzari attended the film’s opening.<sup>50</sup>

*Emigrantes* narrates the plight of a Roman family who, having lost a son and its livelihood as a result of the war, decides to emigrate to Argentina. While Giuseppe Borbone (Aldo Fabrizi) and his daughter Maria are eager to begin a new life abroad, his wife, Adele (Ave Ninchi), curbs their enthusiasm with her mounting nostalgia, to the point of opposing her daughter’s engagement to a wealthy Argentine businessman and demanding that they return to their beloved Rome. Eventually, however, Adele is won over by the generosity and solidarity of the Italian community in Buenos Aires, especially among the other emigrants they had befriended on the ocean crossing, and ultimately agrees to stay in Argentina. Like *Fuga in Francia*, Fascist hierarchs on the run and the collusion of the Catholic Church also make their appearance in *Emigrantes*, albeit without a critique or direct reference made to either, past or present. Rather, the film serves as an illustration of the politics of pacification forced upon neorealism on the heels of the 1948 electoral victory of the Christian Democrats and Italy’s 1949 entry into the NATO alliance.

The effects of this new geopolitical configuration on the Italian film industry were immediate. Under the direction of key Christian Democrat and vice-Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, the government’s cultural agenda featured a system of censorship and control of the film industry that was perhaps even tighter than it had been under the Fascist regime. In many respects, the DC-led government, particularly during the 1950s, was even more repressive than the dictatorship had been in limiting the kinds of cultural products that could reach mass audiences, quickly abandoning anti-Fascism in favor of anti-Communism soon after the election. Film projects on the Fascist assassination of Giacomo Matteotti, for instance, or on the wartime massacre of nearly 13,000 Italian

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<sup>50</sup> Grassi, Giovanna. “Alla Sala Trevi, il cinema di Aldo Fabrizi.” *Il Corriere della Sera*, 18 January 2006.

soldiers by German forces in Cephalonia never saw the light of day. In 1953, scriptwriter Renzo Renzi and editor Guido Aristarco were arrested, then tried and convicted by a military tribunal for having published the script of *Armata s'agapò*, a film project on the Italian wartime occupation of Greece, on the *Cinema Nuovo* film magazine of which Aristarco was editor.<sup>51</sup>

The combination of political and economic pressures with downright intimidation, exercised through the triad of the Christian Democratic Party, the Catholic Church, and Hollywood, was extremely successful in steering the direction of Italian film production and distribution during this time. It was not long before directors learned what kinds of films were likely to allow them to continue to work, “adapting” themselves or their work to the new directives much as they had under the regime. A cultural politics involving censorship, denial of funds, and various other forms of obstructionism thus had devastating effects upon neorealism’s critical capacity, transforming it into the “rosy” variety so prevalent in the 1950s. The already mentioned reluctance to deal with the Fascist past met with institutional and industrial pressures that sought to exclude from view what had been strongest in neorealist cinema, namely the focus on the war and its aftermath and on social problems such as economic inequality and the emigration it set off. The claim of one member of the clergy that “[i]l popolo vuole dimenticare Cefalonia, Salerno, le Fosse Ardeatine e tutte le tremende cose che non devono essere cinematografate”<sup>52</sup> is representative of a whole strategy of systematic forgetting applied from 1948 onward.

Andreotti’s famous open letter to De Sica, first published on the DC-friendly newspaper *Libertas* in February of 1952 on the occasion of De Sica’s filming of *Umberto D*, is illustrative of this repressive agenda and was meant to be heeded by all neorealist filmmakers. The letter essentially condemned the neorealist practice of putting Italy’s social woes on display, adhering to the adage that it is always best not to air the nation’s dirty laundry in public. Placing the matter on the plane of national pride, Andreotti concluded that if Italy was judged abroad according to De Sica’s crude representations, then “De Sica avra’ reso un pessimo servizio alla sua patria.”<sup>53</sup> Still in 1952, in an interview by the weekly magazine *Oggi*, Andreotti clearly spelled out the new objectives of cinema: “Macché film realisti, facciamo film sulle virtù teologali e cardinali.”<sup>54</sup>

The pressure applied upon all levels of cinematic production did not have as its aim the total elimination of representations of social ills from public view, for it was precisely these representations that had enabled millions of Italians to see in cinema a major point of reference, ensuring that Italian cinema achieve such enormous success and ideological power. Rather, the aim of Andreottian cultural politics was to recast these representations through a sanitizing lens, preferring to transform rather than eliminate them. Hence, films appearing as vaguely neorealist actually served to shed a more benevolent light upon Italian institutions of power, which, it is always worth

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<sup>51</sup> Brunetta, *Storia cinema italiano*, 3, especially the chapter titled “La censura,” 73-96.

<sup>52</sup> Piesse (Paolo Salviucci), “Rassegna mensile,” *La Rivista del Cinematografo* XIX, no.3 (June 1946); quoted in Brunetta, *Storia cinema italiano*, 3, 105.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Brunetta, *Storia cinema italiano*, 3, 626.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 649.

remembering, had never been purged entirely of Fascist sympathies. As Brunetta observes,

Andreotti non vuole che ci sia immersione totale in realtà di cui si preferisce ignorare la profondità. Egli riveste il ruolo del super-io che impedisce il tentativo di discesa verso zone oscure del sociale che il fascismo non aveva mai voluto portare alla luce. La profilassi adottata è quella dell'isolamento, della disinfezione e della progressiva affermazione di realtà simili ma ripulite, purgate, più ricche di attrattive sessuali e povere di implicazioni ideologiche.<sup>55</sup>

This kind of authoritarianism prompted Soldati himself to observe “Oggi, a cinque anni dalla liberazione, è troppo difficile realizzare film che non siano conformisti e che attacchino, anche minimamente, la politica e la religione,” and producer Carlo Ponti to remark sardonically that “a pochi anni di distanza sarebbe impossibile realizzare *Roma città aperta*, poiché non sarebbe gradito ai tedeschi.”<sup>56</sup>

One of the most acute critiques of this transformation of neorealism under the DC's authoritarian cultural politics came from Marxist literary and film critic Carlo Muscetta. In a 1954 article titled “Cinema contrealista,”<sup>57</sup> Muscetta lambasted the light-hearted treatment of social issues in this phony version of neorealism. In films such as Luigi Zampa's *Vivere in pace* (also starring Aldo Fabrizi), the war came closer to being the subject of comedy than of drama. The neorealist themes of solidarity and human charity, emptied of their critical content, maintained only the outer shell of reality while preserving that “bucolic” and “cordial” tone that had formed the stock of many Fascist films. These “Jesuitical films” turned resistance values such as solidarity into Catholic doctrine while holding on to the formal, aesthetic motifs of neorealism. By presenting “reality” under a consoling, idyllic veneer, they used the silver screen to harmonize the tensions tearing at the seams of Italian society. Such films served up a reality that was deformed, where a persisting, cumbersome and decadent bourgeoisie was hidden from view while the proletariat made a “puppet” appearance only to confirm the clergy's leading role in the redemption of Italian society. Taking Luigi Comencini's tremendously successful *Pane amore e fantasia* (1953) as a case in point, Muscetta demonstrated how the very terms of social strife were inverted, mystified, until what remained was a parody of domination:

Che cosa accade nel famoso paesino dove c'è poco pane, molto amore e moltissima ‘fantasia’? I termini della realtà sono capovolti scherzosamente [...] Se vedete case distrutte voi pensate che si tratti di bombardamento. No, terremoto. E quando credete sia terremoto, no, si tratta di bombardamento. Ciò è comico nella forma più elementare e superficiale del comico, ma intanto serve benissimo a porre la guerra tra le calamità che il buon Dio ci riserva normalmente, e dinanzi a cui non c'è nulla da fare. Si muore a poco a poco? E che importa? L'importante è riderci su. Siamo in un centro rurale, ma nessuna di quelle questioni agrarie che in forme varie affliggono oggi la vita italiana affligge l'allegro

<sup>55</sup> Brunetta, *Storia cinema italiano*, 3, 77.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>57</sup> Muscetta's article first appeared in *Società*, April 1954, then in *Realismo, neorealismo, contrealismo* (Roma: Lucarini, 1990).

paesello. La terra è già tutta dei contadini e questo spiega (come dice il saggio parroco) la miseria generale. Se c'è miseria, ci saranno allora dei sovversivi? No, l'unica sovversiva è la Bersagliera, che con la sua bellezza procace insegna la modestia ai carabinieri e compromette l'avvenire della nipote dell'arciprete [...] Insomma qui il companatico di ogni immagine è la 'fantasia', come il volgo chiama l'immaginazione. Grazie ad essa uno può accontentarsi di mangiare solo pane e accompagnarlo con tutto ciò che egli si può liberamente inventare.”<sup>58</sup>

Muscetta's critique introduces the Gramscian concept of “transformism.” What was being transformed in these years was not just neorealist cinema but its socio-political referent. Neorealism's swift transformation from an instrument of social critique to one of social harmonization was a cultural weapon for mollifying political and intellectual dissidence and working class resentment. In Gramscian terms, “transformism” refers to the political absorption of the opposition into the dominant group until no real alternative remains to challenge the dominant group's hegemony. In the case of neorealism, we can see how its cooptation into a “rosy” version served an ideological function in the famed political transformism of the DC after the war, which managed to pull in the Left while holding fast onto the Right. As Muscetta concludes, “*Pane, amore e fantasia* fu messo in circolazione durante l'età [...] saturnina della distensione verbale e formale, dell'apertura a destra con le gentilezze a sinistra. Nacque così questo mitico, pacifico, divertente strapaesello.”<sup>59</sup> As Muscetta's clever use of the term “strapaesello” suggests, the transformation of neorealism is but one way in which the DC era formed a continuation of Fascism.

The pressures to transform neorealism from instrument of critique to mechanism for pacification can be observed in the film *Emigrantes*. Though emigration to South America in the late 1940s had become, as we shall see, a matter of heated controversy both in Italy and abroad, *Emigrantes* testifies to the preference among the nation's cultural and political leadership to allow certain versions of the issue to be filmed rather than none at all. Thus, while the film borrows some of its formal elements from neorealism, such as on location shooting, the use of Roman dialect, the concern with common subjects, and attention to a thorny social issue such as emigration, it nonetheless aims more to console public opinion about emigration than to inflame it. Poverty is depicted as part of the folklore, divested of all its squalor and indignity. Similarly, emigration is reduced to an episode in the lives of an impoverished but good-natured populace who confronts its miseries and the decision to emigrate with the same good humor required for a picnic in the countryside.

The motivations for depicting emigration, particularly to South America, in such a conciliatory light were undeniably political. In Italy as in Argentina and Brazil, the emigration of thousands of ex-hierarchs of the regime and of convicted war criminals was provoking episodes of dissent and violence. As *Fuga in Francia* had implied, the Vatican played no small role in providing such individuals with support in the form of money, fake passports, and even sanctuary within its seminaries and convents in South America. To cite only a few of the most notorious examples, this was the case with Tullio

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<sup>58</sup> Muscetta, “Cinema controrealista,” 266-267.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.



Tamburini, chief of police in the Republic of Salò, also known as “il grande bastonatore”; or with the *squadrista* and last acting secretary of the Fascist National Party, Carlo Scorza, whose close ties with “powerful friends” in the Vatican had once provoked Mussolini’s disapproval; or with Cesare Maria De Vecchi, “governor” of Somalia and Rhodes and ambassador to the Vatican; or with Minister Luigi Federzoni, after whose fate the Pope himself had enquired; or with chief of political investigations for the Republic of Salò, Gaio Gradenigo, also known as a “ferocious torturer.” The list of Fascist hierarchs and war criminals who were allowed to flee to South America thanks to the 1946 amnesty, not to mention the Vatican’s secret “road of the convents,” was really quite long, counting several thousands. Moreover, the movement of such individuals and their assets had far-reaching political implications, allowing for the strengthening of neo-Fascist movements in South America that in turn supported the neo-Fascist MSI party in Italy and continued to influence Italian politics for decades. While it is difficult to estimate how many Fascist hierarchs and war criminals were among the hundreds of thousands of Italians who crossed the ocean in search of work after the war, a general idea is provided by the successful campaign conducted in Brazil for the release of Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, “viceroy” of Ethiopia, where he was nicknamed “the butcher.” In any event, the massive influx of such individuals inevitably created friction within Italian communities abroad, where anti-Fascists and Jews had sought refuge precisely from the regime and its racial laws. However, their disapproval and the repeated objections of the Italian consular authorities in Argentina and Brazil were largely impotent against the Italian Foreign Ministry’s indifference and the Argentine government’s thirst for Italian ingenuity and money to industrialize and populate its country.<sup>60</sup>

Rather than condemning the impunity that emigration provided ex-hierarchs and war criminals, or the role of the Church in their escape, *Emigrantes* attempts to instill a conciliatory mood. The film’s timid and benevolent treatment of Fascist emigration is not surprising, given that one of the writers of the screenplay was Piero Ballerini, a filmmaker for the Republic of Salò. Early in the film, Fabrizi’s character, Giuseppe Borbone, and his friend Gigi unfold a map to show Giuseppe’s wife, Adele, where Argentina is. To judge the distance they must travel, she then asks where Italy is. A close-up of the map frames Giuseppe’s and Gigi’s fingers tracing a path over the ocean and then over Africa. Gigi observes, “Questa è la Libia,” to which Fabrizi adds, “Era grossa.” When their fingers reach Italy, they tell Adele, “Questa è l’Italia,” to which she exclaims, “Guarda l’Italia quant’è piccola!” Trying to assuage his wife’s fears over the excessive length of the voyage, Giuseppe replies, “E vabbè, è stampata male,” while Gigi adds, “Sono le solite prepotenze internazionali. C’arrimpiccioliscono pure sulle carte geografiche.” Though brief, this exchange is significant in framing the terms of the responsibility for postwar emigration to a peace accord interpreted as unfair because it stripped Italy of its colonies, including Libya. Having thus forced all the Italians to return to an Italy made “smaller,” it is this international bullying that is chiefly responsible for forcing the emigration of so many Italians.

The reference to Fascist emigration comes in the form of a mysterious character, played by a young Adolfo Celi, who poses as a carpenter in front of emigration

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<sup>60</sup> See Federica Bertagna, “Fascisti e collaborazionisti verso l’America (1945-1948),” in Bevilacqua, *Storia emigrazione italiana*.

authorities but whom all the other emigrants onboard the ship call “the Professor.” His erudition, sophisticated manners and cultured Italian are only a few of the clues that tell viewers he is not who he claims to be. The other emigrants regard him as an authority figure (hence the vague “Professor” title), hanging on his every word, which tends to come in the form of sermons. As the emigrants share their first meal on board, Giuseppe Borbone, Gigi, and a Neapolitan named Gennarino reflect on the circumstances pushing them to emigrate. If everyone had his piece of bread, Giuseppe claims, no one would need to go in search of it so far away from home. While this could have been the cue for an elaborate commentary on social inequality and its effects on Italian mass migration, the Professor’s sanctimonious reply arrives in time to nip any critical reflection in the bud: “Io credo che noi, da fuori della nostra patria, dobbiamo vedere in questo primo pane una promessa di lavoro e di pace. La vita in fondo non ha altra poesia.”

Borrowing from traditional emigration literature, the tension begins to build as the ship nears the Equator, coming to a climax as the emigrants cross over into the southern hemisphere. As in traditional emigration narratives, this is a moment of deep crisis marked by physical and mental anguish: Adele, who is pregnant, has gone into labor prematurely. Her labor pains are matched by psychological trauma when she learns that the baby will automatically be born an Argentine citizen since they are in international waters aboard an Argentine ship. Construing this as another act of international bullying, Adele complains about having her son “taken away” (i.e. not being given Italian citizenship) simply because they are under the Argentine flag. “Ce mettessero ’na bandiera italiana,” she explodes, “qui siamo settecento italiani e dieci argentini!” Giuseppe’s placating response is aimed at the audience more than at his wife: “Sai, infondo sarebbe bello averci un figlio estero. Se molti figli nascessero all’estero, si eviterebbero pure le guerre.” Emigration in other words emerges as an instrument to avoid putting “i figli contro i padri,” not only in war but also in the reckoning process that follows, when the younger generation might judge its elders’ adherence to the dictatorship. Emigration thus fulfills its role as a “release valve” in totality, not only for economic and political motives but also for ethico-ideological ones. As they cross the Equator and the Argentines hold a celebratory ball above deck, Adele goes into labor. The image of her pained face is superimposed with that of the Argentine flag flying on the mast of the ship, clearly rendering her anguish ideological as much as physical. The Professor efficiently intervenes to help deliver the baby, prompting the doctor to praise him later, telling the emigrants waiting outside – including Giuseppe – that they have the Professor to thank for the safe delivery of the baby. “L’ho sempre saputo io che non era un operaio, con quell’aria così distinta,” Gennarino claims. “Ho fatto molti mestieri,” the Professor admits, “tra i quali anche l’infermiere.” But the doctor interjects, “Altro che infermiere!” This exchange reinforces the impression that the Professor had held a position of authority during the regime, perhaps that of a doctor. While the film echoes traditional emigration narratives by depicting the trauma of separation from the nation (the crossing of the Equator), it also effortlessly incorporates the new iconography of the border-crossing by portraying this as predominantly a moment of birth, of national regeneration. Thus emigration no longer represents a form of death or a “blood-letting” of the nation but rather its opposite, a rebirth of the nation.

After the birth of the baby, Giuseppe and the Professor share a quiet moment above deck, looking out onto a still horizon. The peacefulness of the scene is suggestive

not only of the resolution of Adele's birthing crisis, but of the achievement of a much broader form of pacification. With considerable delicacy, Giuseppe asks, "Mi scusi tanto, ma lei chi è, che faceva?" The Professor's vague reply is a dismissal of the issue for the entire nation: "Lasciamo andare. Solo la prego di credere che non ho mai fatto male a nessuno."

The following scene, and the transition to it, are really the crux of the film. Before Giuseppe and the Professor have completely faded out, the next shot fades in, superimposing the image of a crucifix between the heads of the two men, suggesting a reconciliation through Catholicism has occurred, inaugurating a new era of peace in a divided nation. As the new shot fades in, the camera zooms out to encompass a priest performing mass above deck. The background hymn clues us in that this is a solemn occasion, which we are soon made to understand, from the Borbone family's proximity to the priest, that it is the newborn's baptism. However, standing closer to the priest, between the priest and the Borbone family, is the Professor. As with the Professor's "birthing" of the baby, this shot serves to reaffirm the leading role that old figures of authority should continue to exercise in Italian society. This scene has very little to do with the baptism of the baby, which is a private affair that would not have taken place for another couple of months, and everything to do with the absolution of the nation for its Fascist past and present. As the camera pans across the deck, we see that the occupants of the entire ship are present, like a microcosm of the Italian nation. In reverent silence, they listen to the priest's Latin chant, and in unison make the sign of the cross when the priest blesses them en-masse. The redemption of the nation, significantly occurring after the crossing of the Equator, is thus led by the Church, an interpretation confirmed by the priest's sanctimonious reply to Borbone's request to combine holy water they brought from Rome with the priest's Argentine holy water: "Tutte le patrie si riuniscono nell'infinita grandezza di Dio." As though to strengthen his words, the camera pans over the still crowd once more before tracking upward to take in the top of the ship's mast, shaped like a giant crucifix against a serene sky, as the chorus of emigrants pronounces its "Amen." The baptism represents the restabilization of a national identity that had entered into crisis, a crisis portrayed in the film in terms of a dispute over citizenship aboard a ship. Presided over by traditional figures of authority such as the Catholic Church and the Fascist hierarchy, this restabilization brings about a rebirth of the Italian nation.

### Conclusion

In the narratives examined here, crossing the border represents the renunciation of the past and the inauguration of a cleansed future. The emigrant and the child, those who "cross over" into a new moral dimension, are the figures invested with the power to rebuild the devastated ideology of the nation. While *Fuga in Francia* may not have gone far enough in denouncing Fascism as a mass movement involving the Italian populace at large rather than just a few leaders, *Emigrantes* actually represents a restoration of Right-wing power through a cultural politics of mystification, distortion, and amnesia. But the second film was made possible by the first. In the difference between these two films lies the "transformation" of neorealism, registering all that had changed, and at the same time all that had not changed enough, in Italian politics and culture in that intervening year. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx recalls Hegel's observation that

all grand historical events occur twice. He chides Hegel, however, for not having specified that the first time they occur as tragedy, the second time as farce. Marx's treatise is a brilliant reflection on the power of mass culture to supply ideological support for counter-revolutionary restoration. In the Italian postwar context, Marx's reflection suggests that the "rosy" variety of neorealism that parodied the wreckage bequeathed by Fascist domination, may have been, like Torre's figure in *Fuga in Francia*, the wolf in sheep's clothing. Under the guise of peace-maker, it helped to restore a right-wing interpretation of history and a conservative set of values perceived to be threatened by neorealism's disquietingly brutal gaze. But culture being more complex than dominant social forces tend to appreciate, not all of neorealism was cannibalized by its farcical version. Its most critical threads went underground, reemerging a decade later in the works of a second generation of filmmakers devoted to restoring neorealism's critical import. But that is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### ***LA FABBRICA DI ITALIANI: ECONOMIC MIRACLE, INTERNAL MIGRATION, AND NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION***

The rhetorical crossing of spatio-temporal and moral frontiers in the immediate postwar period had failed to provide a lasting solution to Italy's historical crisis of national identity by the time the nation headed into the so-called economic "miracle."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this identity crisis developed into outright trauma as the Italian national imaginary strove to keep pace with sweeping socio-economic changes. Intensive urbanization and industrialization literally changed the face of cities like Rome and Milan, while increased mobility and transportation, Americanization, and the proliferation of the culture industry reflected and at the same time facilitated the explosion of consumer culture. As the reorganization of capital around consumption, neocapitalism demonstrated its novelty in the intensive propagation of commodification itself: as every aspect of social life, including culture, became a product, Italy was transformed into a society of mass consumption.<sup>2</sup>

Emigration once again came to play a fundamental role in defining the Italian nation, acting as both cause and effect of the economic miracle. Moving from country to city, from South to North, millions of Italians changed their way of life and literally reshaped the face of the nation overnight. For many Italians, the unprecedented encounter with populations from diverse and distant regions of the peninsula produced a profound

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<sup>1</sup> The conventional dates of the "miracle" are from 1958 to 1963.

<sup>2</sup> While I use the term "neo-capitalism" throughout this chapter to signal the novelties of capitalist expansion in the context of postwar Italy, I identify it with the definition of "late capitalism" developed by the economist Ernest Mandel in his postwar analysis of the new global form of capitalism. Whereas Marx had theorized the evolution of "classical" (market) capitalism and Lenin had identified a second stage in "monopoly" (imperialist) capitalism, Mandel saw capitalism in postwar society as having entered a third stage, which he called "late" capitalism, to emphasize not a rupture with previous forms of capitalistic expansion but rather an intensification and all-pervasiveness that rendered it the most "pure" form. In Mandel's argument, late capitalism is the stage in which capital comes to colonize previously untouched areas, exploding into mass consumption mode. Fredric Jameson credits Mandel's scheme as having been very influential in his own conceptualization of postmodernism as the "cultural logic" of late capitalism. See Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1975), and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 35-6.

shock. This was due in large measure to the fact that the imaginary borders once separating the nation from its internal Others had suddenly shifted, as a consequence of internal migration, to within very close proximity of the urban centers of the modern nation, triggering the need to construct new “fronts” beyond which to dislocate the nation’s figures of alterity.

Though emigration to Europe, the Americas and Australia continued throughout the economic miracle, the more massive phenomenon of internal migration proved exceptionally fruitful for the figurative reproduction of the nation, generating a discursive field that employed both spatial and temporal markers to produce an image of Italy as finally “modern.” Engaging with influential sociological texts and key cinematic works by Luchino Visconti and Pier Paolo Pasolini, this chapter will examine the function of internal migration in redefining Italian national identity during this crucial period of the nation’s history.

### The Economic “Miracle”

On the eve of the economic miracle, Italy was still predominantly a nation of peasants. With the exception of a few large cities concentrated mainly in the northwest corner of the peninsula, Italy remained a pre-industrial nation. Yet between 1958 and 1963, Italy became one of the world’s largest industrial powers, and its socio-cultural structure was forever altered as the country went through nothing short of an industrial revolution.<sup>3</sup> The effect upon the Italian population was dramatic, for it was given very little time to become accustomed to the drastic social and cultural changes that accompanied the economic boom. This rapid process of transformation was rendered even more striking by the massive flow of internal migration that moved much of the countryside into the industrial cities, for the first time bringing into contact urban residents with a rural population consistently represented as pre-modern.

Italy’s “miraculous” economic expansion can be explained in part by the reorientation of industrial production towards international trade and the intensification of production for mass markets (including ex-colonies), which was common to all the European countries experiencing a postwar economic boom.<sup>4</sup> Abandoning autarchic<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a general overview of Italian industrialization during the miracle, see Russell King, *The Industrial Geography of Italy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), and George Hildebrand, *Growth and Structure in the Economy of Modern Italy* (London: Harvard University Press, 1965), which pays particular attention to the fiscal policies that contributed to Italian economic growth.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Laqueur’s *Europe in Our Time: A History 1945-1992* (New York: Penguin, 1993) provides a comparative view of Italy’s “stormy” growth within the broader context of political and economic change in both Western and Eastern Europe. Interestingly, in *The European Economy Since 1945: Coordinated Capitalism and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), Barry Eichengreen explains Europe’s extraordinary economic recovery in terms of some of its historical institutions, such as trade unions and other solidarity-based associations.

<sup>5</sup> “Autarchy” refers to economic and cultural policies of self-sufficiency enacted by the Fascist regime after the League of Nations placed economic sanctions upon Italy in 1935 for its invasion of Ethiopia. In cultural and economic terms, autarchy signified the reduction of exchange with foreign products and ideas, though of course this campaign was fraught with considerable contradictions. See Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 135-8. Richard J. Bosworth discusses autarchy in the context of a drift towards a war economy in *Mussolini’s Italy* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 312-313; while Barbara Spackman examines the role of autarchy in the economy of the regime’s colonial discourse in *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 130, 172.

modes of production, Italy entered the export-driven economy by providing the European liberal market first with foodstuffs and textiles and then with plastics, petrochemicals, precision tools, and electric appliances. In little more than a decade, Italy went from being one of the most industrially underdeveloped nations of Europe to becoming one of its leading economic powers.<sup>6</sup>

The magnitude of Italy's industrial expansion in these years is indeed staggering. Between 1952 and 1970, the average income of Italians increased more than 130%. During the same time period, the increase for France and England was of 36% and 32%, respectively.<sup>7</sup> The manufacturing of appliances is symptomatic of this expansion: while Italy produced only 18,500 refrigerators in 1951, by 1957 this number had grown to 370,000, and by 1967 it had reached 3,200,000, making Italy the third largest producer of refrigerators in the world after the United States and Japan. Italy also became the largest producer of washing-machines and dish-washers in Europe, with Candy producing one washing-machine every fifteen seconds.<sup>8</sup> As Italians' income rose, so too did their consumption of these products. In just four years, from 1959 to 1963, automobile purchases rose by over a 500%, refrigerators by 400%, and televisions, which had been only 88,000 in 1954, reached 634,000 units – a 720% increase.<sup>9</sup>

Astounding as such figures may be, however, it is important to keep in mind that they are not indicative of actual *social* development: if we look beyond how much was produced to consider *what* was produced, we can see that one of the central aspects of Italy's economic miracle was the production of goods for *private* consumption. The introduction of laissez-faire capitalism was centered upon models of consumption that were individual and familial and that entailed a general retreat of state spending that often left collective, social needs unfulfilled<sup>10</sup>. General income may have increased, as did the wealth of some Italians – but the gap between rich and poor actually widened as entire sectors of the population and regions of the country were excluded from this “miracle.”

As Luciano Bianciardi sardonically reflected in his desecrating novel on the economic miracle, *La vita agra* (1962),

È aumentata la produzione lorda e netta, il reddito nazionale cumulativo e pro capite, l'occupazione assoluta e relativa, il numero delle auto in circolazione e degli elettrodomestici in funzione, la tariffa delle ragazze squillo, la paga oraria, il biglietto del tram e il totale dei circolanti su detto mezzo, il consumo del pollame, il tasso di sconto, l'età media, la statura media, la valetudinarietà media, la produttività media e la media oraria al giro d'Italia [...] Io mi oppongo. Quassù io ero venuto non per far crescere le medie e i bisogni, ma

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<sup>6</sup> See King, *Industrial Geography*, 69-79; and Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics 1943-1988* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 210-17.

<sup>7</sup> Giulio Sapelli, *Modernizzazione senza sviluppo. Il capitalismo secondo Pasolini* (Milano: Mondadori, 2005), 28.

<sup>8</sup> Ginsborg, *History*, 215.

<sup>9</sup> Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano* (Roma: Donzelli, 2005), 87.

<sup>10</sup> While Crainz takes issue with this summary judgment (xiii), recognizing important instances of state intervention in areas such as the agrarian reform and the spread of public education, my judgment is centered on the Republic's “laissez-faire” approach to the public sector, which included health, housing, and education, not to mention the problem of unemployment, all of which were aggravated by regional discrepancies and mass emigration.

per distruggere il torraccione di vetro e cemento, con tutte le umane relazioni che ci stanno dentro.<sup>11</sup>

The “glass tower” Bianciardi’s character wanted to blow up was the headquarters of petrochemical giant Montecatini (later to become Montedison), so representative of Italy’s miracle but also of the corporate greed that caused the death of 43 miners in 1954.

Most important for our purposes here, however, is that the complacent recording of averages and percentages dissimulates the reproduction of structural inequality between North and South. While the Republic abandoned autarchic models of industrial production in the North, it left the Fascist regime’s program of forced ruralization largely unchanged in the South, thereby reconfirming the long-standing institutionalization of inequality. Elsewhere in Europe, industrialization had introduced the mechanization of the countryside, the rationalization of farming methods, and an intensification of agricultural production that called for a gradual redistribution of the population to agriculturally more productive areas. While this process had occurred in the northern countryside, where the rural population had been largely incorporated within the industrialization process, creating a mixed society of “contadini-operai,” it had been all but absent in the South.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, rather than resemble the migratory movements generally associated with an industrial revolution, the abandonment of the southern countryside that began in the mid 1950s assumed the aspect and proportions of a mass evacuation.

The origins of this “forced migration,” as some scholars have called it,<sup>13</sup> are intrinsically tied to the birth of capitalism in Italy, which only fully takes off in this period of postwar industrialization. More importantly, its rootedness in the forced ruralization and de-industrialization<sup>14</sup> of the South, which began under unitary government but intensified during the Fascist regime and was perpetuated by the postwar

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<sup>11</sup> Luciano Bianciardi, *La vita agra* (Milano: Bompiani, 2006), 158.

<sup>12</sup>The foundational historical text on Italian agrarian capitalism is Emilio Sereni’s *Il capitalismo nelle campagne (1860-1900)* (Torino: Einaudi, 1947), which traced the unevenness of Italy’s industrial development to the lack of a capitalist revolution of agricultural processes. For more recent accounts, see Camillo Daneo’s *Agricoltura e sviluppo capitalistico in Italia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1969) and *Breve storia dell’agricoltura italiana* (Milano: Mondadori, 1980); Corrado Barberis, *Gli operai contadini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1970), and the collection of essays in Angelo Varni, ed., *La campagna a vapore. La meccanizzazione agricola nella Pianura Padana* (Rovigo: Associazione Culturale Minelliana, 1990). For more comprehensive histories of Italian agriculture, see Piero Bevilacqua, ed., *Storia dell’agricoltura italiana in età contemporanea* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1991); and Pier Paolo D’Atto and Alberto De Bernardi, eds., *Studi sull’agricoltura italiana. Società rurale e modernizzazione* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> See Franco Alasia and Danilo Montaldi, *Milano, Corea: inchiesta sugli immigrati* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1960); and Alvo Fontani, *Gli emigrati. L’altra faccia del “miracolo economico”* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1962).

<sup>14</sup>In their inquiry into the causes of internal migration, Alasia and Montaldi noted that economic depression in the South was to be considered “piuttosto come prodotto dal divenire capitalistico nazionale che come eredità di una situazione economica pre-mercantile. È noto quanto sia stata negativa l’influenza dell’Unità nazionale nei confronti dell’industria del Sud, come ne abbia provocato lo smantellamento e la decadenza. Tuttavia la diffusa concezione di un Sud semi-feudale è uno dei più grotteschi prodotti della consapevole ignoranza inaugurata dalla cultura riformista e da ciò che in Italia è consueto denominare come ‘ideologia dei monopoli’[...] È sotto il profilo dello sviluppo del capitalismo nazionale che vanno considerati gli effetti della mancata industrializzazione a Sud del Paese.” Alasia and Montaldi, *Milano, Corea*, 17. A similar argument was advanced in his study on the causes of southern emigration by Fontani, *Gli emigrati*, 71-72, and by Giuseppe Galasso in “Migrazioni e insediamenti nell’Italia meridionale,” *Nord e Sud* VI, no.50 (1959).



Republic,<sup>15</sup> suggests a historic reliance of Italian “free market” capitalism upon the strengthening of industrial monopolies and the elimination of competition.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, de-industrialization and the creation of a “captive” (subservient) market is the very archetype of colonial political economy. A classic example of this model was set by British imperial rule in India, where a process of de-industrialization of India’s urban industry was carried out through a tariff policy known as “one-way free trade” that rendered the Indian market reliant on British manufacturing exports.<sup>17</sup> In his enormously influential essay, “The Development of Underdevelopment” (1966), economist Andre Gunder Frank separated “undevelopment,” which is a natural state, from “underdevelopment,” which instead forcibly creates backwardness, arguing that “underdevelopment is not due to the survival of archaic institutions and the existence of capital shortage in regions that have remained isolated from the stream of world history. On the contrary, underdevelopment was and still is generated by the very same historical process which also generated economic development: the development of capitalism itself.”<sup>18</sup>

Frank’s analysis, which was later worked out in what has come to be known as “dependency theory,” could not be more relevant to the Italian case. The creation of underdevelopment was in fact the very basis of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of the Southern Question. As he argued in *Some Aspects of the Southern Question* (1926), the disparities between North and South were not due to some inherent backwardness of the latter, but rather to the fact that “the Northern bourgeoisie has subjugated the South of Italy and the Islands, and reduced them to exploitable colonies.”<sup>19</sup> The result of northern capitalist exploitation, southern “inferiority” could only be overcome through concerted political struggle by an alliance of northern workers and southern peasants. Only this “national-popular alliance,” as Gramsci called it, could ultimately emancipate both classes. More

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<sup>15</sup>While from 1871 to 1936 the national average saw a decrease of the population employed in the “primary” sectors of agriculture, hunting and fishing from 58% to 48%, in the South this increased from 56% to 59%. For the same period, against a national increase of those employed in industry from 22% to 29%, in the South there was a decrease from 23% to 22%. See Alasia and Montaldi, *Milano, Corea*, 22. From 1936 to the 1950s, while the tendency in the South follows the same direction of that in the North, its “pace” is practically non-existent: from 1936 to 1951, the percentage of the northern population employed in agriculture dropped from 42% to 33%, in the South the decrease was from 58% to 57%; and while the northern population employed in industry between 1936 and 1951 rose from 35% to 40%, in the South the rise was from 21% to 23% in the entire quarter century that ran from 1936 to 1960, at the height of the boom. See Goffredo Fofi, *L’immigrazione meridionale a Torino* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1964), 23.

<sup>16</sup>It is interesting to note that, in his urgent argument for African colonization, the nationalist Enrico Corradini inadvertently pointed to the need, for northern capitalist interests, to prevent the industrialization of the South: “se pensiamo ad un Mezzogiorno industrializzato, tanto più dobbiamo pensare a provvederci, quando l’occasione ci si porga, d’uno sbocco nostro in Affrica; ci debbono pensare il Nord e il Sud: il Sud, perchè i prodotti delle sue industrie difficilmente potrebbero risalire verso il Nord e superarlo; il Nord perchè nel Sud industrializzato avrebbe perduto il suo primo cliente, non solo, ma anche enterebbe con esso in concorrenza, dentro i confini dell’Italia chiusa e soffocata fra i suoi tre mari.” Enrico Corradini, *L’ora di Tripoli* (Milano: Treves, 1911), 230.

<sup>17</sup>See Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Political Economy of Underdevelopment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Robert I. Rhodes, ed., *Imperialism and Underdevelopment: A Reader* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970).

<sup>18</sup>Andre Gunder Frank, “The Development of Underdevelopment,” in *Paradigms in Economic Development: Classic Perspectives, Critiques, and Reflections*, ed. Rajani K. Kanth (New York: M.E. Sharp, 1994), 153.

<sup>19</sup>Antonio Gramsci, “Some Aspects of the Southern Question,” in *An Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 171.

than thirty years after Gramsci's impassioned argument, institutionalized inequality was still feeding northern industrial growth while preserving a colonial system of exploitation in the South, which was to remain a captive market for northern industry rather than become a potential competitor. According to postwar economist Vera Lutz, whose neoliberal theories were often adopted by the Banca Centrale d'Italia, it would have been too "dangerous" and a waste of resources to attempt to bridge the gap between North and South. Rather, Italy should have pursued a "dual" system of "unequal development," which included instituting different salaries for North and South and encouraging emigration from the South to mitigate the social pressures caused by high unemployment. In Lutz's view, the economy of the South had to be driven by emigrants' remittances and the export of agricultural products to a Mediterranean market, devolving the presumed rise in income to the consumption of northern industrial goods.<sup>20</sup>

Italian politicians needed southern votes, however, which they could only win by promising a sweeping agrarian reform and a program of assistance for the South. In 1950, these promises resulted in the Agrarian Reform and the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno*, a state-run "fund for the South" that, on paper at least, was supposed to provide investment assistance in and for the South. Appropriating an important part the Communist Party's agenda, the Christian Democrats made these reforms part of their campaign and won the 1948 elections. Both financially rooted in the ERP (European Recovery Program, or "Marshall Plan"), the Agrarian Reform and the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* were also expected to curtail Communist sympathies and quell the peasant agitations and land occupations that had rocked the South in the postwar years.<sup>21</sup> In practice, however, they proved instrumental in consolidating rather than eliminating the economic disparity between North and South, prompting Giorgio Napolitano to claim in 1961 that "the widening of the gap between North and South did not occur *in spite* of the government's politics for the South, but *thanks* to it."<sup>22</sup>

As part of the agrarian reform, over 700,000 hectares of abandoned or "unimproved" land were expropriated and redistributed to some 120,000 peasant families, while landowners were compensated by the state in the form of government bonds. The land was not given to the peasants for free, however, for they had to pay for

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<sup>20</sup> Vera Lutz, *Italy: A Study in Economic Development* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>21</sup> Paolo Cinanni, "La scelta del governo italiano nel secondo dopoguerra," *Il Ponte* XXX, no. 11-12 (1974): 1348. For an overview in English of the Agrarian Reform, see Russell King, *Land Reform: The Italian Experience* (London: Butterworth, 1973). One of the staunchest advocates of the reform was the southern economist and politician Manlio Rossi-Doria, who explicated his position in *Riforma agraria e azione meridionalista* (Napoli: L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2003); while historian and politician Rosario Villari discussed the reform with respect to the emigration question in "La crisi del blocco agrario," in *Istituto Gramsci, Togliatti e il Mezzogiorno, I*, ed. Franco De Felice (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1977). State intervention in southern postwar economy forms the subject of Giuseppe Barone's "Stato e Mezzogiorno (1943-1960). Il 'primo tempo' dell'intervento straordinario," in *Storia dell'Italia Repubblicana, I* (Torino: Einaudi, 1994), as is Nicola Maria Boccella's *Il Mezzogiorno sussidiato: reddito, prodotto e trasferimenti alle famiglie nei comuni meridionali* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1982), while Giovanni Russo's *Baroni e contadini* (Bari: Laterza, 1955) describes life in southern rural villages in the first half of the 1950s, where the effects of the Agrarian Reform and the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* intersect with popular memory of peasant land struggles. For a wealth of information on the European Recovery Program, see the work of Marshall Plan historian David Ellwood, especially *Rebuilding Europe: Western Europe, America, and Postwar Reconstruction* (New York: Longman, , 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Fontani, *Gli emigrati*, 75.

the land in yearly instalments for the next 30 years. Needless to say, the land expropriated was grossly insufficient to satisfy the masses of landless peasants in the South. Moreover, much of the land allotted for redistribution had been abandoned and unimproved for a reason, as it was located in mountainous or infertile areas with scarce or no irrigation. Though the reform boards were supposed to provide peasants with assistance in irrigation, housing, credit, and other technical matters, their assistance was applied very unevenly, so that only land allotments considered most profitable – a miniscule minority – were given assistance. The reform boards themselves, far from carrying out the democratic ideals of the reform, discriminated against peasants believed to be Communist militants or to have taken part in the land occupation movement. Moreover, the peasants were given no representation on the reform boards, which were controlled by local magnates and DC representatives. A case in point was in an area of Calabria, where one of the great landowners affected by the reform, a relative of the Marquis of Tropea, not only sat on the reform board but became its president. Continuing with the example of Calabria, only 15 per cent of the area to be reformed was actually expropriated, and of that, only some 10 per cent was located in the fertile coastal plains. Moreover, the agrarian reform only dealt with the issue of land redistribution, leaving untouched all other agrarian issues in need of redress, such as labor contracts, land improvement, and labor conditions and wages.<sup>23</sup>

As for the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, the emphasis was on agriculture, as its chief features were financing irrigation and land reclamation projects, road building, and infrastructural construction. Industrialization, on the other hand, only constituted around 12% of its spending. “Such a choice also suited the interests of northern industry,” Ginsborg has noted, given that it “provided the heavy machinery and materials needed for infrastructural construction.”<sup>24</sup> In 1960, a Parliamentary Committee on the South published a report on the Cassa’s achievements 10 years after its creation. It found that income remained shockingly low and that in both agriculture and industry, the regions of the South were at a standstill: from 1951 to 1959, industrial production had increased from 14.9% to 15.1%. This negligible growth was moreover due to the construction sector, and not the crucial manufacturing sector, which had instead declined from 14.9% to 12.7%.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, far from bridging the gap between North and South, the Agrarian Reform and Cassa per il Mezzogiorno served to cement it, especially in the critical years of Italian economic growth. By leaving the ownership of the means of production largely intact, these state programs continually reproduced the South’s “underdevelopment.”

### Internal Migration

Not surprisingly, poverty and unemployment in the South continued to soar to alarming rates. As the 1954 parliamentary inquest on poverty demonstrated, 85% of Italy’s poverty-stricken families were to be found in the South.<sup>26</sup> Emigration, by now a

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<sup>23</sup> Ginsborg, *History*, 131-38. See also Giuseppe Galasso, *La riforma agraria in Calabria* (Roma: Opere Nuove, 1958).

<sup>24</sup> Ginsborg, *History*, 162.

<sup>25</sup> *Relazione del presidente del Comitato dei ministri per il mezzogiorno*, quoted in Fontani, *Gli emigrati*, 71-72.

<sup>26</sup> Ginsborg, *History*, 122.

consolidated Italian tradition, remained the only viable alternative to certain poverty. In spite of Italy's miraculous takeoff, therefore, emigration abroad increased from 347,000 persons per year in the mid 1950s to an average of 388,000 persons between 1958 and 1963<sup>27</sup>. Italy was the only "booming" country in Europe with such a population loss, as other expanding economies in Europe needed all the labor they could get: Germany absorbed the greatest share, but Switzerland, France and Belgium also experienced mass immigration – from Italy *in primis*.<sup>28</sup>

Yet foreign migration during these years pales by comparison with the internal migration movement flowing mostly from South to North. Between 1955 and 1970, over 9 million Italians migrated from one region to another. In the North, migration entailed movement from the rural areas (especially of the Veneto) to the Industrial Triangle of the northwest. In the Center it consisted largely of movement from countryside to city within the same region. But in the South migration was a veritable exodus from the entire southern half of the peninsula.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, in contrast to other forms of postwar migration (transcontinental and European), internal migration involved entire families and was permanent. Hence, in both size and duration it proved to be the most massive migration experience to affect southern Italy.

Unlike the immediate postwar years, the Italian government took no part in officially encouraging or administering this migration flow. However, given the persistent difficulties of life in the South, the population awaited neither assistance nor endorsement by the government. Yet even the "solution" provided by internal migration was fraught with obstacles, not least of which was the 1939 Fascist law against urbanization. Part of the "back to the earth" mythology<sup>30</sup> that had accompanied the regime's culture of autarchy, the anti-urbanization law was essentially a protectionist measure intended to shield northern industrial workers from rural migration by redirecting the latter to its imperial wars instead. The law worked like a "catch 22": in order for emigrants to officially change their place of residence, without which they could not have full access to government housing, schooling and health care programs, the emigrants had to demonstrate to have secured employment in the new place of residence; yet in order for them to be hired by an employer, they must already be officially resident.<sup>31</sup>

Until its repeal in 1961, the anti-urbanization law was the single greatest stress factor afflicting emigrants. Their position with respect to this law determined every aspect of their lives, from housing to employment to their chances of being joined by

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<sup>27</sup> Enrico Pugliese, *L'Italia tra migrazioni internazionali e migrazioni interne* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 27.

<sup>28</sup> Colucci, Michele. *Lavoro in movimento* (Roma: Donzelli, 2008), 135-223.

<sup>29</sup> See Pugliese, *L'Italia*, 41-54; Fofi, *L'immigrazione*, 17; and Ugo Ascoli, *Movimenti migratori in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979), 111.

<sup>30</sup> The "back to the earth" movement was an anti-modern ruralization campaign that included the battle for wheat, land reclamation programs, and laws against the movement of people from rural to urban areas. Such a "return to the land," it was argued – by Mussolini especially ("we must ruralize Italy, even if it needs millions and takes half a century") – could combat the sterile effects of modern industrial society and restore the supposedly healthy qualities of a rural lifestyle. See Paul Corner, "Fascist agrarian policy and the Italian economy in the inter-war years," in *Gramsci and Italy's Passive Revolution*, ed. John A. Davis (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 241.

<sup>31</sup> See Carl Ipsen. *Dictating Demography: The Problem of Population in Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 117-18.

their families. In all aspects that mattered, the law effectively excluded migrants from any kind of integration – social, political or cultural. The anti-urbanization law kept them in a permanent state of “irregularity.” When asked what residency accomplished and why they desired it, most emigrants referred to the importance for them of becoming a “regularized” component of the local society. Other considerations, like qualifying for government assistance programs or being able to vote, while important, were secondary to their need to “be in the law” (“essere in regola”). Acquiring residency amounted to nothing less than being officially recognized as a citizen and thus obtaining equality at least before the law.<sup>32</sup> If finding work and having their families join them in the North was the first battle the emigrants won within the miracle society, the obtainment of residency was the crowning achievement; it was the single most important instrument in their efforts to leave the margins and enter the metropole’s centrifugal force.

Yet for almost the entire duration of the economic miracle, the anti-urbanization law ensured that millions of emigrants, given their clandestine condition, were excluded from mainstream society and constituted the most exploitable sector of the working population. Indeed, one is led to wonder if Italy’s economic recovery would have been quite so miraculous were it not for the precarious condition of so much of its working class. Most southern emigrants, finding themselves in a position of illegality and lacking qualified skills as well as labor union representation, often filled the hardest labor positions, especially in the building industry. Moreover, their flooding of the labor market also weakened the bargaining power of the local “official” workers, aggravating the already existing anti-southern discrimination.<sup>33</sup> In essence, the economic miracle could not have taken place without the competitiveness that a vast supply of cheap labor guaranteed northern industry. The South’s poverty, work hunger and migration was thus as much a motor of the economic miracle as it was an effect.

### The Nation and the Internal Other

Internal migration was not instrumental only for the nation’s industrial production but also for its figurative reproduction. Predictably, Italy’s anxiety to achieve the long overdue status of a “modern,” prosperous nation drove it to define itself once more through the foil of “backwardness” traditionally allotted to the South. Consequently, the emigrant figure registered an important shift: gone was that redemptive function so crucial to Italy’s postwar material and moral reconstruction. The emigrants, especially if from the South, returned to serve as the negation of modernity. With their poverty and “backwardness,” southern emigrants represented what the modern sector of Italy was no longer – a nation of peasants. Already marginalized socially and economically, migrants were also pushed out of the nation’s imaginary borders through a process of displacement that was both spatial and temporal.

With the advent of internal migration, the imaginary borders demarcating the modern nation had shifted accordingly. Where once they were perceived as lying along the Alps or in some vague spot south of Rome (let us recall that for Carlo Levi Christ had

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<sup>32</sup> Fofi, *L’immigrazione*, 111.

<sup>33</sup> A precedent for today’s Northern League can be found in Turin as early as 1956, with the formation of an extreme-Right political movement, the “Movimento per l’Autonomia della Regione Piemontese,” that used “local pride” rhetoric to predicate virulent anti-southernism. See Alasia and Montaldi, *Milano, Corea*, 33.

stopped at Eboli), the “front” of modernity now rose up around the burgeoning cities of Italy, especially in the industrial North. The movement from colonial periphery to center was akin to what was taking place in other European nations in the aftermath of World War II with respect to their former colonies. In “The National Longing for Form,” Timothy Brennan has pointed out that “the wave of postwar immigration to the imperial ‘centers’ – including in England the influx of large numbers of non-white people from Africa and the Caribbean, and in America, from Asia and Latin America – amounted to what Gordon Lewis calls ‘a colonialism in reverse’ – a new sense of what it means to be ‘English’. To a lesser extent, the same has happened in France.”<sup>34</sup> We can extend Brennan’s observation to postwar Italy as well, interpreting internal migration as the movement of the nation’s internal colonial Other from margin to center. Here, the emigrants’ alterity was constructed through a clear demarcation of territory: the more the cities to which migrants converged were contrasted against the cordons of shanty towns they inhabited, the more these metropolises found and constructed the visual confirmation of their modernity.

These ghettos appeared almost overnight as the peasantry abandoned the countryside en-masse and poured into urban centers. Though between 1951 and 1961 Italy’s population increased by 3 million, in the same time span 70 percent of its communes registered a population decline. However, between 1951 and 1971, the number of *city* dwellers almost doubled, growing from 9 million to 16 million. In Genoa and Turin, southern emigrants would arrive at 9:50 every morning on the *treno del sole* (“the sunshine train”), from which young workers would be hired by shrewd recruiters waiting for them on the platform. Typically filled to overflowing, during the busier months there would be another one arriving ten minutes later.<sup>35</sup>

Not all of Italy’s urban growth was due to industrialization, however. Often, the migrants’ abandonment of the peasant way of life did not spell immediate entry into the industrial world. In the North, the jobs offered by industry, especially big industry, were typically filled by northern workers first; it was the jobs vacated by these, sometimes in agriculture, but for the most part in construction work or other hard manual labor, that the largely unqualified southern emigrants filled. In addition to the industrial cities of the North, the provincial and regional capitals of Italy that served as bureaucratic and administrative hubs, such as Rome but also other cities of the South such as Naples, Bari, Palermo, and so on, also witnessed an incredible population growth.

Between 1871 and 1961, the population of Rome had increased from 250,000 to 2 million.<sup>36</sup> However, this growth was not due to industrialization, for Rome had been kept intentionally devoid of industries for social rather than for economic reasons. As Quintino Sella, minister of finance and staunch supporter of making Rome Italy’s capital, once declared in a Parliamentary speech, “io ho sempre desiderato che sia in Roma la parte direttiva, la parte intellettuale, ma non ho mai desiderato che vi siano grandi agglomerazioni di operai . In una soverchia agglomerazione di operai in Roma io vedrei un inconveniente, perché credo che qui [...] non sarebbero opportuni gli impeti popolari

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<sup>34</sup> Timothy Brennan, “The National Longing for Form,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1999), 47.

<sup>35</sup> Fofi, *L’immigrazione*, 99-104.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

di grandi masse di operai.”<sup>37</sup> By the time the Fascists seized power, the *sventramenti* took care to also remove much of the subproletariat from the city center.<sup>38</sup> Left homeless, these residents were relocated to the periphery in housing complexes built especially for them, the so-called *borgate*, which take their name from the self-sufficient country boroughs they were meant to emulate. The *borgate* remained the most significant element of the expansion of Rome’s population, both before and after the war.

After 1948, the *borgate* continued to be built to house a veritable army of construction workers needed for the city’s expansion as well as to absorb the influx of emigrants moving to Rome from the South and the surrounding countryside. The *borgate* thus became the very symbol of the rural migration to Rome, and typically formed a chain of slums surrounding the city like an enormous ring. This was where most of the “unofficial” and legally “irregular” population settled.

For the most part, however, the great majority of rural migrants moved to the industrial cities of the North.<sup>39</sup> Yet Italy’s major cities were caught unprepared by this population explosion, and demonstrated gross inefficiency in providing adequate housing solutions. In some cases, the unpreparedness was intentional, a result of pressures exerted upon local governments by industrial monopolies that had much to gain from maintaining a wide sector of the population in precarious, and thus highly exploitable, conditions.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the willingness of the weaker sections of the labor force to fill in during strike actions conveniently curtailed the bargaining power of local workers, further increasing industries’ profit margins.

In Genoa, emigrants made up nearly 70% of the population living in the shantytowns mushrooming around the city.<sup>41</sup> In Turin, most immigrants settled in the neighborhood of Porta Palazzo, in the attics and basements vacated by the local inhabitants who had moved to the suburbs. Most immigrants were part of a migration chain: they arrived already knowing friends or relatives who had preceded them and who could offer hospitality for a few days until they found their own accommodation. But housing in Turin became progressively more expensive and difficult to find as migration

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<sup>37</sup> *Discorsi parlamentari di Quintino Sella*, II, quoted in Fofi, *L’immigrazione*, 26-27.

<sup>38</sup> “Sventramento” literally means “gutting out.” Beginning in 1931, an entire medieval quarter in the center of Rome was demolished in order to open up a more majestic vista onto Rome’s imperial past. A road was built, Via dell’Impero (today Via dei Fori Imperiali), running through the ancient imperial forums, connecting Piazza Venezia, with its monument to Victor Emmanuel and the Fascist headquarters, to the Coliseum in a grandiose trajectory that also served to visually and ideologically connect the grandeur of Rome’s imperial past to the aims of the Fascist state. For more on this aspect of the Fascist era, see Antonio Cederna, *Mussolini urbanista: lo sventramento di Roma negli anni del consenso* (Bari: Laterza, 1980).

<sup>39</sup> In absolute numbers, the regions that lost most residents were Puglia, Sicily and Campania, while those who lost the greatest percentage of their population were Puglia, Abruzzi, Molise, Basilicata, and Calabria. See Fofi, *L’immigrazione*, 20. As limited as vital statistics calculations were for indicating the actual size of the internal migration flow, their figures at the end of 1958 still manage to convey the enormity of this phenomenon: On the positive end of the balance, the chief regions registering new residency requests were Liguria (+36.5%), Valle d’Aosta (+30%), Lombardy (+21.5%), Piedmont (+19.7%), and Lazio (+17.4%). On the negative end, the chief regions registering residency cancellations were Calabria (-40.3%), Basilicata (-35.3%), Puglia (-31.4%), Abruzzo and Molise (-31.1%), Veneto (-23.3%), Sicily (-20.9%), Friuli-Venezia Giulia (-11.4%), Marches (-17.6%), Umbria (-14.6%), and Campania (-14.5%). See Alasia and Montaldi, *Milano, Corea*, 38.

<sup>40</sup> Fofi, *L’immigrazione*, 32-33.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

eventually filled all available space. With increasing frequency, new arrivals ended up in pensions or taverns that catered to them, or, if they ran out of money, on a bench at the train station, where they staved off the guards with a ticket to the next town. During the summer months, when even station benches came in short supply, emigrants sometimes slept in the park.<sup>42</sup> By 1960, it had become virtually impossible to find any sort of housing in the saturated market, and nearby neighborhoods had already made it clear that southerners were not welcome.

Unless electorally motivated, Italian government officials' attention to internal migration tended to be minimal. Within intellectual circles, journalistic inquests paid much greater attention to the phenomenon. Of these, two texts in particular were fundamental for shaping public opinion on the matter. Composed partly of interviews conducted among immigrant communities in Milan and Turin, Alasia and Montaldi's *Milano, Corea* (1960) and Goffredo Fofi's *L'immigrazione meridionale a Torino* (1964) are still today valuable sources of information on Italy's postwar internal migration.

### Milano, Corea / Milano, Italia

Largely a socio-historical analysis of southern emigration, *Milano, Corea* was very influential in relocating the nation's imaginary frontier to the periphery of Milan. At the height of the miracle, room rental signs and advertisements in Turin and Genoa had begun explicitly to reject southerner tenants. In Milan this was less of an issue because the great majority of emigrants settled into areas on the far outskirts of the city, where they built their own ghettos. Like other cities, Milan had been caught entirely unprepared for the migration phenomenon, having taken hardly any of the housing, schooling, or health care measures required to accommodate the additional population.<sup>43</sup> To make matters worse, rising real estate prices had made the city off-limits even to the local working poor, some of whom had to move so far from their place of work that they had to rise as early as 4 a.m. to make the commute. The new emigrants began to settle in the area north of Milan, where outlying communes had been swallowed up by the city's expanding suburbs. Because this occurred contemporaneously with the Korean war, these new ghettos came to be called *Coree* ("Koreas"). Here, emigrants would purchase small plots of land upon which they would work during the night to build little houses. Calling them "houses," however, was at times a bit of a stretch: in the town of Bollate, just outside Milan, twelve families were found to be living in a basement no higher than a meter off the ground.<sup>44</sup> Though this may have been an extreme case, the average emigrant dwelling was hardly an improvement. Alasia and Montaldi's study described in vivid detail how emigrants' homes started out:

La casa nasce come un cubo di cemento, ma quello che si vede di fuori non dice niente; la casa comincia dalla cantina, è la cantina che permette la costruzione della casa, perché viene subito affittata ad una famiglia che non ha tutti i soldi per potersela costruire da sola; una famiglia vive in affitto in cantina, la famiglia del padrone di casa a pian terreno: sono due stanze e un bugigattolo, o una stanza con

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<sup>42</sup> Fofi, *L'immigrazione*, 98-104.

<sup>43</sup> See Gianfranco Albertelli and Giuliana Ziliani, "Le condizioni alloggiative della popolazione immigrata," in *L'immigrazione nel triangolo industriale*, ed. Giovanni Pellicciari (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1970).

<sup>44</sup> Alasia and Montaldi, *Milano, Corea*, 58.



una tramezza. L'anno dopo, se le cose vanno bene, l'immigrato ha fatto un primo piano, nel quale andrà subito ad abitare. Gli inquilini della cantina saliranno a pian terreno e la cantina verrà ceduta in subaffitto ad una nuova famiglia appena arrivata.<sup>45</sup>

*Milano, Corea* brings the contours of Italy's economic boom into sharp focus. The title itself suggests these contours by juxtaposing the epitome of the industrial city with a place imagined as marginal, linguistically conveying the clash between the industrial nation and its pre-modern Other: "Milano, la metropoli del lusso, l'opulenza, il lavoro, l'avvenire. Corea, la miseria, la fame, la degradazione, la morte."<sup>46</sup> The name given to these suburban ghettos also suggests that the "foreignness" of its inhabitants was so complete as to evoke populations of the Far East. Local residents rarely interacted with the inhabitants of the Koreas in any way, for in the words of the authors, "agli occhi dei residenti nei paesi dell'Alto Milanese, gli immigrati si presentavano certamente come degli esuli, dei profughi, come 'gente che aveva perduto la guerra.'"<sup>47</sup>

The text's description of the "Koreas" emphasizes the segregation that separated the emigrants not only from the society of the metropole but also from themselves, for what was immediately striking about these ghettos was the extent to which their architecture reflected the atomized life of the immigrants. Having left behind a communal way of life, they found themselves in a society that prized individualism and did not favor communal forms of interaction beyond the familial circle. The new emigrants thus found themselves architecturally primed for a life of alienation:

La Corea nasce come un insieme di casette monofamiliari popolate al massimo, esempi di architettura spontanea, col tetto quelle dei veneti, a terrazzo quelle dei meridionali [...] Nella disposizione topografica delle prime Coree, si rileva una più profonda intenzione di distacco, un maggior senso del privato. Se la prima casa è disposta frontalmente, la seconda è stata fatta apposta per un altro verso, così che finestre e porte non si affrontino. C'è dentro questo rifiuto di familiarizzare il contraccolpo dell'esperienza precedente: meglio non avere rapporti con gli altri; e poi non ci si vuol riconoscere nella situazione che si ha di fronte; il problema è personale, è quello della famiglia, della casa, del lavoro continuo di sistemazione della nuova abitazione. Una casa di fronte, una di traverso, una di fianco, una isolata, nasce la Corea, lontana, disorganica, disagiata, una frazione del paese che non ha ancora un nome ufficiale, senza strade, senza servizi. Quando i vuoti saranno stati riempiti salterà fuori un intrico di vicoli; i vicoli prima delle strade.<sup>48</sup>

Alasia and Montaldi's analysis brought to light a process of national definition occurring along peripheral urban space in a process of social mapping that was a derivative of Italy's internal colonial history. It also advanced a critique of the social and moral segregation intrinsic to neocapitalism. The isolation and radical individualism that suddenly characterized the life of emigrants to Milan rendered their co-optation more easily achievable, and the hegemonizing power of neocapitalism all the more powerful, while continuing to exclude emigrants economically and politically. In the Koreas settled

<sup>45</sup> Alasia and Montaldi, *Milano, Corea*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

by the emigrants, there was no “historic center,” no sense of community, no class solidarity. As Alasia and Montaldi concluded, every Korea was “una città ottenuta per esclusione.”<sup>49</sup> – the nation negating its Other.

#### From Clan to Nation: Fofi’s *L’immigrazione Meridionale a Torino*

The other classic text on internal migration, Goffredo Fofi’s *L’immigrazione meridionale a Torino*, examines emigration to Turin, the other northern city representative of the miracle. Having traveled to Sicily to join Danilo Dolci during the season of the southern peasantry’s land occupations and “reverse strikes,”<sup>50</sup> Fofi had witnessed firsthand the push factors behind southern emigration.<sup>51</sup> After his work on southern emigration to Turin, Fofi went on to become a chief figure in Italian literary and film criticism.

Where Alasia and Montaldi’s study had focused on the *spaces* where the Italian nation constructed its internal Other, Fofi’s analysis gave the frontier of emigration a *temporal* dimension. The surveys conducted among Turin’s southern emigrants in the early 1960s, on which Fofi’s research was largely based, served to point the readers’ attention to the emigrants’ pre-modern system of values, to a primitiveness rooted in an unhealthy culture of “familism.”

The concept of familism, so instrumental for excluding the emigrant from the modern time of the nation, was coined in 1958, the inaugural year of Italy’s economic miracle, in Edward Banfield’s *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, a pseudo-sociological treatise on southern cultural inferiority that was to become very influential.<sup>52</sup> This Carlo Levi-inspired work was conducted, not surprisingly, in Basilicata, and focused on the life of peasant families in the small town of “Montegrano.”<sup>53</sup> Banfield’s

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 79, emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> These were a sort of “work-in” form of non-violent protest in which landless peasants or unemployed workers would set to work on abandoned plots of land or neglected roads and improve them.

<sup>51</sup> For Fofi’s account of these experiences, refer his *Strana gente. 1960: un diario tra Sud e Nord* (Roma: Donzelli, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> In *Borgata Milanese* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1963), Leone Diena made use of both spatial and temporal categories that produced the migrant Other, examining the familism of immigrant communities in a corea at Cologno Monzese and concluding that the corea was a “primitive” and “barbaric” society (p. 144). More recently, in *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), Robert D. Putnam emphasized profound divisions still separating Italian regions on the basis of differing notions of social and political commitment; John Foot discussed the issue of familism amongst southern immigrants in the North during the miracle in his “Il boom dal basso: famiglia, trasformazione sociale, lavoro, tempo libero e sviluppo alla Bovisa e Comasina (Milano), 1950-1970,” in *Tra fabbrica e società. Mondi operai nell’Italia del Novecento* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1999); and as recently as 2009, in *L’Italia fatta in casa* (Milano: Mondadori, 2009), economists Alberto Alesina and Andrea Ichino have reposed the validity of Banfield’s thesis to explain persistent underdevelopment and organized crime in southern Italy. Opponents of Banfield’s thesis have included Carlo Tullio Altan, who argued in *La nostra Italia* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1986) that the phenomenon of familism not only was widespread throughout Italy, but also had roots sinking far back in the nation’s ancient history, while Loredana Sciolla argued in *Italiani. Stereotipi di casa nostra* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997) that familism need not be interpreted as a strictly negative phenomenon that stands opposed to solidarity and the collective good, and also cited research that would contradict the existence of familism exclusively in the South.

<sup>53</sup> In his acknowledgments, Banfield thanks “Professor Manlio Rossi-Doria of the Scuola Agraria in Portici [and] Farrar, Straus, Cudahy, Inc., publishers of Carlo Levi’s *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, for permission to quote from that book.” Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958), 12. Levi’s influence is evident even in the author’s choice of names for the region.

observations of life in the village led him to formulate the thesis that the South's poverty and supposed backwardness were due to "the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good or, indeed, for any end transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family." Banfield named this inability to develop an ethos beyond the circle of the immediate family "amoral familism."<sup>54</sup>

Characteristics of the "amoral familist" include disregarding the interests of the group or community; maintaining hope of material gain in the short-run as the only guiding motive for action; lacking concern for civic improvement or public affairs; harboring no identification with, or loyalty to, organizations or groups that do not bring material gains; taking no initiatives ("The nearest approximation to leadership is the patron-client relationship"<sup>55</sup>); unscrupulously and selfishly pursuing self-interests; disregarding the law since there is no fear of punishment; and engaging in generally cynical and corrupt behavior such as taking bribes, selling votes, and so on. In short, the amoral familist's exclusive attachment is to the family, where the adult "exists not as 'ego' but as 'parent.'"<sup>56</sup>

Banfield's proposed solution was to have "among them [the Montegrinesi] for two or three decades a couple of dozen middle and upper class families who felt a sense of civic responsibility and who would serve [...] as teachers and leaders."<sup>57</sup> Naturally, this leading class would need to come from outside the community not only in terms of class but also of geography. By his own admission, what Banfield was suggesting was analogous to the "protestant missionary activity"<sup>58</sup> that had accompanied a great deal of British colonization, a sort of northern civilizing mission in the amoral familist South.

Banfield's study lacked a structural analysis, which would have contradicted his theory of southern primitivism and civic turpitude, and it denied poverty as a leading cause since the southern peasant ultimately "uses his poverty as an excuse for not doing what he would not do anyway."<sup>59</sup> With his characterization of backwardness as inherent in southern *culture*, Banfield shifted upon "culture" the discrimination that in colonial discourse had traditionally been imputed to "race," a maneuver that also entailed denying historical processes. Indeed, Banfield even ignored the southern peasants' land occupation movement that, through solidarity and concerted collective action, would have constituted the most obvious contradiction to his theory of amoral familism.

Though Banfield did not apply his theory to emigrants, convinced that amoral familism was so pervasive as to discourage southerners from emigrating, the discourse of familism strongly influenced intellectual debate and public opinion over internal migration. A good section of Fofi's *L'immigrazione meridionale a Torino* is in fact devoted to denouncing southern immigrants' familistic tendencies, focusing on gender and inter-generational conflict within immigrant families and the social conflicts generated by the migrants' excessive attachment to their families. Fofi also seemed to

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Because the Fascist regime had renamed it with the archaic term "Lucania," the region had been officially renamed Basilicata after the war and appeared as Basilicata in the Italian Constitution in 1948. However, a good ten years later, it still appears as Lucania in Banfield's account.

<sup>54</sup> Banfield, *Moral*, 10.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

echo Banfield in concluding that through prolonged exposure to northern values, southern emigrants could break out of their cultural backwardness and step fully into the modern nation.

Fofi's work was nonetheless valuable for illustrating the fundamental role of the family in emigrant settlements in Turin. The "integration" of the emigrants depended virtually exclusively on the support of a family structure offering assistance and solidarity, as government assistance and charity organizations were all but absent in emigrants' experiences. The family structure was thus central for both the material and moral support of emigrants in an environment so alien and indifferent to them, when not downright hostile. From the problem of housing – which was the first and most serious issue to solve, given that without adequate housing immigrants could not be joined by their own families – to the search for employment, immigrants relied on a network of support that was family-centered, even when this support came from friends rather than direct relatives. It was, for instance, through word-of-mouth and family relations that immigrants found work, and never through the employment office.<sup>60</sup> Families thus offered the only assistance and comfort available to the emigrants.

Yet if the family was the basis of the southerners' initial survival in the northern cities, familism was seen as the obstacle to their complete integration. One of the terms with which Fofi introduced the discourse of familism was that of "clan," by which he indicated the extended family. The term's connotation of primitive, even prehistorical familial and social relations, was fundamental for setting the scene for the discourse of familism.

To begin with, the emigrants' ties to their clan are shown to conflict with the solidary working relations they could build in the factory. Southerners who had been in the North longer and were employed in big industry had "clearer ideas and motivation," while those newly arrived "non hanno ancora raggiunto un grado di distacco nei confronti degli altri perché non lo hanno ancora nei propri confronti, e perché c'è un rapporto di immedesimazione che agli altri li lega. [...] Col tempo, le osservazioni diventano relativamente più profonde, e indicano già un certo distacco tra l'individuo e il gruppo cui si sa di appartenere."<sup>61</sup> The clan was thus shown to form an obstacle to identification with and participation in the emancipatory social struggles of a modern society.

Among southerners who had gone from being peasants to proletarians, typically those who had been in Turin the longest, integration involved a rejection of other emigrants, and more specifically of the clan: "tra gli operai di fabbriche medie e grandi [...] c'è un certo distacco dal gruppo meridionale in generale, il rifiuto di parentele troppo strette."<sup>62</sup> Rejecting the clan meant placing greater distance between oneself and one's family, but also annihilating one's identity as a southerner by aping the locals, as one emigrant admitted to doing: "Io cerco di seguire le regole di Torino, di diventare uguale agli altri e passare inosservato. Mi piace stare con gli amici del mio paese, ma capisco che, se voglio diventare uguale a tutti, devo diventare come i settentrionali."<sup>63</sup>

According to Fofi, however, the gravest threat posed to modern society by southern familism was the *delitto d'onore* (the murder of one's spouse, usually the wife,

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<sup>60</sup> Fofi, *L'immigrazione*, 107.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 240-41.

for reasons of “honor”), a practice which Fofi believed the emigrants shed with prolonged exposure to northern culture: “la cultura del proprio ambiente d’origine lo giudica valido, e anzi considera inetto chi, avendone i motivi, non lo compie. Non ci si stupisce, dunque, se, man mano che ci si allontana dal ristretto ambiente paesano e si allentano i legami dal proprio clan, e nello stesso tempo si risente del nuovo ambiente e della nuova cultura, il numero di questi delitti diminuisce, e le opinioni dei meridionali in proposito cambiano radicalmente anche se con molta più lentezza di altre.”<sup>64</sup> However, Fofi does not supply any data to indicate the actual pervasiveness of the crime of honor in any region of Italy or among southern emigrants in the North. The author’s lengthy treatment of the subject appears all the more suspect given that he himself admitted that the majority of emigrants interviewed were adamantly against it.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, Italian social values in general, but especially those pertaining to gender relations, though changing, were still deeply steeped in patriarchy. To take but one example, at the time of Fofi’s writing, the Italian legal code still penalized wives, but not husbands, for the crime of adultery, with imprisonment for up to two years.<sup>66</sup>

Ultimately, emigrants were a threat to the nation because they demonstrated an excessive attachment to their family and retained a “clannish” mentality that could not be harnessed for the reproduction of a modern, industrialized nation. According to Fofi’s logic, only prolonged exposure to northern society could transform southerners from peasants to proletarians, from Montegratesi to Italians.

The family’s relationship to the state has always been an important element of national formation. As Eugen Weber wrote with regards to 19th century France, “the old age of landed-clan alliances was giving way to a new age in which marriage associated the working partners as individuals, rather than members of a clan. The family at the center of production had been maintained by necessities inherent in the mode of production to which it was bound. It disintegrated when and where the demands of production altered, or where the center of production shifted to factory, shop, or office, so that family cohesion seemed less important.”<sup>67</sup>

However, in the passage from clan to nation, Etienne Balibar identified another crucial ingredient besides the development of capitalism, and that was the idea of a common “race.” Balibar also examined the important role of the family in the creation of the nation. For Balibar, however, the logic of filiation implicit in the nation hinged upon the myth of a common race. We are all “brothers” because “our” nation, our community, is essentially “a circle of extended kinship.”<sup>68</sup> Balibar believed it was precisely this idea of race that formed the ideological foundation of the modern nation. Even more significant for our purposes here, Balibar specified that “the idea of a racial community makes its appearance when the frontiers of kinship dissolve at the level of the clan, the neighborhood community and, theoretically at least, the social class, to be imaginarily transferred to the threshold of nationality.”<sup>69</sup> The nation as a (racial) community can thus only exist there where the pre-modern, pre-national forms of aggregation of “clan” and

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<sup>64</sup> Fofi, *L’immigrazione*, 255.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>66</sup> The law, which dated back to the Fascist era, was not declared unconstitutional until 1969.

<sup>67</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 187.

<sup>68</sup> Etienne Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology,” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (New York: Verso, 1991), 100.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

“tribe” have been overcome and no longer constitute an obstacle to individuals’ identification with wider, abstract relations of kinship. The clan and tribe are thus “archaic forms of community which are [...] incompatible with the nation-state (this can be clearly seen from the incompleteness of the formation of a nation wherever powerful lineal or tribal solidarities still exist).”<sup>70</sup>

There is an historically established correlation, Balibar argued, between the dissolution of clan relations and the intrusion of the nation-state into family relations: [A]s lineal kinship, solidarity between generations and the economic functions of the extended family dissolve, what takes their place is [...] a nationalization of the family, which has as its counterpart the identification of the national community with a symbolic kinship, circumscribed by rules of pseudo-endogamy, and with a tendency not so much to project itself into a sense of having common antecedents as a feeling of having common descendents.<sup>71</sup>

With their “amoral familism,” their excessive attachment to alternate relations of kinship and no sense of belonging to an abstract national community, southern emigrants thus posed a threat to Italian national formation: their “amoral familism” is a cause for alarm insofar as it constitutes a sort of a-national form of cohesion that places them outside the nation’s racial community, marking them not only as anarchic and deviant but also as racially suspect.

Fofi’s argument for southern “integration” through the abandonment of familism and entry into the life of the nation-factory, and his discussion of the perils of clan mentality inherent in such practices as the “delitto d’onore,” thus hark back to traditional representations in which emigrants posed a danger to the nation. Nor were Fofi’s arguments circumscribed within the field of the social sciences, for his study bore close ties with Luchino Visconti’s 1960 film, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*. This is not surprising, given Fofi’s interest in film in general and in this film in particular, which led him to write the introduction of a 2010 monograph on Visconti’s *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*.<sup>72</sup> Fofi’s study may have been influenced by Visconti’s earlier film, but more likely and more significantly, the close relation between two works in such diverse fields indicates that both Fofi and Visconti were both working within a broader nationalizing discourse shaped by the concept of familism. What is certain is that with its focus on the anachronism presented by the emigrants’ familism in a city like Turin, Fofi’s work proved instrumental in adding a temporal dimension to the role that the emigrant figure played in reshaping Italian national identity during the years of the economic miracle.

### Cinematic Representations of the Miracle

In spite of the advent of television in 1954, Italian cinema continued to attract large audiences,<sup>73</sup> maintaining a dominant role in the production and circulation of

<sup>70</sup> Balibar, “The Nation,” 102.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 101-102.

<sup>72</sup> Goffredo Fofi, ed. *Rocco e i suoi fratelli: Storia di un capolavoro* (Roma: Minimum Fax, 2010).

<sup>73</sup> Refer to Italo Calvino’s “La televisione in risaia,” *Il Contemporaneo*, 3 April 1954, and Lidia De Rita’s *I contadini e la televisione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1964) for accounts of the origin of television viewing in Italy in the 1950s. For data comparing television and cinema audiences, see Stephen Gundle, “From Neo-Realism to *Luci Rosse*: Cinema, Politics, Society, 1945-85,” in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, ed. Zygmunt Baranski and Robert Lumley (London: Macmillan, 1990), 199-202 and 220-22; and

images of a nation blessed by the economic miracle. By the very nature of the messages conveyed, representations of the miracle were necessarily representations of the nation. The fact that the economic miracle coincided with the centenary of the nation's founding boosted the ideological power of images celebrating Italy's rags-to-riches story, bestowing upon the miracle a teleological function in narratives of national destiny. The titles of Dino Risi's films alone during these years are enough to suggest the trajectory of this narrative, spanning from *Una vita difficile* (1961) to *Il sorpasso* (1962) and *Il successo* (1963). This is not to suggest a facile conquest of neocapitalist hegemony, however, as many films of the miracle, especially the *commedie all'italiana*, captured the ambivalence of social development and dysfunction. As Peter Bondanella has argued, Italian comedies of the miracle combined a cynical sense of humor with despair, "lay[ing] bare an undercurrent of social malaise and the painful contradictions of a culture in rapid transformation," thus offering a darker social vision than was expressed in neorealist comedies.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, however, the proliferation of beach movies, road movies and musicals that appealed to younger audiences elaborated socio-ethical models of behavior in sync with the requirements of the new culture of consumption.<sup>75</sup> Not only did the content of such films reflect this celebration of new wealth, but even the standards of physical beauty embodied by a new generation of film stars were indicative of increased consumption. As Mary P. Wood has argued, during these years the "desire for prosperity is inscribed on the body of the female protagonists."<sup>76</sup> The link between the female body and the nation's economy is structured within Italian language itself, where well-endowed women are referred to as *prosperose* ("prosperous"). The female figures thus "literally embody prosperity. Their curvaceous, fleshy bodies, their little tummies, full lips and expressive eyes suggest a society that can go beyond the basic preoccupation of obtaining enough to eat, and has the energy to conquer a place in society, nice clothes, a fridge, and a new cinquecento."<sup>77</sup>

The top box office successes for 1960,<sup>78</sup> however, were hardly unambiguous celebrations of the economic miracle: Federico Fellini's rather bitter *La dolce vita* conveyed all the existential pitfalls along Italy's path to prosperity, while Luchino Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* explored the tragic underside of the economic miracle, with its accompanying mass migration and cultural demise of the southern peasantry.

Whether *commedie all'italiana* or melodramas, Italian films of the 1950s and 1960s were filled with portrayals of the family. Because melodrama projects social problems onto the private sphere, it is a genre especially suited for family representations.

David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 27-62.

<sup>74</sup> Bondanella, Peter, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*, (New York: Continuum, 2001), 145.

<sup>75</sup> For a history of Italian cinema during the miracle, see Bondanella, *Italian Cinema*, Gian Piero Brunetta, *Identità italiana e identità europea nel cinema italiano dal 1945 al miracolo economico* (Torino: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1996), and Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>76</sup> Mary P. Wood, "From Bust to Boom: Women and Representations of Prosperity in Italian Cinema of the Late 1940s and 1950s," in *Women in Italy, 1946-1960: An Interdisciplinary Study*, ed. Penelope Morris (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 56.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>78</sup> These included wartime revisitations *La ciociara*, directed by Vittorio De Sica, and *Tutti a casa*, directed by Luigi Comencini.

In turn, the family, because typically represented as threatened by outside forces, is both identified with the state of the nation and often used for affirming or contesting traditions and social practices. Since neocapitalism restructures the economy around private consumption, the family becomes an important source of identity that mediates between individuals and social apparatuses. Cinematic representations of the family thus bear an intimate relationship with the construction of the nation.

Having fizzled out in the “rosy” variety of the 1950s, neorealism resurfaced into a second, “post-neorealist”<sup>79</sup> phase in this period, recapturing some of the critical urgency that had given birth to it. The guiding motifs of this second wave were not wartime suffering and material deprivation but rather the moral, spiritual, and, at least for Pier Paolo Pasolini, anthropological consequences of the economic miracle.

Admittedly, the cinema of Pasolini and the later Visconti are not easily characterizable as “neorealist.” However, this only holds true if we apply to neorealism a rigid definition. Film historian Carlo Lizzani, for instance, believes that while neorealist cinema drew to a close with the eclipse of typically postwar concerns, such as peasant land struggles, foreign emigration, unemployment and the political reconstruction of Italy, he nonetheless concedes that it is appropriate to extend the neorealist label to those representations of marginality still occurring against an urban background “made up of sidewalks, cheap dance halls, and shacks.”<sup>80</sup> According to this criterion, a cinema focusing on the disparities caused by the so-called miracle and zeroing in on the human suffering and moral turpitude it concealed as much as required can thus be considered a sort of extension of neorealism. The paradox of Italy’s politics of development, according to which a great deal of the nation’s “underdevelopment” was the inherent component of its “development,” offered a wealth of subject matter for directors such as Ermanno Olmi, Francesco Rosi, and Vittorio De Seta, the disciples of neorealism who typified this second phase.

Though the stylistic signatures of Visconti and Pasolini differed significantly from each other – and in many instances from one film to the next – the films analyzed here exemplify this second wave of neorealism insofar as the emigrant communities marginalized by neocapitalism and scraping an existence on the fringes of the nation constitute their subject matter. In addition, these directors’ different adaptation of neorealist elements can be interpreted as a reevaluation of the role of cinema itself in the transition to a new phase of capitalism.<sup>81</sup> Partly addressing themselves to neorealism, their films critically distanced themselves from the earlier cinematic tradition. Neorealism’s mutation during the 1950s had served as a testament to the power of capitalism to absorb even those cultural movements that had emerged in an antagonistic stance to it. If cinema was to hold any capacity for social critique, it had to alter its language and become less immediately incorporable by the dominant culture.

This renewed critical agenda also explains the thematic differences between the first and second wave of neorealism. While continuing to cultivate an interest in the

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<sup>79</sup> The definition is Alberto Abruzzese’s in “Per una nuova definizione del rapporto politica-cultura,” in *Il neorealismo cinematografico italiano*, ed. Lino Micciché (Venezia: Marsilio, 1999), 57.

<sup>80</sup> Carlo Lizzani, “Il neorealismo: quando è finito, quello che resta,” in Micciché, *Il neorealismo*, 98-99.

<sup>81</sup> Sitney has argued that “this critical reevaluation of neorealism in formal and rhetorical terms became the basis of Pasolini’s cinematic career.” P. Adams Sitney, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography, Stylistics, Politics* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995), 174.



downtrodden, generally speaking there was a move away from epic overviews and a concern with subjects that were narrower, more private and interior, even psychological. Visconti momentarily abandoned the history of the Risorgimento, which had already been told countless times in the neorealist project to reconstruct the nation after the war, while Pasolini never invoked myths of national foundation at all but focused instead on the repercussions upon Italian society of the political and economic changes that had been unfolding for a decade, even behind the scenes of the neorealist movement itself. Though neither of the films examined here makes explicit reference to the contemporary political-economic situation, both are profoundly political denunciations of the economic miracle, depicting the moral failures of the Italian capitalist and political class of the 1950s and 1960s.

Inextricably tied to these directors' denunciations was also the realization that the cultural transformation attempted by neorealism had proved inadequate for enacting structural transformation, much less a sweeping cultural change. By 1960, the resurgence and re-entry in government of the Right brought all the inadequacies of neorealism to create a truly anti-fascist culture into stark relief.<sup>82</sup> As a matter of fact, this so-called post-fascist era was dominated by disturbing residues of what Pasolini called "clerico-fascist" power. The critique of neorealism therefore often provided an ideal arena within which to discuss Italy's cultural, political, and economic woes.

In his introduction to Fellini's *Le Notti di Cabiria*, for which he was hired as consultant on the Roman underworld, Pasolini articulated a critique of neorealism precisely in such terms. Neorealism, Pasolini argued, had not generated a new way of thinking at all, a much needed "reorganization of thought" and of Italian culture. Rather, it had remained a topical, aesthetic phenomenon. For Pasolini, neorealism remained strictly a superstructural movement, disconnected from the real political and economic conditions of post-fascist/neocapitalist Italy. The "sudden withering of neorealism," he concluded, was "the necessary fate of an improvised, although necessary, superstructure: it is the price for a lack of mature thought, of a complete reorganization of the culture."<sup>83</sup> What was more, the first wave of neorealism could not have captured the transformations that had occurred in Italian society by 1960. "Quella stagione è tramontata, e con essa la loro visione del mondo," he declared. "L'Italia, come il resto d'Europa, anzi più in fretta che il resto d'Europa, si è lasciata alle spalle i tempi di carestia e di miseria del dopoguerra. Non ha più corso quindi la denuncia della vita quotidiana, almeno nella forma adottata in *Paisà* o nella *Strada*."<sup>84</sup>

For his part, Visconti harshly criticized what he believed to be a perversion of neorealism that had made "cozy compromises" at the cost of sacrificing incisive analyses of the nation's most pressing social problems.<sup>85</sup> *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* was his contribution to the attempt to rehabilitate neorealism's critical task.

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<sup>82</sup> See Sitney, *Vital Crises*, 174, 179.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>84</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Il Sogno del Centauro," in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, eds. Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude (Milano: Mondadori, 1999), 1435.

<sup>85</sup> Luchino Visconti, "Conversazioni sul cinema," in *Leggere Visconti: scritti, interviste, testimonianze e documenti*, eds. Giuliana Callegari and Nuccio Lodato (Pavia: Provincia di Pavia, 1976), 101.

Luchino Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* and the Gramscian Alliance

As one of the founders of cinematic neorealism, Luchino Visconti's cinema had often been at the center of controversies regarding the movement's formal structure and political intents.<sup>86</sup> His predilection for telescopic historical analyses often ran counter to neorealism's tendency to provide "snapshots" of reality, while the content of many of his films similarly sat askew of typical neorealist concerns. In fact, rather than focus on the themes of war and Resistance, Visconti preferred the pressing socio-political issues of the day, such as emigration, post-war Reconstruction, the "economic miracle," and, of course, that constant staple in the Italian political and cultural diet, the Southern Question. Deeply influenced by Verga's literary realism, to which he would add a generous dose of Gramscian Marxism, Visconti's interest in the South and its relationship to Italian national formation constituted a fixture of his filmmaking well into the 1960s.

Visconti's difference of subject matter within neorealism may also have depended on his decision to work in cinema at a slightly different time period, in a sense both anticipating and concluding neorealism's golden age in the mid to late 1940s. His 1942 *Ossessione*, generally considered to be the prototype of neorealist film,<sup>87</sup> preceded the movement by several years, while his neorealist masterpiece, *La terra trema*, appeared as late as 1948, a full year after Rossellini concluded the last of his war trilogy films, *Germania Anno Zero*. Thus, with the exception of *Giorni di gloria* (1945), a documentary film on the liberation of Rome, Luchino Visconti did not make any neorealist films during the heyday of the movement itself.

Controversies over Visconti's films also concerned questions of style. Even in its "purest" form, Visconti's filmmaking had never fit easily within the neorealist school, and *La terra trema*, with which he officially entered the movement, was a prime example. Bazin believed the perennial battle between art and reality had been won by the latter in this film, which he considered so documentary-like as to risk boring its audience to tears<sup>88</sup>. Undoubtedly, in some key aspects the film was ultra-realist: not only were the actors all non-professionals, they were an actual family of fishermen living in Aci Trezza. The dialogue, conducted entirely in the specific version of Sicilian dialect spoken in Aci Trezza, was developed by the actors themselves after Visconti described the situations he wanted to film. There was no melodrama and no music (not even Rossellini could resist placing a tune in the most dramatic moments of his neorealist films). Most of the action took place outdoors, and even shots filmed in interiors used natural lighting. And finally, there was no intrusive editing, as the camera was allowed to pan slowly, almost contemplatively, over key scenes.

On the other hand, in other respects Visconti could not resist making certain stylistic choices that distracted viewers from the film's realism, placing them at a remove

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<sup>86</sup> For a comprehensive profile on Visconti's filmmaking, see Lino Micciché, *Luchino Visconti. Un profilo critico* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1996); the collection of interviews in Callegari and Lodato, *Leggere Visconti*; Pio Balzelli, *Luchino Visconti* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1973); and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Luchino Visconti* (London: British Film Institute, 2003).

<sup>87</sup> See Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano, 3. Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico 1945-1959* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 2000), 344; and Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 19.

<sup>88</sup> André Bazin. "La Terra Trema," in *What is Cinema? II*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971).

from the reality on the screen. By privileging certain shots over others, for instance, Visconti made a stylistic move that seemed to refer self-consciously to his authorial presence. Perhaps the most controversial of such moments was the scene of the Valastro women on the storm-swept beach awaiting the return of their men from a fishing expedition. “Visconti lingers on these images for longer than the narrative itself would require,” Millicent Marcus has argued, “using seven different camera positions in a short space of time to give visual interest and grandeur to such static figures of despair [...]. The effect of the camera work and the *mise-en-scène* is to abstract the women from their concrete historical circumstances and to project them into a mythic sphere of timeless, universal truths.”<sup>89</sup> Visconti also undercut his own realism by insisting on the particular use of dialect, which gave the film a lyrical quality at odds with its documentary-like format. Such moments of “intense aesthetic self-consciousness” served to point to Visconti’s authorial presence in a way that amounted to a “signatory code”<sup>90</sup> This tension between reality and art prompted film critic Guido Aristarco to define *La terra trema*, paradoxically, as Visconti’s simultaneous embrace and abandonment of neorealism<sup>91</sup>. With *Senso* (1956), a highly stylized, operatic melodrama on Italian unification, Visconti’s abandonment of neorealism – and, according to Aristarco, his entry into “critical realism” – seemed complete.

In spite of his “misfit” position within neorealism, or perhaps because of it, Luchino Visconti was the most likely candidate for making *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, a neo-neorealist film about internal migration during the economic boom: he had been a founder of cinematic neorealism, his most important films in these decades examined the Southern Question and the deeply rooted divide between North and South in national unification (*La terra trema*, *Senso*, *Il gattopardo*), and he had already examined, albeit in limited form, the effects of emigration on the southern population in *La terra trema*. Visconti in fact once claimed that *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* constituted a sort of “sequel” to *La terra trema*, with the Parondi family standing for the historical evolution of the Valastros.<sup>92</sup>

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Visconti had often made use of the family as a locus of social conflicts, positing family relationships at the intersection of the economic and cultural conflicts investing the nation and dramatizing the internal and external forces threatening its survival. As in *La terra trema*, the family in *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* is initially represented as close and supportive, only to shatter at the end under the pressure of tradition on the one hand and changing cultural and economic conditions on the other.<sup>93</sup> Set in Milan, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* narrates the story of a mother and her five sons, the Parondi family, who have just arrived from Basilicata. The film is broken down into five episodes, each named after one of the Parondi brothers – Vincenzo, Simone, Rocco, Ciro, Luca – and follows the family’s gradual disintegration until final tragedy erupts when they cannot adapt to their new conditions of life in the North.

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<sup>89</sup> Millicent Marcus, *Filmmaking by the Book: Italian Cinema and Literary Adaptation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 35-36.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>91</sup> Guido Aristarco, ed., “Introduzione,” in *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, di Luchino Visconti (Bologna: Cappelli, 1978), 14.

<sup>92</sup> Guido Aristarco, “Ciro e i suoi fratelli,” in Callegari and Lodato, eds., *Leggere Visconti*, 80.

<sup>93</sup> Marcia Landy, *Italian Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 216-17.

Aside from its focus on the tribulations of a poor southern family, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* also bore a stylistic resemblance to *La terra trema*. After the opulence and color saturation of *Senso*, Rocco's stark, black and white cinematography, extreme close-ups and on-location shooting, especially in Milan's squalid periphery and dehumanized Seadrome, are a polemic reinstatement of neorealism's task to reveal the inequalities and alienation of the economic miracle. The result was a film that, at the height of the economic miracle, pushed the Southern Question to the forefront of national concerns once again, demonstrating how utter separateness between North and South "persist[ed] in a very disturbing manner," as mass internal migration made far too obvious.<sup>94</sup> By examining the phenomenon of southern migration, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* focused on the most visible aspect of the miracle.

With *Rocco*, Visconti painted a portrait of the economic miracle absent from the self-congratulatory accounts of officialdom of "a South and a Sicily and a Sardinia transformed by the presence of a greater number of paved roads, of factories, of land redistribution, of administrative autonomy"; what Visconti wanted was

to listen to the more profound voice coming from the reality of the South: that is to say of a humanity and a civilization that, though not having received but the crumbs of this great little party of the so-called Italian economic miracle, still hopes to escape from the moral and spiritual isolation of the all-Italian prejudice that keeps the South in conditions of inferiority compared to the rest of the nation.<sup>95</sup>

More than providing a melodramatic portrayal of southern migration, therefore, the film called for a critical reflection of Italy's economic boom and its inherent injustices. Most importantly, however, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* did not stop at denouncing the historical denial of national unity but suggested emigration might be the last occasion for national unity to be achieved in the form of that alliance Gramsci had once urged between northern proletariat and southern peasantry.

This underlying nationalist aspiration, intended in the Gramscian "national-popular" sense, drives the plot of the film and renders it essentially a critique of familism, for Visconti uses the Parondi family to advance a critique that is social: Visconti attacks this family's moral basis because he believes its unity and cohesion to be the basis of southern society. The film is therefore an attack of familism, demonstrating the obstacles it places upon the emancipation of the subaltern and, after Gramsci, upon the realization of a national-popular hegemony.

Visconti represents the Parondis' amoral familism through both narrative and formal devices. Beginning with the opening of the film, Visconti chose to focus directly upon the Parondis' arrival in Milan, rather than depict their dramatic departure and northward journey. In this manner, he is able to recreate for the audience the same "traumatic" impact between modern city and backward peasantry. For Visconti, the Parondis' journey is irrelevant because, as we shall see, the point of arrival – the modern, industrial city - constituted the point of departure for a new Italian nation. The family's isolation is immediately conveyed through Visconti's framing of space. The wide angle shot of Milan's train station highlights the loneliness of the Parondi family. Having arrived late at night, with no one to await them, they momentarily huddle together against

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<sup>94</sup> Luchino Visconti, "Da *Ossessione* a *Rocco*." in Callegari and Lodato, *Leggere Visconti*, 76.

<sup>95</sup> Luchino Visconti, "Da Verga a Gramsci," in Callegari and Lodato, *Leggere Visconti*, 49.

the strangeness and the cold in the vast and empty station. Their appearance further sets them apart from their modern surroundings; their ragged clothes and makeshift luggage contrasting with the industrial steel and glass structure of the station. As they traverse the city by tram, the Parondis resemble time travelers peering out of a capsule, awestruck by the subversion of traditional cycles of time as city lights turn night into day: “Rocco, guarda! Guarda che vetrine, che luce!” Simone exclaims, laughing, “Sembra giorno!”

The temporal disjunction is reinforced in the following scene, when the family arrives to disrupt the engagement party of Vincenzo, the eldest Parondi brother already living in Milan, and his girlfriend, Gina (played by Claudia Cardinale). From the conversation and the speech pattern of Gina and her parents, we gather that they also emigrated from the South, but have had greater time to adjust culturally and to improve their economic circumstances. Though not rich, the family is quite obviously comfortable. As the camera slides unobtrusively between party streamers and guests, it picks up evidence of expendable income: The house is large and well heated, decorated for the occasion, filled with party food, liquor, and youngsters sipping cocktails around a radio playing modern music. Snatches of conversation complete the picture of abundance as someone admits that they always end up eating too much at these parties and another comments on young people’s obsession with going to the cinema. An exchange between Vincenzo, Gina and her brother indicates the young couple is willing to make sacrifices to move out and make it on their own once they are married. The Parondis’ sudden arrival on this scene sets up a dramatic contrast that stresses their archaism and complete otherness with respect to the modern world. The Parondi brothers’ near mute discomfort, excessive shyness and voracious hunger are evidence of their primitivism and scarce domesticity with modern leisure settings.

But this scene is important also because it establishes the power of familism. The Parondis’ sudden arrival complicates Vincenzo’s plans to marry and start a new life with Gina. Mamma Parondi’s sharp features, black mourning clothes and cape giving her the appearance of a vulture, she tyrannizes Vincenzo into taking on his responsibilities over them first, concluding in front of Gina’s vexed family that “he’s the one who has to think of all of us now.” Because taking care of the Parondis will incapacitate Vincenzo from starting a new life with Gina, he is no longer deemed suitable for her and hence no longer welcome in her parents’ home. In this scene Visconti manages effectively to put the familist model in relief by contrasting the positive desire of young people to break away from their families to start new families of their own with the negative custom of remaining within, and shouldering the burden of, the extended family. It is natural to break away from the older generation, while allowing the old-fashioned customs and beliefs to dominate is discordant with the values of a modern nation and hinders its development just as it hinders Vincenzo’s and Gina’s future plans.

The archaic values of familism are also shown to affect other aspects of modern life, such as gender relations. Vincenzo’s own regression with respect to his relationship with Gina is apparent immediately after he reunites with his family. In his first encounter with her after he is thrown out of her parents’ house, he suggests that forcing himself on her might provide a solution to their contested relationship: “Do you know what Mother says? She says that if a man wants to take his woman he just takes her.” Gina slaps him and counters that he should always ask for her permission. With this gesture, it is the

more integrated Gina who reasserts the cultural values of the modern society they wish to be a part of.

Another manner in which Visconti contrasts the emigrants' familism with the modern nation is by portraying them as possessed by excessive, violent passions. Of all the brothers, it is Simone (played by Renato Salvatori), the second oldest, who personifies powerful, destructive emotions, and a thirst for vengeance that presumably characterized southerners. Having fallen in love with Nadia (played by Annie Girardot), a prostitute, Simone demands to be her only man, exploding into a jealous rage that will set off the family's dissolution when he learns that she and his younger brother Rocco have fallen in love, even though he and Nadia had stopped seeing each other months earlier. In the character of Simone, Visconti invests all those qualities that he takes to be the "sentimenti atavici della gente del Sud, i tabù. Il sentimento dell'onore, della famiglia, della donna che appartiene a uno e soltanto a lui."<sup>96</sup> Simone's violent emotions and primitive values will lead him first to rape Nadia and then eventually to kill her.

But Visconti also makes it clear that the family's downfall is as much the fault of younger Rocco as it is of Simone. A "pure" and kind-hearted character, Rocco (played by Alain Delon) boxes for a living but is saddened by the hatred and violence required by his profession. Visconti once characterized Rocco as an "unarmed prophet" because though he possessed great insight into the tragedy befalling his family, he lacked the consciousness required to halt its downward spiral.<sup>97</sup>

Rocco's passive destructiveness is closely related to the predominance of the "clan." In addition to his own personal suffering, he also takes on the unhappiness of his entire family. It is *his* purity of heart and *his* nostalgia for his southern village that do not allow his family to overcome its backwardness; in order to transcend their condition, the Parondis must take on modern social values. Yet Rocco consistently resists this adaptation, and repeatedly resorts to the fantasy of returning home to "Lucania" (not "Basilicata") some day. After his first great boxing victory, Rocco delivers a speech to his assembled family, vowing "the day will come that I will return home. And if this were to not be possible for me, perhaps one of you will be able to return to our land." The camera cuts from Rocco to the skeptical faces of his mother and brothers. None of them remembers why, in Lucanian tradition, the home builder throws the first stone in the shadow of the first person to pass by. "Because," Rocco reminds them, "it takes sacrifice for the home to turn out solid." Indeed, Rocco has sacrificed everything, including Nadia, to keep his family solid, its unity uncompromised by outside forces. This point is also reinforced through parallel editing, as scenes of Rocco's boxing match are intercut with those of Simone's murder of Nadia. As Rocco's coach shouts "cover yourself," Simone says the same to Nadia before he kills her. Nadia's role as sacrificial lamb for the Parondi family is further illustrated by her pose as Simone advances to stab her: leaning her back up against a tree with her arms outstretched, she mimics a crucifixion.

Rocco's excessive devotion to his family is thus just as responsible for Nadia's death as Simone's depravity. Rocco shoulders like a personal guilt all of Simone's sins because he failed to put his brother, and thus his family, first, even in his love affair with

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<sup>96</sup> Luchino Visconti, "Rocco, un profeta disarmato," in Callegari and Lodato, *Leggere Visconti*, 82.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 90. Visconti named Rocco's character after the late poet-mayor Rocco Scotellaro, whom he evidently believed to be an "unarmed prophet."

Nadia. Visconti once commented, “Questo mi sembrava di averlo intuito abbastanza in quelle che sono le caratteristiche proprie dei personaggi meridionali. Rocco prova un sentimento di colpa verso il fratello. Non bisogna mai dimenticare questo, che lui crede ed è convinto di essere in torto. Rocco non attribuisce nessuna colpa a Simone, ma tutto a se stesso. E lo dice anche a Nadia: ‘Tutti e due siamo colpevoli, ma io più di te. Io più di te in quanto tu sei la donna di mio fratello.’”<sup>98</sup> When, months before murdering her, Simone rapes Nadia, Rocco remains a helpless witness, and afterwards he does not respond to Simone’s punches even though he boxes for a living. “Sei mio fratello, che posso fare?” he shouts. Rocco then places the burden of what has happened on his own and Nadia’s shoulders, ending their relationship and urging her to return to Simone. “Ammo creduto de cumincià ’nsieme ’na nuova vita,” he says, defeated, “senza pensà ’o male che facevamo agli altri.” Unlike Vincenzo and Gina, who wish to break away from the family, Rocco remains unwaveringly anchored to it.

However, it is between Rocco and Ciro that Visconti sets up the greatest contrast. Later on in the film, Ciro confronts Rocco over what to do about Simone’s criminal tendencies. Though Ciro does not know about Simone’s rape of Nadia, he is no longer willing to turn the other cheek to the criminal lifestyle that Simone conducts in their family home. “Fratello o no, per me non conta più. [...] Noi siamo come semi di uno stesso sacco,” he concludes, “Se tra noi ce n’è uno guastato, lo dobbiamo separare dagli altri.” But Rocco defends Simone and ultimately concludes that “this was our destiny. Yours, mine, and Simone’s, too.” When Ciro asks him what life he thinks they would have had if they had stayed in Basilicata, Rocco’s automatic reply is that at least they would all still be together. From then on, Rocco lives to shoulder the guilt of his brother’s actions, remaining in the boxing world even though he loathes it so that he may cover Simone’s debts and keep pulling him out of trouble. Ciro, on the other hand, pays Simone to leave their house forever, as he is only a negative model to the youngest brother, little Luca.

Again and again Visconti illustrates how Rocco’s self-sacrifice does not save his family but, on the contrary, seals its doom. After Simone murders Nadia, he returns home to his family and confesses to Rocco what he has done. Though horrified, Rocco does not condemn his brother but cries that it is his own fault. His sharing of Simone’s sin is visually reinforced as Rocco embraces his brother on their mother’s bed during Simone’s confession. When the rest of the family learns what Simone has done, Ciro is the only one to suggest turning him in to the police. Rocco, on the other hand, claims he must do everything to save him. When Mother Parondi exclaims that Simone has finally freed himself of his misfortune (i.e. Nadia), Ciro replies aghast, “Mother, you too have lost your mind!” His mother slaps him and turns ferociously against him: “Shame on you! Enemy of your own mother!” Ciro manages barely to escape from the clutches of his family and to report Simone to the police.

Visconti’s insistent message is that Rocco’s unconditional solidarity and devotion to family unity above all other concerns is, ironically, what causes its disintegration. If the family had acquired greater flexibility, adjusting its values to those of its northern environment, it might have survived intact. What ultimately destroys the Parondi family’s harmony is its inability to abandon its familism in accordance with the requirements of a modern nation. The family is dysfunctional insofar as it fails to adapt to social life in the

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<sup>98</sup> Visconti, “Rocco, profeta,” 82.

modern North, which entails subtending to institutions of civil society, such as a legal system that forbids “delitti d’onore.” Family harmony and solidarity are comprehensible and even necessary in the first stages of emigration, but the tribal notions of “honor” and masculine pride must then give way to the state in regulating interpersonal relations within the private sphere.

The only one to accomplish this change, at first gradually then in a final act of courage as he turns against his own family, is *Ciro*. Having acquired a proletarian identity through his work in the factory, *Ciro* is the only character capable of identifying and criticizing the fatal flaw of amoral familism in his family, especially with regards to *Rocco*. In discussing *Ciro*’s character, Visconti once declared

Volevo un *Ciro* forse un po’ duro, forse un pochino anche crudele verso la sorte del fratello caduto [...] è giusto che sia così, perché *Ciro* difende certi valori, piano piano acquista una coscienza: se la fa vivendo a Milano, e diventando operaio specializzato, in una fabbrica come l’Alfa Romeo; lui certe cose le vede in un modo diverso dai fratelli, non può non essere un po’ duro.’ [...] *Ciro* ha detto: questa è una strada giusta; ed è l’unico che in fondo impari qualcosa.<sup>99</sup>

Turning his brother *Simone* in to the police is the ultimate proof that *Ciro* has acquired faith in and respect for the institutions of the modern state and has learned he must work within these instead of within the narrow confines of the clan. His gesture, which brings his family’s destruction to completion, simultaneously signals his own rebirth as Italian.

We are afforded a glimpse of this new subject in the film’s final scene, where *Ciro* imparts a life lesson to little *Luca*. To illustrate the futility of fantasizing a return to their hometown, where “everyone lives like a beast, knowing only toil and obedience,” he explains that in the North everyone lives without being someone else’s servant. In his romanticization of *Lucania*, *Rocco* had forgotten this. Yet *Ciro* holds hope that his actions, within the society he has entered, will eventually change the face of all of Italy: “Even in our town life will change for everyone, because even down there men are learning that the world must change. Some say that a world thus made will not be better. But I believe in it. And I know that tomorrow your life will be more just and more honest.”

By illustrating *Ciro*’s development in the face of his family’s amoral familism, Visconti provided Italian spectators with the clearest illustration of what the Gramscian alliance between North and South might have looked like. Though the film opens onto the abyss between two Italies separated by economic disparity, cultural values and language, it closes on a possible outcome to this traumatic encounter, the occasion to form a truly national-popular unification such as Italy had never experienced.

However, Visconti’s logic is also problematic, in that the *presa di coscienza*, the revolutionary mentality *Ciro* acquires, is the result of his having become a factory worker, suggesting that the Southern Question may only be overcome with the death of the peasant class through its absorption into northern industrial society, which is to say that Italy’s national becoming is only fulfilled with the disappearance of the peasant class.<sup>100</sup> *Ciro*’s proletarian vision, therefore, also left millions of Southern peasants as ideologically “unarmed” as the tragically self-sacrificing *Rocco*.

<sup>99</sup> Aristarco, “*Ciro e i suoi fratelli*,” 79.

<sup>100</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that Visconti’s conclusion echoes the more party- and proletarian- oriented interpretation of Gramsci (i.e. Togliatti’s Gramsci) then in circulation in Italy, before



Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Accattone* and the Genocide of the Subproletariat

The destruction of the peasant world under the advance of neocapitalism was precisely the accusation Pier Paolo Pasolini leveled against the devotees of Italy's economic miracle. A poet, novelist, filmmaker and intellectual, Pasolini became known as much for his works as for the attempts of state and Church to censor them, dragging him through close to one hundred trials and lawsuits in his lifetime.<sup>101</sup> Like Visconti, he too had been greatly influenced by Gramsci, but Pasolini's approach to Gramsci's philosophy became conflicted early on in his life and works. In the poem titled *Gramsci's Ashes*, Pasolini confessed to being disquieted by a "scandal of the conscience,"

Lo scandalo del contraddirmi, dell'essere  
con te e contro te; con te nel cuore;  
in luce, contro te nelle buie viscere<sup>102</sup>

In essence, Pasolini found Gramsci's notion of national-popular no longer tenable for an Italy in the grips of neocapitalist culture, the analysis of which Pasolini would make his life's work. His vision of neocapitalism's homogenizing power and violence eventually assumed apocalyptic overtones, culminating in the final year of his life in his nightmarish cinematic masterpiece, *Salò* (1975).<sup>103</sup> But *Salò* was only the finale of Pasolini's lifelong denunciation of the fascist character of mass-consumer culture, especially in Italy, where the forces of Church and Fascism had managed to remain in power after the Resistance. Pasolini's correlation of the neocapitalist culture industry with Fascism resonated with the work of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School. For these critical theorists, late capitalism's ability to colonize culture allowed capitalism unprecedented, totalizing power, until "anyone who resists can survive only by being incorporated" into a closed system where "the *Führer* directly orders both the holocaust and the supply of trash."<sup>104</sup>

But Pasolini's critique of neocapitalism was also at the root of his conflicted rapport with neorealism. In his view, neorealism's denunciation of Italy's material poverty no longer held currency in a country where increased wealth and consumption was tragically liquidating the cultural sovereignty and spiritual authenticity of the non-bourgeois population. The task of a politically engaged cinematography was to give the besieged subproletariat a chance to express itself, rather than simply miming it through speech and clothing, as neorealism had done. The real protagonist of neorealist films, Pasolini argued, had been the bourgeois ideology calling for material progress. Pasolini's

Einaudi's subsequent (1975) and less invasive edition of the *Quaderni del Carcere* was to restore Gramsci's complexity of thought to the *Prison Notebooks*.

<sup>101</sup> Enzo Siciliano's *Vita di Pasolini* (Milano: Mondadori, 2005) remains the most comprehensive biography on Pasolini. For an account of Pasolini's perspective on neocapitalism, see Giulio Sapelli, *Modernizzazione senza sviluppo. Il capitalismo secondo Pasolini* (Milano: Mondadori, 2005). And for an ample review of Pasolini's entire oeuvre, refer to Guido Santato, *Pier Paolo Pasolini. L'opera* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1980).

<sup>102</sup> Pasolini, "Le ceneri di Gramsci," in *Le ceneri di Gramsci* (Milano: Garzanti, 1999), 55.

<sup>103</sup> Various scholars have interpreted *Salò* according to the theme of "sex as a metaphor of power." While this is an important element of the film, I agree with Naomi Greene's reading of it as Pasolini's vision of the fascist essence of neocapitalism and as his ultimate refusal to consume. See Naomi Greene, "Salò: The Refusal to Consume," in *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Rumble (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 236.

<sup>104</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 104; 129.

first film, *Accattone* (1961), which he once defined as “a film that could be made in Italy in a specific cultural moment; that is to say when neorealism was dead,” was his response to the shortcomings of neorealism.<sup>105</sup>

Given Pasolini’s merciless critique of neocapitalism and the failure of neorealism to adequately interpret its destructive force, it is not surprising that he should have found Visconti’s portrayal of southern emigrants in *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* lacking. The characters were “dei meridionali di maniera,” he claimed, and their poverty too picturesque. Admittedly, though the film was set in Milan, the Coree never make an appearance in Visconti’s film. What was required, Pasolini countered, was to analyze the problem “con la più coraggiosa e spietata intenzione di approfondirlo e esprimerlo”<sup>106</sup>

If Visconti saw internal migration, however tragic, as a possibility for carrying out a Gramscian national-popular alliance, Pasolini harbored no such illusions. A national-popular alliance was unthinkable insofar as he interpreted Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony” in an entirely negative light, seeing it only as an instrument of capitalist oppression and not as also a means of subaltern resistance. We might say that, to the extent that Pasolini could be considered a Marxist thinker, the advent of consumerism and the disappearance of cultures impervious to it eventually eroded his propensity for dialectical thinking. His keen power of observation and his personal experience as a declared homosexual in a country still dominated by “clerico-fascism” keyed him in to modernity’s strategies for liquidating difference quite early in his life. He observed how, on the one hand, modernity’s centrifugal force tended to absorb and integrate the dangerous classes through the cooptive dynamic of the new consumerism; on the other, it continued to reject them in centripetal fashion, marginalizing them economically, politically, and geographically – even to the point of denying them basic rights of citizenship with laws intended specifically to exclude them, as we have seen with the anti-urbanization law.<sup>107</sup> The hegemony that resulted was a process of co-optation that Pasolini first defined as “cultural homologation” and then, once he believed this process to have become anthropological, as downright cultural genocide.<sup>108</sup>

Elsewhere in Europe, Pasolini argued, the peasantry had had centuries to become accustomed to the capitalist world view, to negotiate or contest its rhythms and values, but in Italy the peasant masses coming into contact with the urban middle and working classes had to shed their own way of life literally overnight, without seeing them replaced by a new system of values or receiving any of the social and political benefits that the capitalist revolution had produced elsewhere. Hence Pasolini’s belief in the genocidal effects of the economic miracle upon Italy’s pre-industrial civilization.

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<sup>105</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Pasolini su Pasolini [1968-1971] – Conversazioni con Jon Halliday,” in *Saggi*, 1308.

<sup>106</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Letter,” in *Saggi*, 904.

<sup>107</sup> In 1979 Giuseppe Galasso concurred with this negative reading of hegemony with respect to the southern population when he claimed that “l’evoluzione storica del Mezzogiorno in questi due o tre decenni è stata caratterizzata, da un lato, da un aggravamento dei suoi problemi strutturali, dei problemi di congruenza e di consistenza della struttura economica meridionale rispetto a quella nazionale; e, dall’altro lato, invece, da una rapida assimilazione, nel costume e nella mentalità sociale, almeno della maggior parte delle zone meridionali, al resto del paese.” See Gerardo Chiaromonte and Giuseppe Galasso, *L’Italia dimezzata* (Bari: Laterza, 1980), 22.

<sup>108</sup> See Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Il mio *Accattone* in tv dopo il genocidio,” in *Lettere luterane: il progresso come falso progresso* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), 158.

Reflecting on the relationship between the core and periphery of Rome, which he'd made his home since 1950, Pasolini lamented the disappearance of subproletarian cultures, which until then had been sovereign and autonomous:

La loro “cultura”, tanto profondamente diversa da creare una “razza”, forniva ai sottoproletari romani una morale e una filosofia da classe “dominata”, che la classe “dominante” si accontentava di “dominare” poliziescamente, senza curarsi di evangelizzarla, cioè di costringerla ad assorbire la propria ideologia [...] Lasciata per secoli a se stessa, cioè alla propria immobilità, quella cultura aveva elaborato valori e modelli di comportamento assoluti. Niente poteva metterli in discussione. Come in tutte le culture popolari, i “figli” ricreavano i “padri” [...] Mai nessuna rivoluzione interna a quella cultura, dunque. La tradizione era la vita stessa.<sup>109</sup>

In his efforts to isolate a counterpart to capitalist society, one that by virtue of its complete otherness and centuries-long exclusion from national formation had remained unsullied by the cultural logic of capitalism, Pasolini constructed the southern subproletariat as an immobile, archaic civilization. Of course, the very process of excluding the Other is inherent in the formation of the nation itself, just as the South's very “ruralism” had been the intrinsic counterpart to the nation's pursuit of industrial capitalism.<sup>110</sup> However, what is important here is that for Pasolini the subproletarian class did not constitute a revolutionary subject as much as a critical remnant, if only by virtue of the fact that, for a while longer at least, it had managed simply to resist the genocide.

It is chiefly through explorations of space, especially as it developed around the nation's capital, that Pasolini represented the life and death struggle between the nation and its archaic Other. In both his literary and filmic works, Pasolini paid a great deal of attention to the refashioning of urban space under neocapitalism. In synecdochal relationship with the rest of the nation, the capital city becomes in Pasolini's work the center of sweeping social-structural changes, representing spatially the uneven developments unfolding in the nation as a whole. Where Visconti had portrayed the *temporal* conflict between peasant world and industrial capitalism by inscribing upon the family the conflicts occurring at the margins of the industrial city, Pasolini maps out the nation's process of national redefinition onto Rome's urban *space*, representing the battle between the nation and its Others through the encroachment of new public housing projects upon the older slums lying along the city's outskirts.

This spatial exploration appears as early as 1955, in Pasolini's first novel, *Ragazzi di vita*, set in the periphery Rome. Here, the brutalization of human interaction is continually echoed in the ravaged, trashy landscape in which the poor live and move, where new construction is old and devastated before it is even finished, much like the lives of its young inhabitants:

Da Monteverde Vecchio ai Granatieri la strada è corta: basta passare il Prato, e tagliare tra le palazzine in costruzione intorno al viale dei Quattro Venti: valanghe

<sup>109</sup> Pasolini, “il mio *Accattone*,” 153-54.

<sup>110</sup> Pasolini did, however, demonstrate he was aware of the see-saw mechanism of Italian capitalist “development,” when he claimed in one interview, “Tu sai benissimo che il vostro ‘benessere’ [...] implica il ‘malessere’: ossia il neocapitalismo rende più profonda la divisione tra Nord e Sud, man mano che il Nord si arricchisce, il Sud – in senso relativo e assoluto – impoverisce.” See Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Intervista rilasciata ad Alberto Arbasino,” in *Saggi*, 1571.

d'immondezza, case non ancora finite e già in rovina, grandi sterri fangosi, scarpate piene di zozzeria.<sup>111</sup>

In a series of articles published in *Vie Nuove* in 1958, the first of which is significantly titled "Il fronte della città" Pasolini literally redirects his readers' gaze from the monuments of Rome to this battle front on the city's horizon:

La Roma ignota al turista, ignorata dal benpensante, inesistente sulle piante, è una città immensa [...] di qua e di là frammenti di villaggi di tuguri, distese di casette da città beduina, frane sgangherate di palazzoni e cinema sfarzosi, ex casali incastrati tra grattacieli, dighe di pareti altissime e vicoletti fangosi, vuoti improvvisi in cui ricompaiono sterri e prati con qualche gregge sparso intorno, e, in fondo – nella campagna bruciata o fangosa, tutta collinette, montarozzi, affossamenti, vecchie cave, altipiani, fogne, ruderi, scarichi, marane e immondezze – il fronte della città.<sup>112</sup>

In the successive article, titled "I tuguri," Pasolini focuses on the specific relationship between this mass of "pre-modern" population and the nation. The *tuguri* ("shacks") are "abitazioni tipiche di popoli a uno stadio preistorico," and exist as an "irrational state" within the rational nation-state.<sup>113</sup> At this point in Italian history and in Pasolini's work, these communities can still represent a threat to the nation insofar as they remain utterly Other, "irreducible." Inhabited mostly by emigrants who'd come from the South, these formed a sort of "pure subproletariat."<sup>114</sup>

Because this "irreducible" anarchic mass threatened the order the nation attempted to achieve, it had to be brought under the state's control, which occurs through the state's conquest of space. This was the function of the new public housing blocs that Pasolini called concentration camps. In the last article of the series, titled "I campi di concentramento," Pasolini explained that these had been devised to house the unwanted elements living at the margins of society, as a way to continue to keep them in their place, out of the city proper:

Ogni città italiana, anche nel Nord, ha, alla periferia, dietro gli ultimi orti, i suoi piccoli campi di concentramento per "miserabili": sono per lo più capannoni, casermette, baracche. Ma in nessuna città italiana il fatto presenta aspetti così impressionanti, complessi, direi grandiosi, come a Roma. La "borgata" è un fenomeno tipicamente romano, in quanto Roma fu capitale dello Stato fascista. È vero, continuano a sorgere anche oggi delle "borgate". Ma, per così dire, sono borgate "libere": ammassi di casette a uno o due piani, senza tetto, per anni e anni senza infissi, e senza intonaco, biancheggianti di calce in fondo alle campagne semi-abbandonate – lussureggianti o fangose – come villaggi beduini. Le strade sono per lo più piste di fango o polverone [...]

Le vere e proprie borgate, però, sono altre, e sono caratterizzate dal fatto di essere "ufficiali": costruite cioè dal Comune, si direbbe a bella posta, per

<sup>111</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Ragazzi di Vita* (Milano: Garzanti, 2005), 8.

<sup>112</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Il fronte della città," in *Romanzi e racconti, I (1946-1961)*, eds. Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude (Milano: Mondadori, 1998), 1455.

<sup>113</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, "I tuguri," in *Romanzi*, 1464.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

concentrarvi i poveri, gli indesiderabili. Questa, almeno, è la loro origine, non solo cronologica, ma anche ideale.<sup>115</sup>

To the subproletariat's anarchic slums, the state responded with borgate in which to concentrate the marginalized population:

Le prime “borgate” furono costruite dai fascisti in seguito agli sventramenti: sventramenti che non obbedivano solo a un ideale estetizzante-dannunziano, evidentemente: ma erano – in seconda istanza, ma in realtà, in sostanza – operazioni di polizia. Forti contingenti di sottoproletariato romano, formicolante al centro, negli antichi quartieri sventrati, furono deportati in mezzo alla campagna, in quartieri isolati, costruiti non a caso come caserme o prigioni.

È nato in quel periodo lo “stile” della borgata: il fondo, naturalmente, è di tipo classicheggiante e imperiale: ma ciò che è tipico è il ripetersi ossessivo di uno stesso motivo architettonico: una stessa casa è ripetuta in fila cinque, dieci, venti volte: lo stesso gruppo di case si ripete anch'esso cinque, dieci, venti volte uguale. I cortili interni sono tutti identici: lividi, arsi cortiletti di prigioni, con file di sostegni di cemento per i bucati che sembrano file di forche, col lavatoio e col gabinetto che serve all'intero lotto.<sup>116</sup>

For Pasolini the Christian Democratic government's attempts to bring under its control this dangerous class were no more humane than those of the Fascist regime that had preceded it. That the Republic shared with the Fascist dictatorship the same fear of the poor and the same authoritarian relationship was further evidence of the continuity that existed between the two regimes:

Le “borgate” democristiane sono identiche a quelle fasciste, perché è identico il rapporto che si istituisce tra Stato e “poveri”: rapporto autoritario e paternalistico, profondamente inumano nella sua mistificazione religiosa.<sup>117</sup>

It was precisely in relation to the imagery of this “front” encircling the city, and his urge to represent it visually, that Pasolini first began to think about making a film:

Pare non esserci altro mezzo di conoscenza che l'occhio. Lo spettacolo visivo è così assillante, grandioso, senza soluzione di continuità, che pare di poter risolvere tutto, intuitivamente, in una serie ininterrotta di osservazioni: di inquadrature, verrebbe voglia di dire, da una infinità di primi piani particolarissimi, a un'infinità di panoramiche sconfinite.<sup>118</sup>

Two years later, Pasolini filmed *Accattone*, in which he used both narrative and stylistic devices to convey the space where the subproletariat and the nation clash, the “front” made up of pre-modern shanty-towns and borgate. The protagonist (played by Franco Citti, whose brother, Sergio Citti, assisted Pasolini with the film's dialogue) is a pimp who proudly calls himself Accattone (Beggar, Scrounger) rather than with his given name, Vittorio (“Victory”). The title of the film and its protagonist's name allow Pasolini to convey the marginality of his subject with great economy, immediately describing a character who does not earn a living by working but rather by scrounging, scraping off a marginal existence.

<sup>115</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, “I campi di concentramento,” in *Romanzi*, 1459.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 1459-60.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 1461-62.

<sup>118</sup> Pasolini, “Il fronte,” 1456.

Though Pasolini incorporates neorealist elements, such as the emphasis on the poor, the use of non-professional actors and vernacular language, on-location shooting and a gritty visual texture, he also reached outside of the neorealist aesthetic in order to express the residuality of this culture, resorting to pre-modern religious imagery and Baroque music that invested his characters with a sacred essence. In the opening of the film, Accattone accepts a bet by diving into the Tiber River off of Ponte Sant'Angelo, the bridge that connects Castel Sant'Angelo to the historic center of the city. As Accattone dives down, his body forms an inverted crucifix while on the bridge above him one of Bernini's angel sculptures holds an upright cross. Accattone also assumes the pose of crucifixion in the moment of his death, as one of the two thieves standing on either side of him makes the sign of an inverted cross. The film's musical score consists entirely of Bach's *The Passion of St. Matthew* (1727) which sets to music chapters 26 and 27 of the Gospel of St. Matthew – that is, the life of Jesus from trial to crucifixion (significantly leaving out the Resurrection). This use of sacred music and imagery serves to re-sacralize the true martyrs on the *Via Crucis* of neocapitalism, and anticipate the lyrical quality of Pasolini's filmmaking that he would later call his "cinema of poetry."

When the prostitute Accattone pimps out (significantly named Maddalena) suffers a beating from a group of thugs and is put in jail, Accattone is unable to support himself, and eventually steals his own son's gold necklace to survive. In a drunken speech, Accattone bewails his predicament to another group of pimps, but his lament is really an outcry of the subproletariat's marginal relationship to capitalist economy: "Semo tutti na massa de disgraziati, semo omini finiti, ce scartano tutti! Noi valemo giusto se ciavemo mille lire in saccoccia, se no nun semo niente... Pure in galera nun ce ponno vedé, a noi. Nun ce considerano omini perché nun semo boni a provacce da soli!"

Accattone's prospects seem to improve when he falls in love with a working girl, Stella, and they move in together. After her first nightmarish experience hooking, he decides to support her by finding a regular job. However, his attempt to insert himself and Stella within the dominant economic system, symbolized by his transition from the marginal economy of prostitution to the center of industrial production, ends tragically. Accattone is physically incapable of performing the hard labor required of him, at one point referring to a concentration camp: "Ma che stamo a Buchenwald, qua?" This is not the only time or manner in which Accattone rebels against "honest work." When he first meets Stella, observing her cleaning bottles to be recycled, he says, "Lo saprebbe io che ce vo' in Italia [...] Lincoln l'ha fatti liberà li schiavi. E invece in Italia ce l'anno messi! Con un mitra in mano a me, ne rimanessimo in pochi in piedi." This is a far cry from the proletarian consciousness Ciriaco's character acquires in Visconti's film. Perhaps like Pasolini, Accattone refuses to idolize the new form of slavery of industrial labor, but ultimately this spells his death. When he is pushed to the margins again by the dominant economy, he decides to become a thief. Accattone meets his death as he attempts to escape the police, racing away from the city center on a stolen motorcycle.

The film's ending – a pointed reference to the neorealist masterpiece *Ladri di Biciclette* – radicalizes Pasolini's social critique by demonstrating the genocidal logic of the new economic order. Watching *Ladri di Biciclette*, we never know who steals Antonio Ricci's bicycle, but we imagine it is someone similarly desperate for survival in the new economic jungle. With *Accattone*, Pasolini shows us the face, so to speak, of that figure neorealism had hidden from us, the bicycle thief: worse off than Antonio Ricci

because he is pushed systematically, not just by historical contingency, to the margins of existence, Accattone loses not just his economic stability but his very life.

In a 1975 article in *Il Corriere della Sera* titled “Il mio Accattone in TV dopo il genocidio,” Pasolini claimed the film rendered perfectly the continuity between the Fascist and Christian Democratic regimes in two ways: first, by depicting the ghettoization and increasing marginalization of the subproletariat; and second, by demonstrating the criminal violence of the police in maintaining this physical and social segregation.

The manner in which Pasolini conveys both points is through his framing of space as he moves between the borgate and the older slums in the Roman periphery. In order to narrate the disappearance of the subproletariat, Pasolini sets up visual parallels to the film’s narrative. Through the use of wide-angle shots, his camera pans across the hills on the outskirts of Rome in a way that sets up a quasi-bucolic foreground where primordial forms of life are being literally strangled by the encroaching cement structures of the borgate. When Accattone goes in search of his estranged wife, hoping she will spare him some change, he crosses small, dirty plots of land interspersed with run-down shacks and so filled with rubbish they are one step away from becoming open-air landfills, where women, including his wife, work discarding recycling material. Pasolini slowly pans across this landscape, stopping only when the new borgate appear on the horizon.

Pasolini also employs vertical panning to underscore the closing in of the new slums. At one point in the film, as Accattone and his friends stand talking on a street, the camera pans from the top of a highrise, down its length to the street where the young men are talking, across the street, and up the side of another highrise all the way to its top in one long take.

Later on in the film, when Accattone goes to steal his son’s necklace, he meets a friend and talks to him about the role of the police to keep the poor in line: “So’ finiti i tempi bellici. Oggi come metti un piede fori de casa te carcerano. Ma non lo vedi che sta a fa’ el questore?” Accattone’s words are reinforced by the mis-en-scene: on one side of him we see a ruined, abandoned hut on whose walls someone has painted the words “Vogliamo una casa civile;” on the other, the new highrises of the borgate mushroom along the horizon, giving visual weight to Accattone’s accusations.

But the clearest impression we get of the borgate’s ubiquity is when Accattone tries to take Stella to a “secluded” spot to seduce her. After walking through mounds of debris and making their way through construction sites, they reach a grassy expanse. As the camera follows them, it makes a leisurely 360 degree turn, allowing us to notice the borgate in the near distance and to realize that they have almost completely encircled the area. The power of this sequence lies in its capacity to convey by visual means alone the cultural extinction to which the oblivious couple is doomed. The point is reinforced in the dream sequence that anticipates the film’s ending, in which Accattone witnesses his own funeral and sees a group of Neapolitan pimps lying dead on the ground, crushed beneath the debris of new construction material.

### Conclusion

While Visconti could still, at the height of the economic miracle, entertain a Gramscian optimism towards emigration as that long-awaited hegemony capable of solving the Southern Question, finally uniting North and South, Pasolini’s view of a

possible alternative to the neocapitalist onslaught was, by 1961, considerably more apocalyptic, as his increasingly acerbic, “heretical” commentaries attest. Where his contemporaries saw innovation and modernization, he saw only a facelift of old power blocs manipulating a national-capitalist rather than national-popular culture, and whose loftiest accomplishment had been more genocide than miracle.

While we may wish to spare their differing outlooks from “the enormous condescension of posterity,” it is undeniable that internal migration was one of the chief factors that allowed Italy to become a leading power in the global neocapitalist economy. A consequence of the South’s enduring status as colony, internal migration demonstrated the reliance of the nation’s miracle upon planned backwardness and inequality. The expansion of northern monopoly capitalism, the preservation of old relations of production, the economic and social incapacitation of the South, low wages and southern mass migration all contributed to the “miracle” and were perpetuated by it.

In the discursive construction of the nation, internal migration served an equally determining function. The emigrants’ relegation to peripheral space and archaic time served to highlight their alterity with respect to the neocapitalist “developed” nation, affirming Italy’s modernity by means of negation. This mechanism has continued to hold enormous staying power in Italy’s self-definition, allowing it to preserve the image of a modern nation not only with respect to its South but also through the more recent phenomenon of foreign immigration.



## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a postscript to the 1975 edition of *L'immigrazione meridionale a Torino*, Goffredo Fofi concluded confidently that

È [...] vero che, ormai, siamo sulla strada del superamento degli squilibri tra Nord e Sud, che l'industrializzazione del Mezzogiorno è in atto, che la "questione meridionale" non è più così lontana dalla soluzione come si poteva temere fino a pochissimi anni addietro. L'Italia, in questi anni, è profondamente cambiata, e nei prossimi cambierà ancora di molto. L'immigrazione meridionale a Torino è un esempio di come i cambiamenti sono avvenuti.<sup>1</sup>

Fofi's optimism notwithstanding, neither the disparities between North and South nor the emigration phenomenon and its function in the perennial "re-making" of Italy drew their final breath with the advent of the economic miracle. Admittedly, within a decade of the miracle, it appeared as though Italian mass emigration had finally drawn to a close, ending one of the most bitter chapters of the nation's history. Foreign emigration began to decline from the latter half of the 1960s, while internal migration lasted until the mid 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

Italian cinema, typically attentive to the emigration question, did not fail to register this altered context, albeit with significant innovations. To begin with, post-miracle films dealing with the subject of emigration tended to abandon melodrama in favor of comedy. Secondly, emigration was no longer represented as an epic occurrence but rather as the consequence of personal, individual choices. In Mario Monicelli's *La ragazza con la pistola* (1968), for instance, Monica Vitti is a young Sicilian woman who goes to London with the intention of avenging her honor by killing the man who has seduced and abandoned her. By the time she finds him, however, she has become sufficiently emancipated that it is she who seduces and abandons him. In Luigi Zampa's *Bello, onesto, emigrato Australia sposerebbe compaesana illibata* (1971), Alberto Sordi's virginal mail order bride (Claudia Cardinale) turns out to be a prostitute on the run from her violent pimp, and upon meeting her husband-to-be in Australia, repeatedly scoffs his hard-earned but dismal achievements. And in Franco Brusati's 1974 *Pane e cioccolata*, Nino Manfredi must face the fact that, after many years of scraping a living in Switzerland, he will never be accepted by the "civilized" Swiss nor will he ever again

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<sup>1</sup> Goffredo Fofi, *L'immigrazione meridionale a Torino* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1964), 296.

<sup>2</sup> Enrico Pugliese, *L'Italia tra migrazioni internazionali e migrazioni interne* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 59-60.

belong to the class of homesick Italian emigrants eager to return to their families and mother country. Though the comedy in these films is admittedly bitter-sweet, it is nonetheless indicative of a society that has achieved greater self-confidence from having overcome a shameful condition. From the apex of its success, this new Italy could look back on its past with humor, self-irony, and perhaps even a bit of nostalgia.

Italy's self-confidence also grew in response to the advent, from the mid-1980s onward, of the entirely novel phenomenon of foreign immigration to Italy. These changed circumstances formed the grounds upon which a new image of Italy was constructed: a once-destitute country that had been forced to ship off its poor had blossomed into "the new colossus" now attracting the global South's tired and huddled masses. The claim that Italy has gone from being a country of emigration to one of immigration has become so commonplace, even among demographic experts, that it has assumed the aura of indisputable fact. Current immigration figures would seem to give credence to this claim: as of 2010, 4.2 million foreign immigrants, half of them from Eastern Europe, were found to be residing in Italy.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, given the recent events in northern Africa that have set off migration waves from Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, this number is liable to grow considerably.<sup>4</sup> While most of these newcomers state their intention to leave Italy for France and northern Europe, it is difficult to foresee how this situation will ultimately unfold, especially given the uncertain fate of Libya and the countless numbers of African migrants and refugees still imprisoned there.<sup>5</sup>

Though immigration to Italy has undoubtedly presented certain novelties with respect to the phenomenon of internal migration in the postwar era, such as the racialization of the migrants and the heightening of discrimination against them (due, among other factors, to the xenophobic politics of the Northern League in the current Right-Wing government coalition), it also bears significant continuities. The most important of these is the relationship the Italian state has forged with these new residents. As anyone familiar with Italian postwar emigration will realize, Italy's current immigration law governing who may enter the country and obtain a residency permit is highly reminiscent of the Fascist anti-urbanization law that remained in effect until 1961. Law number 189, also known as the "Bossi-Fini law" after the names of the politicians who proposed it, came into effect in 2002. Essentially a "new and improved" version of the former anti-urbanization measure, this law stipulates that immigrants may only obtain legal residency if they have first procured work and housing from outside the country – a virtual impossibility. Moreover, the fingerprinting required of new immigrants

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<sup>3</sup> ISTAT, "La Popolazione Straniera Residente in Italia," 12 Oct 2010, [http://www.istat.it/salastampa/comunicati/non\\_calendario/20101012\\_00/](http://www.istat.it/salastampa/comunicati/non_calendario/20101012_00/) (accessed November 14, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> In the first three months of 2011, the southern Italian island of Lampedusa has witnessed the arrival of some 20,000 migrants, prompting the Italian Minister of the Interior, Roberto Maroni, and the Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini, to make dramatic claims regarding a "biblical exodus." See "Maroni: esodo biblico, Ue assente, la Tunisia invia le truppe sulle coste," *La Repubblica*, 14 February 2011, [http://palermo.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/02/14/news/sbarchi\\_maroni\\_esodo\\_biblico-12432273/index.html](http://palermo.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/02/14/news/sbarchi_maroni_esodo_biblico-12432273/index.html) (accessed March 30, 2011); and "Frattini: piano italo-tedesco per la Libia, 'Gheddafi in esilio e più diritti alle tribù,'" 27 March 2011, [http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2011/03/27/news/frattini\\_piano\\_italo-tedesco\\_per\\_la\\_libia\\_gheddafi\\_in\\_esilio\\_e\\_pi\\_diritti\\_alle\\_trib-14142806/index.html](http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2011/03/27/news/frattini_piano_italo-tedesco_per_la_libia_gheddafi_in_esilio_e_pi_diritti_alle_trib-14142806/index.html) (accessed March 30, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> For an account of the odyssey, imprisonment, and human trafficking of African migrants, refer to the work of investigative journalist Fabrizio Gatti, particularly *Bilal. Viaggiare, lavorare, morire da clandestini*. (Milano: BUR, 2007).

automatically categorizes them as criminals simply for having entered Italy.<sup>6</sup> By rendering legal residence and employment nearly impossible to obtain, the Bossi-Fini law induces countless immigrants into a condition of illegality, and, much like the anti-urbanization law, weakens their legal position and economic bargaining power, turning them into a highly exploitable resource for the nation's economy.

Postwar emigration thus forms a valuable point of reference for recognizing the discriminatory nature of current immigration policy. At the same time, it can also serve to alert the public to new forms of emigration investing the country. While it is indisputable that Italy has become a destination of immigration, it is equally accurate to say that it is still a nation of emigrants. Not surprisingly, given the much less flattering portrait it paints of Italy, mass emigration has resumed under almost complete silence on the part of social institutions and mass media. While these remain galvanized by the influx of foreign immigrants, a growing number of southern Italian emigrants are disappearing into the fog of oblivion. This is much more than the oft-touted *fuga dei cervelli* ("brain-drain") – a term which in any case served to coat an unseemly occurrence with a veneer of respectability. Rather, the latest wave of emigration involves predominantly the South's unemployed and working poor.

Receiving scant public attention, the announcement of the resumption of emigration appeared in SVIMEZ's 2010 annual report.<sup>7</sup> This state agency, which has the task of monitoring the development of trade and industry in the South, found the recent upsurge in emigration to be connected to the deplorable state of the economy in southern Italy. Since the mid 1990s, "official" emigration figures, which encompass only those who officially change their place of residence, have averaged some 70,000 units per year. In 2008, however, that number rose to 122,000 and has been steadily climbing, amounting to over 1 million southerners in fifteen years. Of these, 87% come from the regions of Campania, Puglia, and Sicily.<sup>8</sup>

However, given that emigration has become highly "serialized," meaning that it is frequently repeated since it no longer provides the stable, lasting solution it once did, the majority of those emigrating or moving for seasonal work do not even bother to change their official place of residence. Consequently, the actual numbers of southern emigration is liable to be considerably higher and remains difficult to calculate. A rare glimpse of this "silent" emigration was offered in 2008 by Giampaolo Visetti in an article written for *La Repubblica* titled "2008 Fuga dalla Campania. I nuovi poveri, sfollati al Nord." ("2008 Escape from Campania. The new poor evacuated to the North"). Visetti described the dramatic character of this new form of emigration: every week, thousands of unemployed men head North aboard trains and vans to work in industries or on construction sites paying them twenty euros a day, under the table. Their poverty is so acute that they take sack lunches from home to cover their meals for the entire week and many sleep in the same vans that have transported them north. After working for a week,

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<sup>6</sup> EIROOnline (European Industrial Relations Observatory on-line). "Italy: New Legislation Regulates Immigration," 26 September 2002. <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2002/09/feature/it0209103f.htm> (accessed October 20, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> SVIMEZ (Associazione per lo Sviluppo dell'Industria nel Mezzogiorno), "Rapporto Svimez 2009 sull'economia del Mezzogiorno," <http://www.svimez.it/> (accessed February 18, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

they return home to their families for one day before repeating the same exercise the following week.<sup>9</sup>

That this new form of emigration, and the alarming social conditions generating it, should remain under the radar is not surprising: if southerners are setting off on another long march a mere two decades after internal migration was declared a closed chapter, then the overall performance of Italian political and economic leaders can only be interpreted as an abysmal failure. In the South, where some 6 million people are officially categorized as poor, the economic “miracle” remained but a mirage: in Campania, three out of every ten families lack the most basic necessities for survival, eight out of ten cannot afford to pay the rent, and two out of ten do not eat more than three meals a week.<sup>10</sup> In areas like Naples, unemployment has reached 40%,<sup>11</sup> while 50% of the South’s entire working population earns less than 500 Euros per month.<sup>12</sup> Dismal as they may be, these figures describe the situation preceding the global economic crisis, suggesting that current conditions may be even more dramatic. With such staggering unemployment and unrelenting poverty, it is little wonder that in 2007 alone Naples lost 14% of its population to emigration.<sup>13</sup>

This radically skewed context has provided extremely fertile ground for organized crime, which has become the primary investor and employer in the South. Its profits are based largely on drug trafficking and the even more lucrative enterprise of “managing” Europe’s toxic waste disposal, a scenario amply described in Roberto Saviano’s bestselling reportage, *Gomorra*.<sup>14</sup> The vacuum of opportunities and hope has allowed organized crime to become not only a state within the state (*il sistema*), but also to amass an empire that grows wealthier and more powerful each year. A study conducted by Confesercenti<sup>15</sup> estimated the yearly profits of organized crime to amount to 130 billion Euros, making “Mafia S.p.a.” (“Mafia, Inc.”) Italy’s wealthiest enterprise and giving the label “Made in Italy” a whole new meaning.

This year, 2011, marks the 150 year anniversary of Italian national unification. Yet for obvious reasons, national cohesion remains as problematic as ever. As the celebrations for the unification of Italy got under way on March 17<sup>th</sup>, only a small minority of the southern population participated in the festivities with heartfelt enthusiasm. When asked how he was celebrating that day, an acquaintance offered a reply that effectively summed up the general attitude prevalent around Naples: “What is it that we are supposed to be celebrating? Having been colonized? When the South will be equal to the North and we will no longer be second-class citizens, perhaps in another 150 years, then maybe we will have something to celebrate.”

The occlusion of recent and on-going emigration strengthens the rhetoric of the nation’s triumph over the internal and external foes who would keep it divided. Italy

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<sup>9</sup> Giampaolo Visetti, “2008 Fuga dalla Campania. I nuovi poveri, sfollati al Nord,” *La Repubblica*, 27 September 2008, sec. R2, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> SVIMEZ, “Rapporto.”

<sup>13</sup> Visetti, “2008.”

<sup>14</sup> Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra. Viaggio nell'impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della camorra* (Milano: Mondadori, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Confesercenti, “XI Rapporto SOS Impresa. Le mani della criminalità sulle imprese,” <http://www.sosimpresa.it/news.php?id=5213> (accessed May 5, 2010).

today is strong and united, so the narrative would have it, because it conquered the poverty and “backwardness” that once impelled mass emigration. The closure provided in the Italian imaginary by the supposed end of mass emigration is supported by the recent trend to “museumify” this history. Between Genoa, Rome and Naples, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has undertaken a project to install a triad of national emigration museums, with a central division, the Museo Nazionale Emigrazione Italiana (MEI), to be located in Rome. To date, the only one of such museums to have gotten under way is located in Genoa, where, since 2008, the Galata Museo del Mare has been hosting an exhibit titled *America! From Genoa to Ellis Island. The Sea Voyage at the Time of Italian Emigration*. Spanning three galleries and covering 1200 square meters, the exhibit features an impressive reconstruction of Genoa’s old harbor and of the ocean-going vessel *Taormina*. For 11 euros, visitors can experience “virtually” the emigrants’ voyage to the New World. Once aboard, they search for their berths and explore the public areas of the ship, such as the refectory, common bathrooms, infirmary, and even the prison that once housed the “violent and clandestine” emigrants. The visit ends with the “arrival” at Ellis Island, where visitors go through mock immigration procedures and medical visits, and end their journey in front of a giant vista of New York.<sup>16</sup>

The co-production of the expo by the Ellis Island Immigration Museum and the collaboration of the U.S. Embassy in Rome in part explain the exhibition’s geographic and temporal emphases. However, the limited perspective offered by such an important historical project unfortunately cultivates a very selective memory of Italian emigration. The title alone of the exhibit has the effect of circumscribing Italian emigration to transoceanic destinations, as well as relegating it to the distant nineteenth century. More recent migration experiences, particularly those of the postwar period that were directed to Europe and northern Italy, are for all practical purposes ignored, and emigration is reshaped into a product safe for the touristic consumption of the nation’s past.

The exhibition is indicative of a more general removal of recent emigration experiences from Italian history. By disregarding postwar emigration, national emigration histories erase the “scar tissue” produced by the nation’s spatio-temporal struggle against its internal Others. Milan’s “Koreas” remain forgotten residues of Italy’s path to modernity and Rome’s *borgate* seldom generate discussions of exclusionary politics, past or present. At the same time, the concentration of museums in harbor cities like Genoa and Naples shifts public attention from the spaces evacuated by emigration, obliterating even the memory of once vibrant centers of life that today lie crumbling beneath the weight of desertion and forgetting. Such museumified representations of Italian emigration function, much like the texts examined in chapters One through Three, to remove the internal Other in space and time, producing a figure the nation can afford to recall only as extinct – a “Last of the Mohicans” who can no longer threaten the homogenous order of national space. This process of collective forgetting is, as Milan Kundera teaches us, part of the periodic refashioning of national histories: “The first step in liquidating a people,” he observed, “is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it

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<sup>16</sup> Galata Museo del Mare. See the expo’s website, [http://www.galatamuseodelmare.it/cms/la\\_merica\\_da\\_genova\\_ad\\_ellis\\_island\\_br\\_-11620.html](http://www.galatamuseodelmare.it/cms/la_merica_da_genova_ad_ellis_island_br_-11620.html)

was. [...] The struggle of man against power is [thus] the struggle of memory against forgetting.”<sup>17</sup>

In Italy, the struggle against forgetting can begin by looking to the marginal spaces of emigration, recovering shared experiences of interdiction and segregation that go against the grain of sanitized national narratives and recognize the heterogeneity of Italy’s identities. By uncovering how constructions of migrant Others have intersected over time, such a project of historical recovery would not be a mere exercise of looking back to the past but would instead be oriented towards the articulation of a possible future in which hybridity becomes the valuable basis for radical social transformation.

Reflecting on the nature of diasporic identities, Stuart Hall once claimed that

Diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, the imperialising, the hegemonising, form of ‘ethnicity’. We have seen the fate of the people of Palestine at the hands of this backward-looking conception of diaspora – and the complicity of the West with it. The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.<sup>18</sup>

After all, *spaesamento*, that condition of ambiguous nationlessness once imputed to Italy’s emigrants, has now become a universal condition of life, the “exodus” that characterizes our existence in a “globalized” world. While the marginalization inherent to modernity has indeed, as Pasolini lamented, signified the disappearance of entire ways of life, it has also generated new peripatetic subjectivities bound to wear down the walls modernity erected between an illusory “home” and the menacing “foreigner,” generating what Theodor Adorno once observed with remarkable foresight, “the new morality [...] to not be at home in one’s home.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Aaron Asher (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 159, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 235.

<sup>19</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London, New York: Verso, 2005), 39.

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