

# The Cinemas of Italian Migration



The Cinemas of Italian Migration:  
European and Transatlantic Narratives

Edited by

Sabine Schrader and Daniel Winkler

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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Edited by Sabine Schrader and Daniel Winkler

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See the conference report: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=3638>





## INTRODUCTION

### THE CINEMAS OF ITALIAN MIGRATION: FROM *IL CAMMINO DELLA SPERANZA* (1950) TO *INTO PARADISO* (2010)

SABINE SCHRADER AND DANIEL WINKLER

The films *Il cammino della speranza* (*The Road to Hope* Pietro Germi, 1950) and *Into Paradiso* (*Into Paradise* Paola Randi, 2010) constitute the time span for the present volume *The Cinemas of Italian Migration: European and Transatlantic Narratives*. In *Il cammino della speranza*, Pietro Germi stages the arduous path of Southern Italian mining workers and their families to France; it counts among the early Italian films that pick out emigration as their central theme. This film is in many regards paradigmatic for Italian cinema of migration. It gives shape to the narratives of hope and disappointment in conflict with *italianità*.

The 2010 low-budget comedy *Into Paradiso* also bears the hope for a new beginning in its title, but it narrates immigration in today's Italy. "Paradiso" is the great promise for former cricket champion Gayan from Sri Lanka, but at first "Paradiso" is nothing but the name of a run-down multi-ethnic tenement in Naples where he moves into a room, and, by way of absurd complications, meets an unemployed academic and a corrupt politician.

The title of the introduction, "From 'Il cammino della speranza' to 'Into Paradiso,'" however, not only refers to the cinematographic history of migration, but also to different ways of presentation. In order to accommodate this scope, our corpus is recruited, on the one hand, from films that have migration within and into Italy as their theme, and on the other hand, from those dealing with Italian emigration. By doing this, not only can different aesthetics be analyzed, but strings of cinematographic tradition can also be sketched. The corpus thus stretches from Italian and American mainstream movie productions to more experimental, often regional and sometimes transnational contemporary movie and docu-

mentary productions. Among them are narratives that critically reflect racism and give migrants a subject status (“whoness”) (Parati 2005, 121-122). However, many mainstream productions also resort to stereotypical depictions by painting a picture of migrants as passive or residing in an object status (“whatness”), thus following typically European “endlessly recycled narratives of oppression and victimization” (Bergfelder 2005, 317).

There are many narratives of migration, and this volume constitutes only a selection of possible modes of narration, without any claim to completeness. In this introduction, we will try to sketch the history of the Italian migration film and then broach the issue of central concepts and genres. We will return time and again to articles in this book in order to better contextualize the films reviewed. At the end of this volume, there is a selected bibliography and a filmography which—with an emphasis on Italian (co-) productions—draws together films with a migration focus. This is intended to be the beginning of a collection and an invitation for continuous addition.

Let us return to the two films that opened up this introduction. Seen from a perspective of cultural history, *Il cammino della speranza* seizes a collective Italian experience; after all, Italy had been into the 1970s “the European migrant and emigrant country par excellence” (Bertagna/Maccari-Clayton 2008, 205). Over a prolonged period of time, the number of Italian migrants was not only the highest in Europe, but they also dispersed over numerous target countries. The economic distress after the Italian unification in the middle of the nineteenth century had led many Italians—up until the beginning of the twentieth century—either to the cities in Northern Italy, Western Europe, or America. The second wave of emigration, which Germi makes the central topic of his film, takes place during the so-called economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s, again leading towards the North(-West), especially towards France, Switzerland, Belgium, or the Federal Republic of Germany.

In terms of cultural history, *Into Paradiso* refers to a completely different situation. Here, the immigration into Italy is at the centre of interest, i.e. the emigration country has become an immigration country. The narrative is sparked not so much by the voyage itself but by the attempt to gain a foothold despite disappointed expectations. When the film started at the biennial Venice Film Festival, Italian television broadcast pictures that were anything but hopeful. Since Spain fortified its southern frontier, the little Italian island of Lampedusa, situated close to the African coast, with only 6,000 inhabitants, has become the favourite landing spot for refugees from Tunisia, Morocco, Ghana, and many other African countries. The

television pictures showing leaky boats in front of the island and rather too small and ramshackle emergency accommodations are well known; there are deaths to be mourned regularly. The reactions of the Italian authorities comprised entry bans for humanitarian organizations and members of parliament, hopelessly overcrowded refugee camps, mass deportations and mistreatment of the refugees, as well as the proposal made by Berlusconi's minister Roberto Calderoni, who in 2004 demanded that the military shoot at the refugee boats (Milborn 2006, 55-58). It becomes clear once more that despite its own "collective" migration experience, Italy does not reveal itself to be an open, tolerant country. Beside the political and legal reforms, the mass media reporting practice attests to how the "racism," which used to be targeted at Southern Italians, the *terroni*, is today transferred to the *extracomunitari* (Cincinelli 2009, 29-31; Russo Bullaro 2010, xvi).

Nevertheless, Italy's process of changing into a multi-ethnic society has actually been taking place for decades, even though it was widely ignored in political circles. In 1973, Italy had more immigrants than emigrants for the first time (Bertagna/Maccari-Clayton 2008, 216), and since the 1980s the country has gathered more and more migrants of different provenance: Eastern Europeans, first among them Albanians and Romanians; people from the Maghreb countries and from central Africa; but also many Chinese. In January 2011, the number of immigrants reached 4,570,317 or exactly 7.5 per cent of the total population, and continues to rise with increasing tendency.<sup>1</sup> This does not include the *clandestini*, the irregular ("illegal") immigrants. So the emigration country Italy has turned—despite a relatively restrictive jurisdiction—into a plural society.

The New Migrant Cinema started in Italy during the 1990s,<sup>2</sup> i.e. during a time when the country itself had already turned into an immigration country, just like other formerly typical emigration countries of the EU (e.g. Spain, Greece, Portugal, or Ireland) (Loshitzky 2010, 6; Berger/Winkler 2012a, b). Paradigmatic for this transformation is the exceedingly successful documentary film *L'orchestra di Piazza Vittorio* (*The Orchestra of Piazza Vittorio* Agostino Ferrente, 2006), which positively stages the multi-ethnic urbanity of Rome by showing the coming-into-being of a multi-ethnic orchestra and its concert activities that continue to this day.

## A Sketch of the Italian Migration Film

The focus of this book lies on the analysis of the narrative of migration from a cultural studies perspective. In the sense of White (1980) or Müller-Funk (2002), we understand narrative as a central cultural technique

for organizing the individual and collective memories which is then able to arrange events in an orderly sequence of time and space. Film genres in turn organize these narratives. When assuming that film genres and playing with them have an important function for deeper cultural and social textures (Schweinitz 1994, 105; Hickethier 2003, 82-83), then they will also provide information about the “basic stories” of Italian migration while staging the genre aesthetics in ever new forms.

Migration and the formation of state are as closely linked in Italy as the history of Italian cinema and the history of historical film; after all the latter was for a long time the Italian cinema par excellence (Spagnoletti 1997, 151). First the silent movie and later Fascist cinema developed heroic narratives of a nationally intended unity to the detriment of (regional) variety. So it is not surprising that in an age of Italian monumental films, migration was not a central narrative (Bertellini 2010, 205-235).<sup>3</sup>

After the Second World War, the internal migration from the South to the North, just like emigration, finds its first echo in neorealistic films with neorealistic traits. Beside the already mentioned post-war films by Germi and Visconti, Vittorio De Seta's documentary movies such as *Contadini del mare* (*Peasants of the Sea*, 1956) or *Banditi a Orgosolo* (*Bandits of Orgosolo*, 1961), and later Francesco Rosi's often internationally produced films featuring prominent actors, such as *Le mani sulla città* (*Hands over the City*, 1963) or *Tre fratelli* (*Three Brothers*, 1981), paradigmatically represent this in the collective imaginary. There, the South takes on a dual narrative function; it is staged both as a poor and archaic region, so that the cinema is robbed of the old clichés of Italian travellers looking for the myths of antiquity; however, by focusing on poverty and exploitation of the South, the films also stage an “*Africa a casa* (Africa at home)” (Wood 2005, 142).

This conditioning of Italian cinema can be explained from a standpoint of cultural history by the clearly different societal development, especially compared to other European countries: in contrast to France, for example, Italy does not have a long-standing history of colonialism followed by immigration from these colonies. Moreover, instead of French centralism and immigration, already strong in the late nineteenth century, there are massive internal regional frictions, which Antonio Gramsci traced back to the long history of Northern economic-political hegemony over the South in his classic “*Alcuni temi della questione meridionale*” (1926) (Gramsci 1971, 137-158). According to him, the South had on the one hand been discriminated against for a long time. On the other hand, it had been differently constituted, both discursively and culturally, namely as a region

of crisis responsible for the lack of progress in all of Italy. Not least, it is these conditions that have led to a tradition of (e)migration—from Southern to Northern Italy or towards other countries and continents—which have been reflected in a strong thematic focus on internal North–South conflicts and also within the scope of the cinema d’emigrazione.

### “La questione meridionale”

The sometimes violent conflicts resulting from the cultural difference between the agricultural-Catholic migrants from Southern Italy and the customary behaviour in the big cities are a leitmotiv characterizing “Italian” cinema, regardless of whether the films focus on internal or external migration. Luchino Visconti, for example, focuses on the tragic content of intra-Italian migration in his film *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (*Rocco and His Brothers*, 1960), which—together with some other films—marks the beginning of the Italian cinema of migration but which can also be understood as a prototypical narrative of the failure of a truly lived Italo-Italian *diversità*.

Sandra Ponzanesi summarizes this in her certainly accurate statement that Italy is characterized in its representational history by a “double mythology of rootedness and expatriation” (Ponzanesi 2005, 269). The cinematographic debate concerning internal Italian tensions in the neorealistic cinema is reflected in international cinema in the narrative of displacement. Italy is a nostalgic place of reminiscence, “*il bel suol d’amore* (the beautiful love land)” (Ponzanesi 2005, 269), whose presence, however, is narrated on both sides via a crisis that allows the country as a whole to seem “backward.” Cinema scientist Mary P. Wood also underscores this when she writes:

for much of the last 150 years, the role of the awkward “Other” in Italian society was fulfilled by the *Mezzogiorno* and its inhabitants, whilst at the same time Italians from whatever region of Italy found themselves in that humiliating position in England, France, Germany, Argentina, Australia and North America. (Wood 2003, 96)

Via relatively closed and homogeneous film spaces, *migratio* serves as the narrative vehicle to tell of socio-economic conflicts, which are also a part of the cinema of migration, as Aurora Rodonò outlines across cinema history by citing exemplary German and Italian films like *Pane e cioccolata* (*Bread and Chocolate* Franco Brusati, 1974) and *Palermo oder Wolfsburg* (*Palermo or Wolfsburg* Werner Schroeter, 1980). This often ties in with a discourse of victimization as well as with clichés of a

yearning for Italy. That both tendencies are closely linked with each other can be seen in the current Italian *auteur cinema*. It is as an exemplary representative of an “Italian” cinematographic aesthetic, which does borrow from international sources but which always takes recourse to the familiar tradition.

## The Italo-French Axis

Beside the North-South dualism, the early productions in the context of neorealism are interesting especially for analyzing the “coming-into-being” of emigration cinema with regard to the Italo-French axis. Cases in point are Mario Soldati’s *Fuga in Francia* (*Flight Into France*, 1948)<sup>4</sup> as well as Jean Renoir’s *Toni* (1935). While Soldati creates a criminalistic plot around war criminal Riccardo Torre (Folco Lulli), Renoir tells the tragic tale of the Italian eponymous hero (Charles Blavette) who migrated to southern France to get a job. This film, often neglected in cinema historiography, is particularly interesting, for one thing because not only Georges D’Arnoux, but also Luchino Visconti “assisted” Renoir in this production. Moreover, this film anticipates many traits of neorealist film aesthetics since it exclusively works with exterior shots and lay actors or regional actors and since it moves the everyday existence of work migrants with their cultural and socio-political conflicts into the centre of the plot.

Also neglected by historiography for a long time, and in some ways rather successful, were other films that concentrated on migration, for example the following films located in Germany or Holland: *I magliari* (*The Magliari* Francesco Rosi, 1959) and *La ragazza in vetrina* (*Girl in the Window* Luciano Emmer, 1961) (Zambenedetti). This may lead to the conclusion that the (neo-)realistic cinema and its historiography mainly turns to national issues which in turn are closely linked to the North-South conflicts.

Yet the four films mentioned above precisely illustrate two tendencies which accompany the cinema of migration and which moreover closely determine the construction of *italianità* up to this day: on the one hand, the family is given a special degree of attention while, on the other hand, crime, especially the mafia, is very much present. This also identifies two aesthetic tendencies that will strongly determine the cinema of migration: melodrama and the crime movie or thriller.

## Family and Mafia

The first category is present in this volume with Swiss and (Latin) American documentaries like Martin Scorsese's *Italianamerican* (1978) and Alexander Seiler's *Siamo italiani* (*The Italians* Alexander J. Seiler, 1964), which are rarely considered in the context of emigration cinema. They give a central role to the collective memory of the Italian emigrant community in America or Switzerland, both in the scope of the family and the larger sphere, as the articles by Camille Gendrault and Sophie Rudolph show. However, contemporary movies like the Swiss-Italian-French production *Azzurro* (Denis Rabaglia, 2000) and the Argentine movie *Un día de suerte* (*A Lucky Day* Sandra Gugliotta, 2002), presented by Sophie Rudolph and Gudrun Rath, also place special emphasis on *familismo* as an Italian place of remembrance, in part they even use their title to depict Italy as a place of longing and crisis. Rabaglia and Gugliotta narrate the hopeful (work) migration to Latin America and Switzerland as well as the disappointment and nostalgia which in part will trigger a return to Italy for a later generation.<sup>5</sup>

Within this narrative of emigration and remigration, some *auteur cinema* directors combine the theme of the family with that of the mafia, the melodrama with the thriller. René Allio for example does this in *Retour à Marseille* (*Return to Marseilles*, 1980) in the character of the career businessman Michel (Raff Valone), who grows up in France in a family with Italian roots and who returns to Italy. Here, Marseille turns into a place where, upon his return to France, his business practices come to light and a breach with his family takes place. This link is especially dominant in B movies, films that strongly borrow from the genres of crime movies and thrillers. With a certain time lag, they respond to neorealist film in terms of cinema for wide audiences that juxtaposes the discourse of internal cultural tensions with a mainstream discourse that also reproduces complaisant clichés of Italy.

These films narrate the emigration from Southern Italy towards France, Germany, or America more or less in passing. The focus resides mostly on the new life in the (North-)West beyond Italy. As Alberto Zambenedetti shows in his article, this is already the case for Rosi's *I magliari*, which narrates the life of a group of people from Naples who live in Hanover and Hamburg. He uses the melodramatic-comical style of the *Commedia all'italiana* and its actors (Alberto Sordi, Renato Salvatori) but also has recourse to English and German ones (for example, Belinda Lee and Joseph Dahmen). Even more striking is the "criminalization" of the narrative of emigration in the sub-genre of the mafia movie starting in the

1970s, often realized as commercial movies featuring a star cast—Francis Ford Coppola’s Hollywood movie *The Godfather I–III* (1972/74/90) starring Marlon Brando, Diane Keaton, and Al Pacino is a perfect example; or European co-productions like Jacques Deray’s *Borsalino/Borsalino et Cie* (*Borsalino and Co.*) starring Alain Delon and Jean-Paul Belmondo (1970/74). Both directors place the Italo-American community on the scene under the sign of escalating crime and violence.

## New Migrant Cinema: Road Movie and Melodrama

In the 1990s, the Italian cinema finally turns to immigration as a theme. At first, productions are few and far between; among the first more widely received films are *Pummarò* (Tomato Michele Placido, 1990), *Un'altra vita* (*Another Life* Carlo Mazzacurati, 1992), and Gianni Amelio’s internationally successful production *Lamerica* (1994). Here one can already see the first signs of a *cinema di impegno* (*cinéma engagé*), which tries to take sides with immigration and at the same time, in order to reach a larger audience, harks back to the classic genre cinema as well as to Italian film history. Placido’s *Pummarò* is a paradigm for this in more than one sense:<sup>6</sup> it shows—in a process reminiscent of road movies—the voyage of the Ghanaian medical graduate, Kwaku (Thywill Amenia), from Southern Italy to Germany. He embarks on a search for his brother, Giobbe, who went to Italy some time ago to look for work. Starting in Naples and the Campania region, where he does not find his brother but earns his keep as a tomato picker, finally rising up against the inhuman methods of the plantation owners, he stops at various stations, among them Rome and Verona. He learns that his brother was persecuted by the camorra and the police, and he finally ends up in Frankfurt, where he finds Giobbe dead.

This film, presented in 1990 at the Cannes film festival as part of the series *Un Certain Regard*, can be regarded as part of the reaction of civil society to the killing of South African Jerry Masslo in Villa Literno in the Campania province of Caserta (Capussotti 2009, 62). In its criticism of racism, it is a classic Italian (migration) film, insofar as it devises a melodramatic *cinéma engagé*, like the early (emigration) films did, however without a big budget and a prominent cast, but to a great extent without questioning the binary concepts of Self and Other, of perpetrator and victim (O’Healy 2002, 234–235). It is also typical in its reminiscence of neorealism. With its treatment of motifs of hope and disappointment, it cites neorealist classics. *Il cammino della speranza* had already shifted the *migratio* all across Italy into the centre, as is clarified in the first article of this volume by Laura Rascaroli. Across several stations, from Sicily



towards the North, the visual design of this film stages empty plazas and railway stations that become in-between spaces. The treatment of migration via a combination of road movie and melodrama is also performed by other early films of the New Italian Migrant Cinema, like Gianni Amelio's successful production *Lamerica* (1994), Carlo Mazzacurati's *Il toro* (*The Bull*, 1994) and Armando Manni's *Elvjs e Merilijn* (*Elvjs & Merilijn*, 1998) (Rascaroli 2006, 150-160). Often, like Placido's film, and in the style of a *cinéma engagé*, they deal with irregular migration—for example, the everyday life of Eastern European or African protagonists without any permit of residence in the “European fortress.” The “cinema of irregular migration” shifts the focus of interest to the ambivalence between the cinema as an audio-visual media, which seeks to draw attention to the precarious situation of the *clandestini* by means of images and just this precarious situation of the persons concerned, who as a result of their “illegal” status remain invisible (and invisibly exploited) both in the urban and the rural areas. Thus, they have to try to make a living by hiring themselves out as “neo-slaves” (Brown 2010, 19-21; Berger/Winkler 2012).

In the sense of a “cinema of transvergence” (Higbee 2007), the aforementioned films often transform the relationship between centre and periphery by focusing on “marginal experiences.” Amelio's film, which Veronica Pravadelli addresses in her article, makes this paradigmatically clear even in its title. Via its protagonist Spiro/Michele, it focuses on identity superimposition, such as the switch of national adherence due to experiences of migration and war or the recurrence of similar transformation processes in different countries and eras, shown by the cases in point: Albania, Italy, and America (O'Healy 2004; Duncan 2007). Amelio, too, harks back to the classics of post-war cinema, like Rossellini's *Paisà* (*Paisan*, 1946) and Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948), by paralleling the Italian post-war era and the time after the downfall of the Communist regime in Albania, thus underscoring the ambivalence of liberation and occupation in the sense of an asynchronicity of the synchronicity of cultures.

Towards the end of the 1990s, immigration becomes ever more present in Italian movie theatres, not least because of the reality of migration in Italy, but probably also because of the success of films like *Pummarò* and *Lamerica*. Time and time again, well-known filmmakers choose this topic within the scope of genre cinema as well as melodramatic cinema traditions. Prominent examples of big productions that were also screened outside of Italy are Bernardo Bertolucci's *L'assedio* (*Besieged*, 1998), Marco Tullio Giordana's *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (*Once You're*

*Born You Can No Longer Hide*, 2005), and Giuseppe Tornatore's *La sconosciuta* (*The Unknown Woman*, 2006).

The success of the melodramatization of migration, as Jörg Metelmann's article shows, is not least the result of the fact that the clear, affective structure of the melodramatic is particularly well suited to expounding upon the ethical implications of absolute, relative, and self-responsible moralities. At the same time, today's cinema of migration is more subject than genre; beside traditional narratives like those of illegality and crime, deracination and abscondence, the Italian cinema of migration takes on an increasingly wider spectrum of topics, layers, and spaces of the most diverse streams and realities of migratory life. Beside the melodrama, these narratives can be found in the road movie, the crime movie, and by now also in comedy. At the same time, there is an increasing hybridization of genres, so that we follow Jörg Schweinitz in assuming that genres are open, dynamic processes that are generated in a transnational, inter-medial, and generational exchange (Schweinitz 2002, 84; Altmann 2006, 49-68, 84). Nevertheless, playing with the genre or the audience's genre expectations is a central feature.

## Accented Cinema?

In their introduction to *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Films in Contemporary Europe* (2010, 12-49), Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg presented and discussed a great number of theoretical concepts of the international cinema of migration which in turn represent a reaction to the great number of contemporary productions. Below, we would like to address some concepts relevant for this volume and set out some further tendencies.

One central approach in this context was developed by Hamid Naficy. He discusses the "accented cinema" for which the experience of migration or diaspora made by the director and/or the team is an important precondition, because this may lead to a "double consciousness" of the participants (Naficy 2001, 22). This "double consciousness" in turn can become the precondition for certain aesthetic procedures, for example, the staging of multilinguality. The concept of "accented cinema" tries to pay tribute to exiled film makers, but the classification of films via their directors' biographies is also problematic in more than one sense. For one thing, the films thus get marked "collectively," discounting individual aesthetics. Moreover, the films and their participants are once and for all ascribed as "peripheral" and thus "foreign" (Ruhe 2006, 34-36).

When looking at the Italian cinema landscape, one can see that the “accented cinema” is still a rather small trend compared to other countries; this no doubt has to do with the comparatively short colonial and immigration history. In other words: the more widely received cinema of migration is produced predominantly by Italo-Italian film makers in the sense of a “cinema medio d’autore” that can be defined as “films of ‘good’ quality, produced on a reasonable budget and that can expect good to medium box office success” (Capussotti 2009, 57). With regards to “accented cinema,” apart from Ferzan Özpetek, whose melodramas have made him one of the most established film makers in Italy, three directors should be mentioned: Maghreb-born Rachid Behnhadj (*L’albero dei destini sospesi*—*The Tree of Hanging Destinies*, 1997; *El khoubz el hafi/Il pane nudo*, 2005), Mohsen Melliti (*Io l’altro—I, the Other*, 2006), and the Ethiopia-born US resident Haile Gerima (*Adwa*, 1999; *Teza*, 2008). In their films, alterity is a strong focal point, both thematically and aesthetically, but only a few films are dedicated to Italian migration or colonialism.<sup>7</sup>

The Italian directors Pablo Benedetti and Davide Sordeall are playing with exactly these biographical expectations from the audience and film criticism by giving their production *Corazones de mujer* (*Women’s heart*, 2008) a Spanish title and adopting a different-sounding pseudonym (Kiff Kossof). Still, it is an Italian production narrating the voyage of two protagonists living in Italy but indebted to Moroccan tradition.

In the present volume, Rada Bieberstein’s article uses the example of Ferzan Özpetek to show how problematic Nacify’s criteria are, among others, by showing the kind of difficulties that film criticism has in categorizing filmmakers with experiences of differentness. After all, Özpetek does not so much narrate migration as the variety of everyday urban life in Rome, and does this in a melodramatic context.

### Smaller productions

It is precisely many smaller productions that practice a differentiated staging of the regionally and locally very diverse everyday existence of migration. Films like Vincenzo Marra’s *Tornando a casa* (*Sailing Home*, 2001), Giorgio Diritti’s *Il vento fa il suo giro* (*The Wind Blows Round*, 2005), or Vittorio Moroni’s *Le ferie di Licu* (*Licu’s Hollidays*, 2006) inscribe themselves into a concrete regional context, often in relatively short form and are characterized by a shooting practice that takes recourse to documentary procedures. The films are shot with handheld cameras, ideally outdoors, the pictures are not trimmed to high-gloss but show blurs and often only weak colour contrasts. Here, a realistic aesthetic is strength-

ened, similarly to when it was reanimated in Europe, especially from the mid-1990s onwards by the Dogma group.

In their soundtracks, such films often feature not only the dominant presence of everyday sounds, but also types of film music that strengthen regional traditions. In films such as *Il cammino della speranza* or *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* the otherness is hardly marked at all in terms of music or language, since the actors mostly talk in standard language, with an eye on economic interests and an (inter)national audience; however, everyday language and dialect are a hallmark of contemporary Italian cinema. In low-budget productions, lay actors often appear who speak their dialect or accent. Marra takes recourse to several members of the Naples family Iaccarino in his film, Moroni locates his film in an intercontinental context, and Diritti uses three languages for his film located in the Maira valley (province of Cuneo): Italian, French, and Occitan (Schrader 2012).

All three films can be counted within “polyglot cinema” (Berger/ Komori 2010, 8) since they feature bi- and plurilingual dialogues, representing with their linguistic-cultural plurality a counterpoise to the smooth hegemonic aesthetics of Hollywood. These films are also similar in that they represent the cinema of the regions, which is very much present in Italy and which triggered a real film boom particularly in the south of the country: in regions such as Puglia, Campania, Sicily, and Sardinia (Wagner/Winkler 2010). In the sense of *neo-neorealismo*, they represent a cinema which draws regional cultures and differences more into the centre of interest, harking back to neorealist practices but also to documentary and/or melodramatic aesthetics. At the same time, the term *neo-neorealismo* is generally understood to denote a cinema which again increasingly addresses societal experiences of marginalized persons and political protest. Here, Brunetta refers to a young “realist” cinema which focuses on the dignity of the individual and the crisis-laden second Italian republic (from 1994) (Brunetta 1995, 392-397). Riccardo Guerrini, Giacomo Tagliani, and Francesco Zucconi, however, discuss a cinema—without using the term or referring to neorealism—which stages a “spaccato dell’esistenza quotidiana,” giving room to the country’s anxieties and latent tensions (Guerrini et al. 2009, 10).

Yet, clear aesthetic and topographic differences also become apparent here. While Diritti and Marra strengthen the regional element within the scope of a mountain or fishing film in cinema history, Maroni transposes and exalts realistic procedures into a transnational context. Seventeen-year-old Licu, who has lived in Rome for eight years, has to go back to Bangladesh in order to follow his mother’s wish and marry an eighteen-year-old girl whom he does not know. *Le ferie di Licu* contrasts the

bleakness of a Roman suburb where Licu lives with an exceedingly colourful Bangladesh. While Rome is depicted in an almost documentary style (which has led to the film being sometimes classified as a documentary), Bangladesh has an exaggerated exotic flair, although local everyday life in Bangladesh is referred to and reinforced by the soundtrack (Feleschini Lerner 2010a).

The documentary film also stages the variety of the regionally and locally diverse everyday life of migration and, in doing so, often takes recourse to the melodramatic and (neo-)realistic tradition of Italian cinema. Beside the aforementioned film *L'orchestra di Piazza Vittorio*, which conjures up multiculturalism with its melodramatic gesture, some other films have also gained wide attention, among them Vittorio De Seta's film from the same year, *Lettere dal Sahara* (2006). The doyen of neorealistic documentary films chooses a completely different narrative and aesthetic method but shares the claim to authentic documentation by pathos with Agostino Ferrente. He does not portray in a collective's but an individual's fate; he takes the university graduate Assane (Djibril Kébé) and sketches his route from Lampedusa via Sicily all the way to Torino. This full-length documentary focuses on the experience of Assane as a representative of the new "subalterns" and successors of the dependent fishermen and peasants, for example, the "favorite figure" of the neorealists (Capussotti 2009, 63-66). The film almost completely dispenses with a visualization of the sea, as the spectacular, for example, and, similarly to some previously mentioned films, it chooses a multilingual staging (Italian and Wolof) which, however, is connected to a clear-cut, bipolar collectivist focus. Contextualizations via other film material and commentaries are avoided, as is the fact that the replication of the migration route is filmic and artificial. In both films, the audience should completely identify with the diegetic world.<sup>8</sup>

Especially during the past few years, the documentary film has experienced a new upsurge, thanks to new technological developments which have made shooting much less expensive as well as distancing it from "big" or traditional productions. An insight into this area of experimental Italian documentary film is provided by Francesca Esposito's article that discusses technically-aesthetically innovative short films, such as those shot with a handheld camera. Esposito illustrates the continuity of the discourse of crisis and disappointment, especially with regard to the current internal tensions in Italy and to the political developments during the Berlusconi years. They have not only led to an increasing political and economic crisis but also to a massive (artistic and academic) emigration from Italy towards the US, Canada, and North-Western Europe.

Not only in Italy, but also in Europe and America numerous short films have been made within the Italian communities during the past few years, films that treat the societal experiences of marginalization through less spectacular productions. The following are two cases in point that, in an analogy to Ferrente and De Seta, document the cultural memory of migration in a broad sense of the term by showing the examples of an individual and a collective, respectively. In their 100-minute-long Austrian-Italian documentary road movie *Babooska* (2005), the film team Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel accompanied this 20-year-old artist for one year. The film narrates, in the tradition of *direct cinema*, Babooska's tours through Italy together with her family's travelling circus because she lacks any other education or training. First and foremost, the circus here does not signify entertainment, but an everyday life at the edge of society and at the very brink of poverty. Almost simultaneously, Italo-Canadian film maker Paul Tana tried to document the collective memory of migration by citing the example of Montréal's Little Italy. His 26-minute-long documentary film *Ricordati di noi* (*Don't forget about us*, 2007) goes back to the archive of the first popular television programme *Teledomenica*, which was broadcast each Sunday in Italian between 1964 and 1994. Tana shows the efforts of the *Cinémathèque québécoise* to conserve the film material of the station and thus the media history of Italian emigrants.

### (Gender) Perspectives

Issues of rendering perspective and visual regime are central in such regionally located smaller productions, but they also dominate the genre cinema of established film makers. This often takes place in terms of an ethno-national cinema or a cinema of strengthening "ethnoscapes" (Torchin 2010, 56-73; Berghahn/Sternberg 2010, 27), for example, one that is defined by places where issues of socio-economic inequality are discussed with a focus on cultural diversity. A case in point is Carlo Mazzacurati's appropriation of the "whodunit" in *La giusta distanza* (*The Right Distance* 2007). With the aim of discussing the relativity of the attribution of Self and Other, his film harks back to the decidedly stigmatizing tradition of the mafia movie. Films like *La giusta distanza* show, as Doris Pichler sets forth in her article, that this genre is particularly appropriate for tales of migration because it breaks through a very typical migration narrative. This film, which was awarded the *Nastro d'argento* in 2008, accomplishes this by playing with the "foreign" element on several levels of perception so that gaps are created time and again which are filled in by the viewers, depending on their perspective. The game of ambivalence, security, and

insecurity is already ironically foreshadowed in the title with its question about the “right distance.”

Turning the visual regime into an issue is also of central importance in the scope of innovative narrative techniques. As Alice Bardan and Áine O’Healy show, Carmine Amaroso’s *Cover Boy: L’ultima rivoluzione* (*Cover Boy: The Last Revolution*, 2006) stages a Romanian migrant and an unemployed person from the Abruzzi living together, both of them deracinated as foreigners and living in their respective precarious environments in Rome. The hegemonic masculinity is thwarted by their experience of migration as well as by their social inferiority or professional failure. The film clarifies this, among other things, by its poly-local and polyglot structure. In doing so, the film broaches the issues of perspective and power structure: for example, through having the Romanian language dominate the first half of the film which was also shot in Romania. There, the film also finds its ending, thus breaking with the cyclical structure of classic narratives of the Italian cinema of migration such as those of victimization and disillusionment.

The genre of the comedy film which in Italy only sparsely deals with the topic of migration, despite the tradition of the *Commedia all’Italiana*, is also being used in this way. In his article, Gaocheng Zhang presents *Lezioni di cioccolato* (*Chocolate Lessons* Claudio Cupellini, 2007), *Questa notte è ancora nostra* (*This Night is Still Ours* Paolo Genovese and Luca Miniero, 2008), and *Into Paradiso* (2010), three examples of this genre, and questions the (comic) potential of the digressions from normative constructions of masculinity. After all it appears predominantly to be “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005) that seems jeopardized by migration. Linking cultural diversity with hegemonic masculinity, in other words the ideal of the middle-class, successful, heterosexual man, also takes place in Ozpetek’s early film *Hamam—Il bagno turco* (*Hamam*, 1997), questioning the heterosexual orientation of its protagonist in a “foreign” place. These examples clearly show that unsettling the Self and the Other is increasingly charged intersectionally in Italian cinema in that gender concepts and sexual orientation become topics.

Despite Catholicism’s deep roots in Italy, which has for a long time hindered the development of a queer policy, there are more and more interesting productions which at the same time increasingly break away from the “national” narratives (such as family and machismo). The previously mentioned film *Corazones de mujer* does this in a particularly depressing way. Benedetti and Sordella “return” their protagonists, Zina (Ghizlane Walidi) and Shakira (Aziz Ahmeri), to Morocco. Zina lost her

virginity but is still supposed to marry according to traditional norms. In order to “undo” her past sexual life, she goes to Morocco, accompanied by transsexual Shakira who is responsible for her wedding gown. So this film enacts a threefold transgression by not only crossing classic Italian topoi on a gender level but by crossing the continent at the same time and transcending “national” film aesthetics in the name of realism and melodrama, leaning towards trash and video aesthetics. Thus, the filmmakers broach the issue of a desire for strict borders in terms of topography, aesthetics, and sexuality all at once, as exemplified by using Italian and Arabic as languages in the film and by resorting to trashy aesthetics.

A similarly hybrid film aesthetic is used by Roberta Torre, who throws any kind of realism overboard. As the article by Daniel Winkler shows, the Palermo-based film *Sud Side Stori* (*South Side Story*, 2000) crosses perspectives, starting with the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* and combining it with home video and trash aesthetics, documentary sequences, and musical tributes. The film, shot in the dialect of Naples, thus satirically narrates the “African invasion” of Palermo, broaching the issue of racism in Italy in an innovative way and distancing itself from the style and morals of the classic *cinéma engagé*.

As different as the last mentioned films are, they still allow this conclusion: they all imply, in the sense of “transnational narratives,” a “hybridity of aesthetics, settings, acting and languages” (Berger/Komori 2010, 8), thus representing a cinema which not only differs from mainstream cinema in its aesthetics and production, but which also embarks on experimental paths. In the sense of Sandra Ponzanesi’s concept of an “outlandish cinema,” issues of perspective and power are drawn into the centre of attention, with the aim of showing a different Italy away from stereotypes of cinema history (Ponzanesi 2005, 270).

## **Glocalization and National Cinema**

Studies on transnational European cinema have been correct in pointing out that cinema in an age of globalization—maybe somewhat less than literature or graphic art—cannot be conceived from an exclusively national point of view (Ezra/Rowden 2006; Jahn-Sudmann 2009). With reference to European cinema, Elsaesser discusses a post-national, new “cinema of double occupancy” characterized by “hyphenated identities” and the conflicts brought about by multiple affiliations (Elsaesser 2009b, 32-33). Moreover, what can be observed in Italian cinema as well is “glocalization,” which in terms of economics, politics, and culture



connects global (often hegemonic US-American) processes with national or regional traditions (Robertson 1995). So global film topics and aesthetics receive national or regional localization; at the same time, many films clearly show that a contemporary cultural and cinematographic history from the perspective of migration not only needs to transcend the boundaries of the national, but also of the European.

The films analyzed here make it apparent once again that we cannot disregard national attributions when problematizing identity constructions; the former are always tricky and hence have to be raised as issues. Many films, from *Il cammino della speranza* through to *Into Paradiso*, already question the attributions of *italianità* and the Other through their staging of open and closed spaces alone. To phrase it with all due caution: in terms of aesthetics and content, certain procedures tend to crystallize what could be termed characteristics of the “Italian” film, which are the further writing, continued writing, and thus different writing of national film traditions in the name of transnational issues. For many filmmakers of the youngest generation, it is valid to state that—after the economic and political crisis of the Italian *auteur cinema* in the 1980s—the films made during the post-war decades serve as models for orientation both in terms of aesthetics and content. This serves to explain the frequent intra-medial recourse to neo-realistic procedures in order to lend authenticity to what is narrated, or the many variations of the melodramatic. These are tendencies that may be observed in other European countries as well, such as France, Spain, Switzerland, or Austria,<sup>9</sup> but which certainly have a particular characteristic occurrence in the *Nouvo Cinema Italia* (Wagner/Winkler 2010, 12).

*The Cinemas of Italian Migration* places itself in a series of studies about film and migration and, in doing so, focuses on Italian migration, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, complements the perspective of film aesthetics by a perspective of cultural science. In this way, regions as well as genres and filmmakers that have often been neglected are given a voice. We hope that this contribution may serve as a stimulus for further research on Italian cinema in a trans-local and transcontinental perspective.

The English translations of the original quotations are in the endnote; they are translated by the contributors unless otherwise noted.

Translated from German by Ludwig Fiebig.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Istituto nazionale della statistica*. URL: <http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/39726> (accessed on May 22, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The discussion about these new realities of life first takes place in literature in Italy during the 1990s. Authors like Salah Methnani, Pap Khouma, Mohamed Bouchane, and Garane Garane published texts that often have an autobiographical character, telling about the migration experience of the so-called boat people and often characterized by literary multi-linguality (Gnisci 2006). The journalist Fabrizio Gatti created attention all across Europe when he disguised himself as the irregular Kurdish-Iraqi migrant Bilal, experienced for himself the inhuman living conditions of the *clandestini*, and documented them (Gatti 2010).

<sup>3</sup> In US-American movies, like D. W. Griffith's *The Italian Barber* (1911), it is initially the comic presentation of Italians, e.g. as Latin Lovers, that characterizes the Italo-American film. In the US-American production *The Italian* (Reginald Barker, 1915), however, the New York struggle for survival of a former Venetian *gondoliere* and his family is narrated for the first time as a melodrama. An Italian exception is the silent movie *Napoli che canta* (Roberto Leone Roberti, 1926), which presents migration as absence, as a gap. Time and again, the viewers see fragmentary scenes from the everyday life back in Naples, scenes of happiness as well as those of poverty and departure. Migration here turns into the precondition for the nostalgic remembrance of times past (Illger 2009, 21).

<sup>4</sup> Pietro Germi appears as an actor here.

<sup>5</sup> The narrative of return is not only found in movies but also in recent documentaries like *Merica* by Federico Ferrone, Michele Manzolini, and Francesco Ragazzi (2007), who—via the example of migrants in Brazil—use the title (similar to Gianni Amelio's famous film shot in Albania) to ironically allude to the “American Dream” which has been dreamt.

<sup>6</sup> This is Placido's first work as a movie director and is based on a script written together with Sandro Petraglia and Stefano Rulli.

<sup>7</sup> In part, her films are European-American (co-)productions that sometimes also take recourse to Italian co-authors or international movie stars (Parati 2005, 108–134).

<sup>8</sup> The documentary *Miss Little China* (Riccardo Cremona/Vincenzo De Cecco, 2009) also shows traits of the *direct cinema* in that the camera accompanies the everyday life of the girls living in the Chinese community, who by participating in the *Miss Italia* beauty pageant hope to liberate themselves from poverty. *Miss Little China*—beside the movie *China Girl* (Abel Ferrara 1987)—belongs to the few productions that give a voice to Chinese migrants.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, the dedicated issue “Cinéma régional, cinéma national” from the series *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque. Revue d'histoire du cinéma* (79, 2010).

**THE SOUTHERN QUESTION  
AND ITALIAN CINEMA**



SOLID BORDERS, FLUID NATION:  
ON PIETRO GERMI'S  
*IL CAMMINO DELLA SPERANZA* (1950)<sup>1</sup>

LAURA RASCAROLI

The title of the 1950 film by Pietro Germi, *Il cammino della speranza* (*The Road to Hope*), is a popular locution used to describe extremely long, laborious and demanding feats.<sup>2</sup> The title is, of course, a metaphor for emigration in general but may also be seen as a reference to the slow and difficult forward movement of the entire Italian nation, a movement shaped by the hope for a better and fairer society.

The double focus of the film on emigration and on national progress indicates two elements of interest. First, Germi's film is about nation and national identity as much as it is about the illegal emigration towards France and other European countries around 1950. Second, the film ultimately argues that the state of evolution of a nation is mirrored and measured by its capacity to deal with the migrant, whether internal or external, national or international. While most films about emigration point to questions of identity—personal, local, and national—Germi's film is especially poignant because it couples its reflection on such themes with an examination of ideas of nation building in the post-war era, as well as the role played by neorealist cinema in that same process. Placed as it is at the end of a decade marked by the war, by the end of Fascism, and by the most glorious and productive phase of neorealism, *Il cammino della speranza* offers a snapshot of Italy in 1950. Additionally, the film displays the marked ambition of reflecting back on the past decade and producing an assessment of the outcome of the *Resistenza* and the hopes of the early post-war era.

Written by Federico Fellini and Tullio Pinelli, Germi's fourth feature was produced by Lux—the only producer that in the post-war years attempted an industrial programming of the neorealist current (Sesti 1997, 47). Initially considered by critics as one of the finest neorealist films, *Il cammino della speranza* is no longer central to the canon. It is important to note that the film, which Germi initially intended to title *Terroni*,<sup>3</sup> was deprived of government financial funding, “[Fondi] che fino ad allora non

erano mai stati negati, nemmeno al più infimo dei film” (Giacovelli 1997, 34).<sup>4</sup> The funds were finally assigned only after the exclusion of some sequences portraying the police in a negative light. This suggests that the film was considered by the institutions as antagonistic and damaging. However, its perceived threat did not necessarily reside in the unfavourable light in which it placed the Italian police but rather in its alarming and perturbing portrayal of an irreconcilably diverse and divided nation, which the film represented as fluid and foreign. The goal of this essay is to demonstrate that the Italy in Germi's film, as seen through the eyes of its migrant protagonists, is ultimately presented as an interstice, as an in-between, and as an unfinished nation.

*Il cammino della speranza*'s ambition to pass judgement on the previous five years of the Italian political settlement, social order, and cinematic history is suggested by its choice to cover almost exactly the same territory as Roberto Rossellini's seminal masterpiece, *Paisà* (*Paisan*, 1946). The film took it upon itself to tell the story not only of what had happened, but also of what had happened to everybody, to every region, to every Italian, and performed the first post-Fascist mapping of the country in 1946. While the narrative pretext of *Paisà*'s exploration of the entire national territory, from Sicily to the Po River Valley, is the northbound march of the Allies, in *Il cammino della speranza*, it is the illegal emigration of a group of Sicilian miners, travelling from their village to the border between Piedmont and France.<sup>5</sup> However, it would be wrong to compare Germi's and Rossellini's works without mentioning a third film which, in 1948, had already taken issue with *Paisà* and, in particular, with its portrayal of Italy, region by region, through the adoption of a similarly episodic narrative structure: Pietro Francisci's *Natale al Campo 119* (*Christmas at Camp 119*, 1947). Before comparing Francisci's and Rossellini's films, it should be mentioned that Cesare Zavattini was also planning a film in episodes encompassing the entire nation in 1950-51, *Italia mia* (*My Italy*), which was, however, never made (see Zavattini 1959, 122-45). The sheer number of such national films and film projects that emerged within five years of the end of the war suggests a potent need not only to discover Italy after twenty years of Fascist propaganda but also to convey certain ideas of the nation.

Released in 1946 and 1947 respectively, *Paisà* and *Natale al Campo 119* (a canonical neorealist film the former, a generic product the latter), even though temporally contiguous, are the outcome of two distinct historical moments. A war drama, *Paisà* still reflects the opening generated by the end of Fascism. A war comedy, *Natale al Campo 119* mirrors the restoration of old powers, marked by such events as the Togliatti