

## CHAPTER 7

# Frames, Stereotypes and Authorial Politics The Transits and Landings of Migrants in Italian Cinema

*Gaia Peruzzi, Marco Bruno and Alessandra Massa*

### **Migrants' Journeys in Italian Films: Our Research Field**

---

This chapter aims to develop reflections on the role of cinema in the representation of migration. It starts from the main findings emerging from research on Italian audiovisual productions on this issue, in which more than a hundred works, both films and documentaries, were analysed. The present work will focus on a selected corpus of stories of journeys and landings, in the belief that media narrations of these two phases of the migration experience play a role of particular importance not only in the public and political debate over migrations but also in relation to identity processes in Italy and Europe.

Migration in Italy is a highly debated issue that has been the subject of intense political discussions. The frequent turnover of governments, whether technical or political, over the past twenty years has proved the powerful impact of migration on electoral campaigns and political information, utilizing various channels such as broadcasting and digital media to disseminate the issue to the public and civil society (Greco 2019; Bentivegna et al. 2020). Political debates on the issue often take on an aggressive tone, serving to polarize public opinion. Right-wing and populist parties have turned migration into a defining element of their political platforms. Proposals for managing migration policies have helped to outline political parties' identities and electoral communications. Even the work of nongovernmental or humanitarian organizations engaged in sea rescues has been the subject of polarizing narrative dynamics and frames. However, these organizations have attempted to delineate their specific narratives, sometimes in opposition with political actors (Abbas et al. 2019).

An emblematic case was that of the *Sea Watch*, a German-flagged NGO ship involved in rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. In 2019, the vessel's captain, Carola Rakete, refused to dock in Tripoli, considering it an unsafe port for the 53 migrants on board. Due to the Security Decree Bis, signed by then Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini, the ship was formally prohibited from docking in Italy. However, Rakete decided to dock on the island of Lampedusa, Italy, after a two-week standoff. The captain was arrested and released a few days later. This incident revealed the manifest and latent tensions within the Italian political class. The ruling coalition at the time, consisting of the right-wing party Lega Nord, focusing on territorial claims and nationalist border protection, and the populist party MoVimento 5 Stelle, founded by comedian Beppe Grillo, focusing on challenging the political establishment, exhibited contradictory attitudes. Opposition forces, such as the Democratic Party and other left-wing representatives, heavily criticized the government and the inadequacy of current migration policies (Geddes and Petracchin 2020). The issue has taken on the characteristics of both a domestic and a foreign policy matter. Migration policies often conflict with European policies and directives, which some believe do not align with the needs of citizens and are adverse to Italian interests. After a period of being overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent media coverage (Bruno 2021; Giacomelli et al. 2020), the migration issue has forcefully returned to the political agenda under the right-wing government led by Giorgia Meloni, which took office in September 2022. This resurgence was further fueled by tragic shipwrecks near the Italian coast, such as the one in Cutro, Calabria, on 25–26 February 2023, when at least 94 people are believed to have lost their lives.

Having established the political context of Italy's recent history, we now aim to bring the theoretical and empirical coordinates of our discussion into sharper focus. Firstly, we will examine the reasons that give significance to the cinema–migration linkage and, within it, focus more specifically on transits and landings. We will then provide details about the nature and method of the research, in order to contextualize our analysis.

In discussing the relationship between cinema and migration, we ask: why are cinematographic representations of migrations considered sociologically meaningful? What is interesting in the way this specific medium deals with migrations, particularly the migrants' journeys and their landing in Italy? What can films tell us about phenomena and problems that the news media have been reporting on for years and on a daily basis? The scientific literature has amply

demonstrated that, in contemporary democracies, media representations of migrations have crucial political and social importance, because they contribute to public opinion formation and the emergence of political agendas.<sup>1</sup> In answering the above questions, we therefore take this premise as a given, while focusing specifically on the medium of film.

In comparison with other current media, the distinctive characteristics of the cinematographic work may be summarized in the following manner: firstly, films are industrial publishing products that, in order to be made, require summoning the efforts of highly qualified professional figures; secondly, they come into being for (ideally) public enjoyment; thirdly, if historic and fantasy works are excluded, most cinematographic narrations, even when they are invented stories, are based upon representations of actual social contexts that resemble reality. In addition, films are extended narrations, among the longest of those circulating in the contemporary digitalized media landscapes. Finally, the film text is based on the image, and on the relationship between image and word. In the authors' opinion, the analysis of these elements can delineate the perimeter of meaning within which we assess the role of cinema in dealing with current events like migrations.

While the first three characteristics make cinema similar to the information media (news journalism, to be precise), the last two (the length and complexity of storytelling and the predominance of the image) are those that distinguish film in the media landscape. Every film is a highly dense stock of stories, conversations, and images that, in being shown, propose socially constructed and historically situated cross sections of reality. In this sense, cinema is accorded a privileged relationship with modernity, which places it – albeit in a non-central position – beside the information media in the narration of social issues. With respect to these media, the distinctive force of cinema lies in the fact that the narrative modes of film, engrossing and immersive as they are, aim to touch the sphere of emotions, and to trigger feelings. In the construction of popular imageries, the audiovisual text combines reason and pathos; where journalism tends towards objectivity and impersonality, cinema, without abandoning the impression of realism, can allow itself to explicitly involve the viewer in different perspectives. It can allow the point of view of the 'other', of the 'different' – in our case, of the migrant – to be adopted. It is a practice we know as the Achilles' heel of Western mainstream information, which continues to tell the story of migrants as *Other* than us, the native, white, (male), well-to-do Westerners. The reason for the interest in the cinema–migration pairing lies essentially in this potential

subversiveness of narrative cinema. The attraction between the two (cinema and migration) is also exemplified by the number of sub-genres used in the literature to refer to films recounting stories of migrants and migrations: accented, exilic, diasporic, postcolonial, ethnic, hyphenated identity, intercultural, transnational (Naficy 2001; Loshitzky 2010; see also the Introduction to this volume). It is precisely the central nature of the diaspora and its associated social, cultural and political issues, along with the realistic style and recurring tensions between tradition and modernity, that were recognized as one of the distinctive features of European cinema.

Having confirmed the central significance of the cinematographic narration of migrations, we approach the specific theme of our investigation: why focus on the representation of transits and landings? Sociologically and narratively, the passage itself and the landing in a foreign land are the most interesting phases of the journey. The narration of the transit is in fact the account of the migrants' strength, will and hope, an account of their uncertainties and of the dangers they are fleeing from and are exposed to. Portraying the crossing may be considered an act of listening to migrants, and to their fears and dreams. On the other hand, the narration of the landing is the account of the meeting with the host society. Aside from whether the movie camera is the protagonist's eye or the director's external gaze, the depiction of the arrival contains the host country's reaction. A film on arriving in Italy is a counter analysis of our own and Europe's reaction to contemporary migrations (Sayad 1999).

If this may be considered generally true for all migration stories, the decision to select Italian films which narrate landings of migrants also responds to considerations of politics and current events, as already established in the opening part of this chapter. Positioned in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, Italy is a strategic gateway to Europe. The cases of Lampedusa and of the landings denied to the ships of humanitarian NGOs (Open Arms, Sea-Watch3) have made it one of the focal places symbolizing migrants' journeys of hope. Alongside the Port of Calais, the island of Lesbos, the Lipa camp, the Alpine passes and Viktor Orbán's wall, the Italian coastline has been for years one of the open wounds in Europe's conscience.

To study the representation of arrivals in Italian film discourse therefore means intertwining studies on media and migration with border studies, but also with solidarity studies. In dealing with a Europe that looks more and more like a 'borderland' (Balibar 2009), these emerging strands of research raise questions

about the new phenomena of criminalization of solidarity and politicization of groups and clashes (Giliberti and Potot 2021). In the face of an unprecedented evolution in state/citizens/foreigners relations, the intersection between political sociology, the sociology of migrations, and sociology of the media appears – as Andrea Pogliano has noted – to be a necessity (Pogliano 2017).

In conclusion to this introductory part, we dedicate these final lines to illustrating the objectives and nature of the research conducted, before we embark on developing our main reflections on the representation of migrations in Italian films. Our corpus of reference consists of more than one hundred film texts based on stories of migrants and migrations, produced or co-produced in Italy, and collected between 2012 and 2020.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, the corpus comprised: films about the journey of migrants from Italy, made from the beginning of the twentieth century to today; films about Italy as a migratory destination and about immigration to Italy, made during the last thirty years; and documentaries on the crossing to Italy, made over the last two decades. For this chapter, for the reasons already explained, we have concentrated on films telling the stories of journeys and landings, with a thematic analysis focusing on the recurring and/or particularly significant themes in the representation of migrant transits and landings. The hypothesis at the basis of this technique is that the repetition of certain aspects in the representation of a subject, by numerous authors, can reveal deep-seated structures of the imaginary of an era. These frames and frameworks of meaning become receptacles for symbolic materials, such as stories, images and labels, which are consistently consolidated through repetition, thus becoming powerful models for the attribution of established meanings (Gamson 1992; Bruno 2014; Peruzzi and Lombardi 2020). Consequently, this chapter compares texts of dramas and documentaries to reflect upon the role of authorial politics, an area still underexplored in the current literature.

### **Italian Cinema and the Frames of Journeys and Landings**

---

Framing is a fertile device for any analysis on media representations of reality and, in particular, those defined in terms of diversity (Bruno and Peruzzi 2021; Binotto and Bruno 2021). Framing though acquires an additional dimension of meaningfulness when the focus is on cinema, a phenomenon which can be credited to the relationship that cinema has with the imaginary. An analysis of the

imaginary is therefore fundamental to understanding how each frame can function by constructing representations that are concrete and rich, realistic and full of references to symbols, myths, and 'cultural resonance' (Gamson 1992). Like much of the media system, the imaginary performs the dual and only apparently contradictory function of showing (but also expressing tensions and conflicts) while at the same time guiding the imagination, crystallizing and in certain ways limiting it to 'large blocks of meaning' (Ilardi 2010: 21). On the other hand, the frames are constructed as common sense: every new example, by belonging in that frame, is automatically deemed truer and more significant for those who know and are recognized in the frame, thus appearing 'already known'. The use of myths reinforces the imaginary and at the same time endows it with concreteness, providing a symbolic and narrative framework. Myths are consequently inserted into common sense by making them appear 'naturally' linked to the imaginary.

Of the various topics, the theme of the journey seems most able to be configured as an autonomous and direct frame producing imagery in addition to common sense. As already discussed, with the term 'journey' we also indicate the journey's wider dimension relating to transits, the places traversed by movements, the interruptions and reorganization of trajectories, and so on. The theme of the journey is, in fact, implied in every representation of migrations, and this can only be the case for cinema too, given the narrative and pathemic value this topos has for all stories. From mythology to adventure literature and the audiovisual (in cinema, the 'road movie' has nearly acquired autonomy as a 'genre'), the journey makes it possible to explore the characters' reactions to the stories, to define their existential changes, and to track the coordinates of a before, during and after in which physical displacement is also and always an existential movement.

In this sense, the selection of the issue of the journey and the analysis of its sociocultural articulations in the cinema dealing with migrations nearly takes on the outlines of a tautology. The various aspects and materials of film that can be explicitly considered here are only a subset of those potentially called into question. In fact, from certain standpoints, every film that deals even vaguely with migrations (from and to Italy, in our case) has something to say about the dimension of the journey; the selection made here will, by necessity, be partial, to say the least.

To overcome this epistemological problem,<sup>3</sup> the reflection is organized around two specific subcategories of the more general dimension of the journey. These two subcategories will, in our analysis, constitute the frames that, to us, appear

most prevalent and capable of defining the coordinates of the representation of migrations in Italian fiction cinema: 1) the journey as physical and at the same time existential displacement, and 2) the sea as an icon of crossing.

### ***The Frame of the Journey as Physical and Existential Displacement***

The theme of the journey permeates much of Italian filmmaking on migrations which, to a certain point, has begun taking an interest in the issue from the perspective of immigration and no longer with reference to Italian emigration, in what has been defined as ‘the new migrant Italian cinema’ (Schrader and Wrinkler 2013: 8). In fact, during the 1990s, and thus about twenty years after Italy had reversed its migration balance,<sup>4</sup> immigration finally became a theme of Italian filmmaking. At that initial moment, the productions were few and disconnected from one another. Titles of note included *Tomato* (Michele Placido 1990), *Un'altra vita* (Carlo Mazzacurati 1992), and *Lamerica* (Gianni Amelio 1994) – an output that enjoyed international success. In these films, we can already see the first signs of an engaged cinema (Schrader and Wrinkler 2013: 8) that seeks to ally itself in favour of immigration while, at the same time and in order to reach a wider public, including references to the classics of genre cinema as well as the history of Italian filmmaking (ibidem). Placido’s *Tomato* is a paradigm for this in more than one sense, showing, in a development reminiscent of a classic ‘road movie’, the journey of Kwaku (Thywill Amenia), a Ghanian medical school graduate, from Southern Italy to Germany.

More recently, a more dramatic – or melodramatic (Schrader and Wrinkler 2013) – direction was taken explicitly with *Una volta che sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2005) and with *La sconosciuta* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 2006). In all these films, the dimension of the journey is explored by relying on various archetypal representations. From this standpoint, one may cite (in order to introduce cinema dealing with Italian emigration into the reflection as well) a film like *Il cammino della speranza* (Pietro Germi, 1950), which already contained many of the elements characterizing the body of films under analysis.

Through the way it is represented and introduced into a narrative, the journey (in its spatial sense) is transformed into an existential dislocation, a dislocation in emotion and feelings, in the same way that the boundaries that are crossed are not only physical and geographical, but also psychological, metaphorical, social, and cultural (Leed 1992; Naficy 2001). One may say that they are also ‘political’ in

nature, since the very idea of ‘boundary’, or the experiences of dislocation, of migration, of nomadism, and of crossing those very boundaries, call political configurations into question while rearticulating social and cultural ones (Capussotti 2009; Connolly 2010).

In cinema (as in literature), the topoi relating to the journey therefore take on great importance, and often mobilize certain mythological or epic journeys that, in certain aspects, represent something quite close to ‘cultural universals’ (even though they often regard the cultural and religious substratum of the West especially). As proof, consider the expulsion from Eden, the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, and their search for the Promised Land (Naficy 2001), wherein that Promised Land is another topos of great relevance in filmmaking about migrations.

### ***Spaces of Journey and Arrival: The Sea as an Icon of the Crossing***

The analysis of the Italian films dealing with migrations places substantial emphasis on the dimension of the arrival (and, by extension, of entry) into Italian territory. The arrival is substantiated through an iconic presence of the maritime and coastal setting – a presence that, in reality, and also from a visual standpoint, is nearly never central in terms of the spaces in which the events and settings are played out. In fact, Berger and Winkler (2012: 66), referring to the film production of Southern Europe (Italy, France and Spain), assert that ‘although the Mediterranean Sea is often used to introduce the action or to close a film, the *Mare Nostrum* itself is strikingly absent as space of action’ in the proper sense of the word. Even in a film like *Una volta sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2005), which presents the sea as one of the expanses that leave the greatest impression (starting from the poster), and which has the original narrative device of the young son of a Northern industrialist falling into the sea and being rescued by a migrant boat, the Mediterranean is not exactly configured as the space of the film’s action. The Mediterranean, rather, is a space of passage, a place of transition, as are all the coasts of Southern Italy.

In *Terraferma* (Emanuele Crialesi, 2011), the visual force of the scenes presents us with a sea that is the counterbalance to the landing, to the island, and in specific terms to the *terra ferma*. The land, on the other hand, is fixed and bound to its traditions, divided between welcoming tourists and the arriving migrants and their stories (like that of Sara and her very young son, brought to that landing from Africa). It is an island where the Puccillo family appears to move in search for its



own space for expression, and in some way for its own ‘elsewhere’. Crialese’s careful and rigorous exploration is not only aesthetic, but clearly presents the antinomies of immigration, the tension between the prospect for security and the ‘law of the sea’, between the past and a present to be deciphered, between the wellbeing of tourists and the aspirations of those who, to different degrees and in different ways, experience the diverse peripheries of the ‘hyper-civilized’ world. Here, the sea surrounds the island, dictating its rhythms as in an eternal present. But at the same time, in responding to new emergencies and the inhabitants’ aspirations, it envelopes it, seeming to trap the island in some way.

The presence of the sea relates above all to the cinema on immigration to Italy, rather than the representation of immigration from Italy. *Nuovomondo* (Emanuele Crialese, 2006), not coincidentally a modern film dealing with a topos of Italian filmmaking like emigration, presents a major exception. The sea takes on a very central placement in *Nuovomondo*, conveying the dimension of danger, of confrontation with the sea (an extraneous and at times terrifying element), while also focusing on the ship that, by carrying the travellers, becomes the bearer of change and of transformation for (even) relationships. In *Nuovomondo*, ‘in the memorable scene of the departure from the port, the sea slowly and inexorably insinuates itself between those who stay on land, on the dock, and those standing on the ship’s deck, who have embarked: the image is that of a humanity that is dumbfounded, compact, and silent, lacerated by the unknown that separates hope from poverty’ (Corrado and Mariottini 2013: 113). The journey towards the new world is thus clearly an existential one, and this setting of the sea (the fluid place of passage and transit, which is also enveloping) is transfigured into the dimension of dreams: the most important example of this is the famous scene of this journeying humanity swimming in milk – a scene that, with visual force, delivers a surreal and highly allegorical dimension to the reflection on the stories of our migrants. ‘I don’t know how to swim, but I would gladly swim in a river of milk!’ says the protagonist Salvatore, dreamily.

### **The Migrants’ Journeys: Spatial, Temporal, and Relational Trajectories in Documentary Narratives**

---

The documentaries dealt with in this section were selected taking into account the central narrative nucleus (for further discussion of the role of documentaries on

migration in the context of the relationship between journalism and narrative fiction, see Campanioni in this volume). The discussion will explore those documentaries that represent migrations which have the Mediterranean Sea as their setting and principal route. This choice makes it possible to examine more deeply how documentary production helps to crystallize the theme of the journey within a symbolic spatial arc that depicts the *Mare Nostrum* as a central node of extra-European movements, whereas what takes place on the coasts and on the Sicilian islands acts as an access point while awaiting much-sought entry towards other European destinations.<sup>5</sup> This selection critically inserts documentary production within the mainstream narrations of migrations, which the literature describes as prevalently focused on the arrivals of migrants by sea, on travelling routes laden with imagery for the building of Otherness and on the processes of othering (Said 1978) places such as Africa or the Middle East (Binotto, Bruno and Lai 2016).

In Italy, documentary production tends to be characterized by a ‘new canon’ (Hipkins and Renga 2016) defined by a trend towards ethical commitment. Migrations are part of an active and innovative production devoted to political issues and to the representation of persons traditionally placed at the margins (Angelone and Clò 2011). These forms of *cinema engagé* deliver images of social change, and include imageries and public debate figures traditionally underrepresented in mainstream media. The documentary production analysed here may therefore be read by virtue of the proposition of a reality more realistic than certain journalistic representations: the theme of the journey is treated in emblematic fashion. Hardships, difficulties, meetings and separations are part of a symbolic account in which the intentions of raising awareness clearly appear. In reconstructing the main thematic nodes emerging from our analysis of the documentaries, we focus on specific categories that contribute towards placing the account of journeys and landings into narrative paths. We then aim to illustrate the journey in time, in space, and as relational practice.

As for time, it bears considering both the historic dimension to which the migrants’ journeys as a collective experience belong, and the temporal variable that describes the journey’s ‘before and after’ in the individual accounts. The documentaries taken into consideration tend to emphasize the now ‘routine’ nature of sea voyages. At the same time, documentary representation helps to reveal how the public responses to these phenomena fall within the characteristics of a supposed exceptionalism that still describes the migrants’ journey as an

ahistorical and therefore universal account. There are, then, no allusions to long-term dynamics. When the migrations are historicized, this is done through the outlining of certain parallelisms that refer to local experiences. In *Come il peso dell'acqua*, a 2014 documentary directed by Andrea Segre, the historicization of the phenomena is functional for underscoring the communality of experiences. The relationship between the difficult Italian emigrations that marked the history of the twentieth century and the needs of the migrants landing on Italy's coasts is constructed through the lyricism exemplified by the theatrical reading of Giovanni Pascoli's poem *Italy*.

The migrants' life stories are immobilized in the limbo of the landings. The documentary storytelling does not always recount the journey's 'before'. At the same time, the life stories of the migrants – in the rare cases in which they are given room to speak – are almost never articulated in the steps after arrival. The space in which the journeys are made tends to privilege a representation where routes that do not 'make' imagery come into being. The selection of documentaries analysed here, in fact, is emblematic of the narrative force of the sea voyages, which end up summarizing the entire experience of the migratory flows. Although some of the migrations ending in Italian territory originate from Europe (Caritas and Migrantes Report 2020), or see Italy as a first step towards reaching other destinations, the narratives remain focused on the sea voyage, omitting the intermediate steps preceding the embarkation. This mode of representation – which, at times, does not hesitate to rely on the logic of the emergency – may typically be found in the frames relating to journalistic storytelling. As the sociologist Maurizio Ambrosini (2020) notes, the mediation of migratory phenomena by the mainstream media contributes towards emphasizing the divergence between reality and its representation. In journalistic representations, this is dictated by a complex set of factors, which range from journalistic routines to the processes of simplification and stereotyping, as well as to images of the various publics' interests in the abstractions of the newsrooms. However, it is peculiar that these 'simplified' representations also find correspondence in documentaries. A partial exception is the documentary *Come il peso dell'acqua*, in which the playwright Marco Paolini – famed for his commitment to civil theatre through which he brought to Italian theatres representations relating to moments critical to the country's history, like the terrible Vajont tragedy – moves physically within a large map rebuilt in the studio, marking, with the aid of graphic representations, the multitude of routes leading to the journey in the

Mediterranean. The routes are inspired by the testimony of three women, the linchpin of the documentary: Gladys, who, from Ghana, reaches Saba, from which she embarks for Italy; Nasreen, a Syrian exile whose journey starts in Egypt; and Semar, who begins her journey in Eritrea. The interposed mediation of the map only shows the arbitrariness of boundaries and borders, and consequently of the alternating fortunes of the destinies that depend on them.

On the other hand, the space of the landings exemplifies the intertwining between global and local; the Sicilian islands are the scene for the dynamics of glocalism. These areas are peripheral and marginal with respect to the continental dimension, but central for the points of intersection originating from the global south. In *Fuocoammare*, directed by Gianfranco Rosi and presented in 2016 at the 66th edition of the Berlin International Film Festival,<sup>6</sup> it is the linguistic evidence that marks the various territorial divergences and the social position of the individuals within them. Thus, Samuele, the film's young protagonist, uses Sicilian dialect as the language of personal affection and childhood games, while the migrants at immigration centres speak fluent English. Pietro Bartolo, a physician on the island and the point of linkage between migrants and native inhabitants, is the only one among the characters who speaks a 'standard' Italian (Orrù 2017). Although the alternating linguistic registers are a consequence of the realism sought by the film's director, who spent a year on the island of Lampedusa to grasp their rhythms and gain insights, one cannot help noticing that, in the editing, these registers have performed a narrative function. Samuele speaks English only when forced to by study, while watched over by his grandmother in the kitchen of his home where he reads a passage on Christopher Columbus and the conquest of America, with the focus turning to what was stolen from the Native Americans (it appears superfluous to detail the numerous streams of expression that arise from this choice – from the sea voyage to the rights of native people and the oppression by the wealthiest); and again, under the guidance of his teacher at school, symbolizing an external pressure towards globalization.

The migrants' journey may also be read as a powerful device revealing the relational dispositions towards those whom we manage to see as Others, and who intersect family relationships, interactions with civil society, and the encounters/clashes with bureaucracy. On the one hand, a dimension prevails that assesses the journeys as significant for the processes of dialogue with the native society. The depiction of the bureaucratization of borders provides the image of flows of migration joining mechanical, depersonalized flows. The long queues of migrants

in Lampedusa, the encoded relationships with institutions, and the daily routine of handling the reception of migrants, show the landings as encoded operations managed by professionals. At the same time, this standardization can only confirm the ‘anomalous’ nature of migrations: while the ordinary, encoded practices suggest a certain ability to handle the phenomenon, now currently inserted into the routine of island landings, some symbolic elements of the representations do not appear equally reassuring. What emerges, forcefully, is the ‘quantitative’ dimension of the migrations: migrants are often depicted in queues, awaiting support from institutions; the immigration centres are always overflowing, while the personnel dedicated to identifying the migrants are always swamped with work.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the migrants, and the outcomes of their journeys, are functional to the representation of the Other (in context). These representations appear at times to settle upon the figure of the ‘good migrant’. The journeys are nearly always motivated by the stories and needs of family redemption; the forms of socialization with the native inhabitants are for the most part asymmetrical, since they are guided by principles of solidarity, but at times with notes of paternalism. The dimension of work and commitment exemplifying the functional relationship with the native reality absorbs any form of individualistic expression of the migrants’ identities. It also bears pointing out that the management of the integration relationships is marked by the opposition between civil society and the family. This tension intercepts a leitmotiv of the Italian films on migration (Gianturco and Peruzzi 2015).

If institutions are present prevalently at the time of entry, it is up to the individuals – and to their consciences – to contribute towards reception. Quite often, this is interpreted as part of ‘doing the right thing’, also by opposing a restrictive regulatory dimension. An example of this is described in *Mohamed e il pescatore*, a documentary filmed by Marco Leopardi in 2007, in the space of passage where it is the law of the sea, with its ethics of behaviour, that prevails over legislative restrictions. The story of Mohamed has something of the unbelievable to it, yet at the same time it is rendered common by the tragic accounts of recent years: the youth, having held on to a floating board for a week, is the only survivor of the 47 shipwrecked people who had travelled with him. Many vessels had approached the wreck, but only the one belonging to Vito, a Sicilian fisherman, stopped to provide assistance. Vito sees Mohamed as a son, to the point of calling him back from France, where the youth had gone to stay with some relatives, in

order to teach him the fishing trade, and in the end bringing him into his family. This story exemplifies how the empathic, individual bond, clashes with and/or integrates the institutional dimension, creating a daily routine (as in the scenes where the migrants are seated at the table with the family at mealtimes) marked by persistent reduction to 'procedure' and to the depersonalization of guests and hosts alike. It bears noting, however, that the reception of migrants into the family network is a theme found especially in the most dated productions of the *corpora*, while the film texts closest in time privilege a collective, ensemble dimension of migrations and of the dynamics of welcoming, by including the migrations within a systemic and social gaze.

## Final Remarks

---

This chapter discusses how cinema plays a significant role in the representation of migrations. In our study, we use over a hundred films and documentaries to explore how media narratives shape public opinion and political agendas regarding migration. Industrial production, mass consumption, adherence to reality, extended storytelling, and imagery and words make films a unique form of communication. Placed at a strategic crossroads, Italy is particularly important for migrant journeys into Europe, so transits and landings have a special significance.

Examining Italian cinema and its representations of journeys and landings reveals the critical role that framing plays in media representations, especially regarding diversity. In cinematic narratives, the journey holds a special place, encompassing physical and existential displacement. Characters' reactions, existential changes, and the before, during, and after of their experiences can all be explored during the journey. Additionally, the sea is a powerful symbol of the tension between security and the law of the sea, tradition and modernity, tourist wellbeing and migrant aspirations. There is a strong focus on the sea in documentaries, too. Documentaries focusing on the Mediterranean Sea as a central migration route provide significant insights into migrants' journeys and landings. With a commitment to ethics and a tendency toward political activism, Italian documentary production portrays marginalized people and social change in a realistic and engaging manner. It is through the space of landings, especially the Sicilian islands, that we are able to observe the interaction between the global and the local. Glocal dynamics in these areas are characterized by convergences

of the Global South and European continental dimensions. In conclusion, this study highlights the multifaceted nature of cinematic representations of migration and their contribution to shaping narratives, perceptions, and discussions about this complex and evolving issue.

**Gaia Peruzzi** (PhD) is Associate Professor of Sociology of Culture and Communication at Sapienza University of Rome, Department of Communication and Social Research. Her research focuses on media and diversity, gender cultures, and intercultural issues.

**Marco Bruno** (PhD) is Associate Professor of Sociology of Culture and Communication at Sapienza University of Rome, Department of Communication and Social Research. His research focuses on media and cultural diversity (with particular reference to Islam and migratory processes), journalism, communication, and political phenomena.

**Alessandra Massa** (PhD) is Research Fellow at Sapienza University of Rome, Department of Communication and Social Research, specializing in sociology of communication. Her research focuses on international political communication, public and governmental communication, migration, and social and political conflicts.

## Notes

1. The bibliography on the issue is vast. For an up-to-date critical overview of the international literature on the subject, see Bruno and Peruzzi (2020).
2. For a detailed description of the research project, see Gianturco and Peruzzi (2015).
3. For an examination of some of the epistemological and methodological implications of the sociological approach to the issue of the journey, see Toscano (1996) and Gianturco (2000).
4. Immigration is often seen as a relatively recent phenomenon in Italy, especially when compared with the seasons of prevailing emigration; however, the migration balance reversed – that is, immigrants began outnumbering emigrants – in 1973.
5. In keeping with the choices of method that were described in the previous section, the discussion will focus on a selection of documentaries able to suggest narrative trends. The documentaries, then, were selected by assessing the homogeneity of the setting and of the migration routes. This section will concentrate on the following film texts: *Come il peso dell'acqua* (Andrea Segre, 2014); *Fire at Sea* (Gianfranco Rosi, 2016); *Lontano dagli occhi*

- (Domenico Iannaccone and Luca Cambi, 2016); *Mohamed e il pescatore* (Marco Leopardi, 2007); *U stissu sangu/Lo stesso sangue* (Francesco Di Martino, 2009).
6. Rachel Johnson (2020) maintains that the case of *Fuocoammare* is emblematic not only of a particular, ‘brutal’ realism that is the mark of some recent works of Italian cinema – including both documentaries and drama (one title for everyone: *Gomorra*, Matteo Garrone, 2008) – with major overseas circulation, but also of the framing that presentation at film festivals confers on these works. Presentations, synopses, interviews, and public declarations relating to the film have contributed towards reinforcing the imaginary of humanitarian commitment in the account of the migrations shown on film.

## References

- Abbas, M., R. Lombardi, A. Massa, G. Peruzzi, and D. Popescu-Jourdy. 2019. ‘Migration et vulnérabilité dans le discours institutionnel des ONG/OSI humanitaires internationales’ [Migrations and Vulnerability in the Institutional Discourses of International Humanitarian NGOs], *Discours, Signe et Sociétés*. Available at: <http://revue-signes.gsu.edu.tr/article/-Lr3sqNFZw-dFWpiV-nb> (accessed 29 December 2020).
- Ambrosini, M. 2020. *L’invasione immaginaria: L’immigrazione oltre i luoghi comuni* [The Imagined Invasion: Migrations besides Common Myths]. Rome-Bari: Laterza.
- Angelone, A., and C. Clò. 2011. ‘Other Visions: Contemporary Italian Documentary Cinema as Counter-discourse’, *Studies in Documentary Film* 5(2–3): 83–89.
- Balibar, E. 2009. ‘Europe as Borderland’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27(2): 190–215.
- Bentivegna, S., G. Boccia Artieri, and R. Marchetti. 2020. ‘L’agenda pubblica interrelata in campagna elettorale: Politiche 2018 ed Europee 2019 tra convergenza e divergenza mediale’ [The Interconnected Public Agenda in Election Campaigns: 2018 National and 2019 European Policies between Media Convergence and Divergence], *Problemi dell’informazione* 45(2): 173–200.
- Berger, V. and D. Winkler. 2012. ‘Clandestino: The Cinema of Irregular Migration and the Question of Space. France, Italy and Spain’, *PhiN – Philologie im Netz* 61: 60–70.
- Binotto, M. and M. Bruno. 2021. ‘Confini e nemici: Immaginario e frame delle migrazioni nel discorso pubblico italiano’ [Borders and Enemies: Imaginary and Frame of Migrations in Italian Public Debate], *H-ERMES* 19: 181–206.
- Binotto, M., M. Bruno, and V. Lai (eds). 2016. *Tracciare confini: L’immigrazione nei media italiani* [Tracing Boundaries: Migrations in Italian Media]. Milan: FrancoAngeli.
- Bruno, M. 2021. ‘Prove di sostituzione tematica: Il topic mediale delle migrazioni nell’anno della pandemia’ [Thematic Replacement Trials: The Media Topic of Migrations in the Year of the Pandemic], in C. Ruggiero (ed.), *Il virus nell’informazione: I telegiornali italiani nell’anno della pandemia* [The Virus in the News: Italian Television News during the Year of the Pandemic]. Milan: Franco Angeli, pp. 63–74.
- . 2014. *Cornici di realtà* [Framing Reality]. Milan: Guerini.
- Bruno, M. and G. Peruzzi. 2020. ‘Per una sociologia delle rappresentazioni medialie delle migrazioni’ [For a Sociology of Media Representations of Migration], *Mondi migranti* 2: 29–46.
- Bruno, M. and G. Peruzzi. 2021. ‘Diversità e media: La costruzione dell’alterità e dell’empatia nei



- media di informazione' [Diversity and Media: The Construction of Alterity and Empathy in Information Media], *Problemi dell'informazione* 3/2021: 287–302.
- Capussotti, E. 2009. 'Moveable Identities: Migration, Subjectivity and Cinema in Contemporary Italy', *Modern Italy* 14(1): 55–68.
- Caritas and Migrantes. 2020. *XXIX Rapporto Immigrazione 2020: Conoscere per comprendere [XXIX Report on Migrations: To Know in Order to Understand]*. Todi: Tau Editrice. Available at: [https://www.migrantes.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/50/2020/10/RICM\\_2020\\_DEF.pdf](https://www.migrantes.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/50/2020/10/RICM_2020_DEF.pdf) (accessed 5 March 2021).
- Connolly, K. 2010. 'Journeys of Hope to Fortress Europe: Cross-Border and Migratory Films', in A. Corrado and I. Mariottini (eds), *Cinema e autori sulle tracce delle migrazioni [Cinema and Authors on the Trail of Migrations]*. Rome: Ediesse.
- Gamson, W.A. 1992. *Talking Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geddes, A. and A. Pettrachin. 2020. 'Italian Migration Policy and Politics: Exacerbating Paradoxes', *Contemporary Italian Politics* 12(2): 227–42.
- Giacomelli, E., P. Parmiggiani, and P. Musarò. 2020. 'The Invisible Enemy and the Usual Suspects: How Covid-19 Re-Framed Migration in Italian Media Representations', *Sociologia della comunicazione* 60(2): 119–36.
- Gianturco, G. 2000. *Per una sociologia del viaggio: Dall'esperienza al diario [For a Sociology of the Journey: From the Experience to the Diary]*. Rome: Eucos.
- Gianturco, G. and G. Peruzzi. 2015. *Immagini in movimento: Lo sguardo del cinema italiano sulle migrazioni [Moving Images: Italian Cinema's Look on Migration]*. Parma: Junior.
- Giliberti, L. and S. Potot. 2021. 'Verso i solidarity studies: Nuove prospettive di ricerca su migrazioni e frontiere' [Towards Solidarity Studies: New Research Perspectives on Migrations and Frontiers], *Mondi migranti* 3: 25–41.
- Greco, F. 2019. 'Il dibattito sulla migrazione in campagna elettorale: confronto tra il caso francese e italiano' [The Debate on Migration in the Electoral Campaign: Comparison between the French and Italian Case], *Culture e Studi del Sociale* 4(2): 205–13.
- Hipkins, D. and D. Renga 2016. 'A New Canon? Contemporary Italian Cinema and Television and the Role of Quality in the Anglophone Curriculum', *Comunicazioni sociali* 1(3): 375–97.
- Ilardi, E. 2010. *La frontiera contro la metropoli: Spazi, media e politica nell'immaginario urbano americano [The Frontier Against the Metropolis: Spaces, Media, and Politics in the American Urban Imaginary]*. Naples: Liguori Editore.
- Johnson, R. 2020. 'A Brutal Humanism for the New Millennium? The Legacy of Neorealism in Contemporary Cinema of Migration', *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies* 8(1): 61–77.
- Leed, E.J. 1992. *The Mind of The Traveler: From Gilgamesh To Global Tourism*. New York: Basic Books.
- Loshitzky, Y. (ed.). 2010. *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Naficy, H. 2001. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Orrù, P. 2017. 'Plurilinguismo e innovazione nel cinema sulle migrazioni da Terraferma a Fuocoammare' [Pluri-linguism and Innovation in Migration Cinema, from Terraferma to Fuocoammare], *Nuova Corvina* 30: 61–71.
- Peruzzi, G. and R. Lombardi. 2020. 'Cross-Cultural Couples in European Cinema: A Research on the Visual Representations of Mixedness', *Mondi Migranti* 2: 141–57.
- Pogliano, A. 2017. 'Media, Migration, and Sociology: A Critical Review', *Sociologica* 1: 1–41.

- Said, E.W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Sayad, A. 1999. *La double absence: Des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré*. Paris: Seuil.
- Schrader, S. and D. Winkler (eds). 2013. *The Cinemas of Italian Migration: European and Transatlantic Narratives*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Toscano, M.A. 1996. 'Per una sociologia del viaggio: Note metodologiche' [For a Sociology of the Journey: Methodological Notes], in E. Nocifora (ed.), *Il Viaggio: Dal 'Grand Tour' al turismo post-industriale* [*The Journey: From 'Grand Tour' to Post-industrial Tourism*]. Naples: Magma, pp. 9–21.