

**THE SIGHT AND SOUND OF ALBANIAN MIGRATION
IN CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN CINEMA**

In the last fifteen or so years, a number of film-makers in Italy have used the contemporary phenomenon of migration to the peninsula both as a means of reflecting on Italian national identity and of setting out the geographical and historical co-ordinates through which it might be investigated. There has been an attempt to see beyond the apparent novelty of Italy becoming a destination for migrants, in order to investigate parallels with Italy's own history of emigration and indeed colonization. A striking feature of migration patterns to Italy is that most of the new arrivals come from places with which it has no direct historical connection. A notable exception to this is Albania, one of the most significant sending countries, which was invaded by Fascist troops in 1939 and occupied for three years.¹ Unlike most other migrants, many Albanians arrived in Italy with a reasonable knowledge of the Italian language, often, but not exclusively, learned by watching Italian television that was picked up quite easily in the coastal regions at least.²

Italy's new migrants, regardless of ethnicity or country of origin, have been generally viewed with suspicion, but none more so than those from Albania. Attitudes towards them have not remained constant. When the first Albanians arrived in March 1991, they were met with an 'intenerimento nazionale'.³ The press recalled the long history that the two nations shared, and a perceived physical similarity between Albanians and Italians proved a key factor underpinning the high hopes for the successful assimilation and integration of these early migrants. The comments of Claudio Martelli, then Vice-President of the *Consiglio dei ministri*, on the imbrication of historical knowledge and corporeal visibility set out the terms that seemed to underpin this early reception: 'Ci sono componenti colti, sofisticati nella

¹ For a brief discussion of the historical links between Albania and Italy see Nicola Mai, 'The Cultural Construction of Italy in Albania and Vice Versa: Migration Dynamics, Strategies of Resistance and Politics of Mutual Self-Definition across Colonialism and Postcolonialism', *Modern Italy*, Vol. 8 (2003), 77-93.

² The effects of Italian television on Albania have been much discussed. For a detailed analysis see Onofrio Romano, *L'Albania nell'era televisiva: le vie della demodernizzazione* (Turin: L'Harmattan Italia, 1999); Y. Polovina, *RAI e Albania: una grande presenza nella storia di un popolo* (Turin: Rai-Eri, 2002); Nicola Mai, "'Italy is Beautiful": The Role of Italian Television in Albanian Migration to Italy', in *Media and Migration: Constructions of Mobility and Difference*, ed. by Russell King and Nancy Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 95-109.

³ Ardian Vehbiu and Rando Devole, *La scoperta dell'Albania: gli albanesi secondo i mass media* (Milan: Paoline, 1996), p. 49. Further references to this text are given after quotations.

solidarietà di chi ricorda affinità, consanguineità, vicinanza, ma sotto c'è una preferenza di pelle per l'immigrato bianco rispetto a quello più scuro. Il profugo dell'Est non fa macchia, non si vede, si assorbe meglio'. (*La scoperta dell'Albania*, p. 50).

A second wave of migration from Albania in August 1991 resulted in the enforced internment of Albanian migrants in the stadium in Bari in atrocious conditions, and functioned as the fulcrum around which public consciousness changed. No longer the objects of compassion, the imprisoned Albanians were figured as menacing invaders, rather than refugees. As the degree of their stigmatization increased, they ceased to be represented as being 'like' Italians, and the sense of their alterity and deviance began to be constructed in physiological terms. This project of racialization insisted on the visibility of poverty and abjection as essentializing, racial phenomena, rather than politically contingent factors. The Albanian body came to be seen as symptomatic of deeply undesirable moral and psychological attributes. Criminality was their abiding trait. This pathologization fused with a new-found sense of cultural alterity and colonial hierarchy to the extent that the 'comportamenti collettivi' of those in the stadium were judged by one commentator in *La Stampa* to be 'proprio da continente nero' (*La scoperta dell'Albania*, p. 102). A more direct colonial reference was made in the *Corriere della sera* lamenting the way in which Italy's 'antichi sudditi' had been forced into the sea, and calls on Italy to recognize a responsibility to 'gente che avevamo incantato con le nostre sirene commerciali' (*La scoperta dell'Albania*, p. 107). The former 'subjects' of Fascism were targeted by the civilizing zeal of the imperial mission, while the allure of consumerism references the supposed influence of the RAI on the aspirations of a beleaguered population under Communist rule in the 1980s. In either instance, the Albanian is the target, or perhaps dupe, of a reformatory and modernizing social project, and functions as an indirect indictment of both historical moments. Since then, media representations of Albanians have remained much the same, and they have come to be seen as emblematic of the challenges, and the perils, of the new transnational migration. Because of the way in which they seem to effect a connection between Italy's past and present, Albanians more than any other migrant group have borne the burden of negative representation.⁴

⁴ The actual integration of Albanian migrants appears to be more successful than press accounts might allow; see Ugo Melchionda (ed.), *Gli albanesi in Italia: inserimento lavorativo e sociale* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2003). This success, however, is often premised on strategies that conceal the migrant's national identity, and so depend on the migrant's ability to 'pass'; on this, see Vincenzo Romania, *Farsi passare per italiani: strategie di mimetismo sociale* (Rome: Carocci, 2004); Nicola Mai, 'The Albanian Diaspora-in-the-Making: Media, Migration and Social Exclusion', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 31 (2005), 543-61.

This article takes as its starting point the stereotyping of Albanians in the Italian press, but looks beyond that to explore their representation in the medium of film. As I will go on to demonstrate, the shift in medium is significant, not least on account of the often exorbitant role afforded to post-war Italian cinematic production, imbued with robust moral and political values, in the creation of a unified national identity and cohesive collective memory. The primary focus will be on narrative structure and visual representation, my main concerns being how the story of the Albanian migrant is told, and how he is seen.⁵ I am particularly interested in the plots that are given to migrants in these films, and how these stories are managed. What sorts of stories about migration are told? Who tells the migrant's story, and in what voice? To whom are these stories addressed, and what is the tenor of the response?

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam stress that 'questions of address' in cinema are equally as determining as 'questions of representation' in the production of a film's meaning: 'Who is speaking through a film? Who is imagined as listening? Who is actually listening? Who is looking? And what social desires are mobilized by the film?'.⁶ They expand Genette's literary concept of 'focalization', the techniques through which narrative information is conveyed to the reader through the mediating role of a character, to reflect on how the formal apparatus of the cinema shapes the reception of what is said, as well as what is seen. The narrative does not unfold simply through the development of plot; its intelligibility is also produced through the ways in which the camera locates the speaking figure in space, or plays with eye-line matches to effect the sharing of perspective between spectator and character. The question of address and spectator response are therefore crucial to an understanding of these films and their putative participation in the nation-building project. My interest then is less in how Italian cinema has dealt with (i.e. claimed to reflect) a socio-economic phenomenon than how it has actively participated in the discursive construction of the migrant from a self-consciously cinematic and, I will suggest, ultimately nationalistic perspective.

To appreciate the function of recent films about migrants, and the particular relevance of the Albanian migrant, it is essential to know something of how Italian cinema and its relationship to the national past has been understood. A dominant strand in Italian film

⁵ There is an over-representation of male migrants in these films. Women tend to appear in more subsidiary roles, often as victims of migrant men. In the Albanian case, the first waves of migration were predominantly male-led, but nevertheless these films raise issues of gender and national identity that I do not have space to deal with fully here.

⁶ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 205. Further references to this text are given after quotations.

criticism has been resolute in asserting the nation-building function of Italian cinema and in laying claim to the nation as the prism through which film production in Italy is most productively understood. The fact that Italy's first feature film, *La presa di Roma* (1905), was an historical epic of Risorgimento nation-building has proved a useful rhetorical starting point for critics who want to pursue the idea that cinema in Italy has been constitutive of national identity formation and a strong sense of civic achievement.⁷ Gian Piero Brunetta, Italy's most eminent film historian, argues that Italian cinema's sense of political purpose was most acutely felt and realized in the immediate post-war period where the screen was no longer 'lo specchio deformante delle piccole "brame" della sala, ma la proiezione dell'anima collettiva'.⁸ The repressed, yet wholly determining, element in this proposition is the Fascist 'ventennio' and the illusions it supposedly fostered in the Italian population. As will become apparent in my argument, this repression, and the subsequent response to it, emerge as recurrent elements in the assessment of the state of Italy's film industry. Recurrent too though is the unresolved tension between the contrasting ideas of cinema either as a mirror of society, hence reflective of it, or as a screen onto which an almost utopian vision of society might be projected and, as a result, brought into being. Brunetta's sense is that cinema fulfilled both functions in the aftermath of World War Two. Neorealist cinema, he contends, led the Italian population towards an invigorated sense of national identity, one imbued with a clear moral and political purpose. It exploited the power of the cinematic medium 'per rendere visibile l'intero paesaggio nazionale, specchio e strumento di registrazione della vita e del corpo

⁷ See for example Millicent Marcus, *After Fellini: National Cinema in the Postmodern Age* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 285. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam comment on the more general availability of this model: 'The cinema, as the world's storyteller *par excellence*, was ideally suited to relay the projected narratives of nations and empires. National self-consciousness, generally seen as a precondition for nationhood – that is, the shared belief of disparate individuals that they share common origins, status, location, and aspirations – became broadly linked to cinematic fictions': *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) p. 101. For critiques of the nation-centred approach see Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (eds), *Cinema and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000), and Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemsen (eds), *Theorising National Cinema* (London: BFI, 2006). The idea of national cinema can of course be conceived differently. Pierre Sorlin develops the idea in relation to the construction of a cinema-going public: *Italian National Cinema 1896-1996* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). Mary Wood is more attentive to industrial factors and questions of genre: *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

⁸ Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cent'anni di cinema italiano. Vol. 2 dal 1945 ai nostri giorni* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2004), p. 8. Further references to this text are given after quotations.

nazionale e di ogni minimo mutamento'.⁹ Yet, for Brunetta, Neorealist filmmakers did more than simply document corporeal diversity; they were instrumental in effecting the embodiment of the nation by inducing the visceral identification of the audience. While the Italian cinema-going public may have been entertained by the American films that flooded the market after the War, Brunetta contends that it felt 'i film di Rossellini e De Sica come parte del proprio corpo e del proprio sangue' (*Cent'anni di cinema italiano*, p. 8). This dual mimetic and constitutive impulse extended beyond the visual register to record also the sounds of Italy and particularly its regional diversity whose expression had been severely curtailed under Fascism as part of the regime's own attempts to unify the nation: 'Nel dopoguerra si registrano le voci della mille e una Italia, si valorizzano, senza piú censure, le varietà dialettali, l'italiano regionale e soprattutto le voci di figure rimaste sempre ai margini della scena e della storia e a cui non era mai stata concessa la dignità della parola' ('L'identità del cinema italiano', p. 19). The mimetic function of such linguistic diversity is superseded by the democratic imperative. Cinema's role is explicitly recuperative as it assumes the burden of representing/recording those 'hidden from history'. Yet, the articulation of the narrative is twofold in that cinema undertakes to give discursive space to those Italians who previously had been silenced and, moreover, to move their stories centre-stage so that these displaced narratives need to be listened to, in a distorted Freudian echo, as the 'national romance'.

The foundational role said to have been played by cinema in constructing Italian national identity has remained the measure according to which subsequent cinematic production has been tested and very often found wanting. This has been particularly the case since the early 1980s where the relative absence of the great *auteur* figures, such as Pasolini, Fellini, and Antonioni, whose politically motivated and aesthetically inventive cinema both re-worked and extended Neorealism's purchase, has resulted most commonly in the charge that Italian cinema now lacks political direction or commitment. Yet just as the events of World War Two, the fall of Fascism and the advent of the Republic are said to have facilitated the articulation of Neorealism's nation-building project, so the crises that befell Italy in the 1990s are also alleged to have given new impetus to contemporary Italian cinema's waning sense of purpose. Brunetta contends that it has rediscovered 'l'orgoglio del senso di una storia unitaria' (*Cent'anni di cinema italiano*, p. 408), claiming that it has become 'un luogo da cui, in una situazione moralmente, politicamente, culturalmente in stato di degrado o stagnazione,

⁹ Gian Piero Brunetta, 'L'identità del cinema italiano', in *Pagina Pellicola Pratica: studi sul cinema italiano*, ed. by Rebecca West (Ravenna: Longo, 2000), pp. 11-22 (p. 14).

si levano voci alte, dove ci si interroga sulla necessità di opporsi alle spinte secessioniste, alla caduta dei sistemi di valori, alla perdita del senso dello stato e delle istituzioni' (p. 415). This re-awakened sense of unifying energy is filtered through a melancholic memory of national integrity.

Brunetta's view is echoed by Ettore Scola, one of that generation of great auteurist filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s who attributed the crisis in 1980s Italian cinema to the loss of its ability to represent the nation.¹⁰ Contemporary directors, he laments, 'non sanno raccontare l'Italia'.¹¹ Millicent Marcus interprets this as an inability to link in a politically meaningful way individual circumstances to the collective whole in an argument that depends on the allegorical nature of film-making's role in constructing the national narrative. Scola's own response to this ideological impasse was inevitably to return to the period of Fascism. *Concorrenza sleale* (2001) is a family drama set in 1938 at the time of Hitler's visit to Italy and the introduction of the Race Laws. It deals with a neighbourhood friendship/rivalry that is recast when Fascism's anti-Semitic legislation begins to impact on a Jewish family whose religion had previously gone largely unremarked.

This episode functions as a metaphor for contemporary concerns at the same time as it indicts national memory. In his preface to the screen play, Scola writes that his film is about the discovery 'di essere considerati "diversi" per nascita e per razza. È accaduto in passato a ebrei e neri, accade oggi a immigrati e extracomunitari' ('Ettore Scola's *Concorrenza sleale*', p. 84). The lack of historical or cultural contextualization erodes the coherence of Scola's comparison, but what is possibly more important is his implicit re-statement of Italian cinema's mission to respond to a new and emblematic reality. The overt subject of his film — Fascism and the response to it — remains, however, the defining trope of politically committed film-making, as it has throughout the post-war period. Marcus validates Scola's project, claiming that he 'offers a powerful example to contemporary filmmakers, mired in the narcissism and intimism of thinly-veiled autobiography, of the need to *raccontare l'Italia* by telling the story of the "other", both in the present tense, and in the *passato prossimo* which continues to haunt us' ('Ettore Scola's *Concorrenza sleale*', p. 92). The high-mindedness of this project is in its way laudable. However, Marcus's comment raises a

¹⁰ More conventionally, this crisis is seen in industrial terms, especially in light of competition from commercial television and, more particularly, video (Wood, *Italian Cinema*, pp. 21-23).

¹¹ Quoted in Millicent Marcus, 'Ettore Scola's *Concorrenza sleale*: The Alter-Biography of the Other-in-our-Midst', in *Incontri con il cinema italiano*, ed. by Antonio Viti (Caltanissetta: Salvatore Sciascia, 2003), pp. 79-94 (p. 79).

number of questions relating to the abiding function of the ‘other’ in the construction of the national narrative and in the exorcism of the national past.

A number of recent films have revisited the question of Italian national identity in terms similar to those proposed by Scola: that the contemporary phenomenon of migration to Italy is often combined with a return to the Fascist past. The best-known of these films is Gianni Amelio’s *Lamerica* (1994), shot entirely in Albania with an Albanian cast in the minor roles. Set in early 1991, *Lamerica* is about the attempt to set up a shoe factory in Albania in order to cream off government subsidies. Things go wrong, and the film follows the young Southern Italian, Gino, as he makes his way through what is represented as the chaos of contemporary Albania. He finally ends up on a boat crossing the Adriatic without a passport in the company of Albanian migrants.

Amelio’s *Lamerica* is as much concerned with Italy’s own history of emigration and the historical memory of Fascism; Gino’s journey is, more than anything else, a journey into Italy’s past. The film combines an exploration of contemporary migration between Albania and Italy with an awareness of the enduring, albeit covert, effects of Fascism. The structural connection between the two phenomena is intimated when it emerges that the old Albanian man put up as a front to head the fraudulent business enterprise is, in fact, an Italian deserter from the 1940s. Gino, wholly ignorant of Italian history, is informed of the Fascist invasion by an Italian-speaking Albanian doctor. The film is all about the ‘haunting’ of the present by the past, and about how the past dwells and endures in the present.

Amelio did not aim to document current events.¹² His initial idea was to make a film based on his own father’s experience of migration to South America, but what Amelio in fact saw in Albania was the possibility of making a film about an Italy that no longer existed, and in which the Albanians effectively play the parts of ghosts from Italy’s *passato prossimo*.¹³

¹² Áine O’Healy, in an insightful and comprehensive analysis of the film, comments on Amelio’s use of Panovision as a means of creating a distance both from the documentation of contemporary events and from the aesthetics and politics of Neorealism with which he is often associated. As O’Healey points out, this is one of an array of self-conscious, intertextual strategies through which Amelio also engages with ‘Fascist documentary filmmaking, contemporary Italian television, and global mass culture’: ‘*Lamerica*’, in *The Cinema of Italy*, ed. by Giorgio Bertellini (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), pp. 244-53 (p. 246).

¹³ Amelio’s encounter with Albania prompted a revisitation of his own past: ‘Ho visto in Albania, nei primi mesi del ’92, un’immagine che era sepolta nella mia memoria e che corrispondeva assolutamente a ciò che vedevo tutte le domeniche nella mia infanzia: quella delle donne che si levavano le scarpe non appena fuori del paese per non consumarle’: *Gianni Amelio*, ed. by Gianni Volpi (Turin: Edizioni Scriptorium, 1995), pp. 149-50. Alberto Cattini refers to this recovered past as ‘un altrove dimenticato ma non distante, rimosso ma non

Angelo Restivo suggests that the nation invoked by Amelio might best be seen as a ‘phantasmatic construction’ in that it brings to light the multiple, contrasting investments, both past and present, through which the nation comes into being.¹⁴ As such the nation is a potent, yet not necessarily coherent, construct.

Lamerica’s lengthy concluding sequence, set on board the ship heading for Italy, has been the subject of much critical debate.¹⁵ What is clear, however, is that Gino now resembles physically his fellow Albanian passengers and is treated by the authorities in the same way that they are. He has lost the accessories such as the smart suit and sunglasses that denoted his Italianness in the early stages of the film. The camera also constructs him in the same way. The shooting of him on the boat, in both close-up and in the middle-distance as part of the migrating crowd, contrasts with the means by which the camera had individuated him in the early stages of the film. Yet the uncertainties of *Lamerica*’s historical and geographical location make it difficult to know who exactly Gino looks like. At the film’s outset, his moral and physical presence signals the corruption of Italy. Yet, as the film progresses, his bodily transformation challenges any secure interpretation and response. Is the spectator invited to see him as an Albanian of the 1990s or called on to recognize him as an Italian of the 1940s? What kind of cipher is he? As he travels through Albania, Gino becomes the screen onto which most of those he encounters project their media-fed, utopian dreams of Italy. Journeying on a bus and then a truck with a crowd of young Albanian men heading, they hope, for a better life across the Adriatic, he is bombarded with their fantasies of easy sex and wealth, equally available to footballers and dishwashers. These scenes are shot from Gino’s perspective. The camera focuses primarily on him, and on his wearied, sceptical response, in close-up. In a slightly later sequence, after the death of one of the men on the truck, a different narrative of ambition emerges. Shot in middle distance, one of the men speaks of his

estraneo’: *Le storie e lo sguardo: il cinema di Gianni Amelio* (Venice: Marsilio, 2000), p. 132. The idea of repression and the proximity of its referent present a structural similarity to the disavowed physical similarities between Albanians and Italians. Amelio presents this as a desirable proximity; however, once again desire and disavowal operate together to suggest the deep ambivalence surrounding the relationship between Albania and Italy.

¹⁴ Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in Italian Art Film* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 168.

¹⁵ For a consideration of this, see Pauline Small, ‘Immigrant Images in Contemporary Italian Cinema: A Nation with a Clear Conscience?’, in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 239-54 (pp. 247-52); Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: BFI, 2001), pp. 64-69. See also O’Healey, pp. 248-49.

plans to Gino who remains out of sight behind a rock. His address to the spectator is made amidst the ambient bustle. He begins by reflecting on whether such deaths could happen in Italy. He then wonders if there is a law in Italy outlawing marriage between Italians and Albanians: ‘ora che vengo in Italia, trovo una ragazza di Bari – voglio sposare con quella – fare molti figli - non voglio mai parlare la lingua albanese con figli miei – voglio parlare sempre lingua italiana - così i figli scordano che io sono albanese’. His future is figured not in terms of consumption, but in the redefinition of national identity through a managed domesticity and a mode of sexual reproduction that would eradicate tangible material traces of an Albanian presence. It might be read as a fantasy of radical assimilation, but his fractured, heavily-accented Italian works as a reminder of an inalterable, residual alterity and underlines the vanity of his ambition. Yet Gino himself is similarly marked. Initially embodied as Italian, the concluding sequence, as noted, refuses to distinguish between him and the others on the boat crossing to Italy. Yet, apart from the accompanying extradiegetic lament, this sequence takes place in silence and so elides the national differences that the film has instated through accent and voice, not least in the distinctly southern accent of Gino himself.

The quality of his speech forces a return to the question of voice.¹⁶ To what extent does the marked nature of his Italian reflect racial difference, as opposed to linguistic diversity? What kind of authority does the migrant voice possess, and how does he speak? *Lamerica* is not the only film in which there is a scene where the migrant is allowed to tell his story which functions as a kind of highly-charged pause in the main narrative. Very similar moments occur in other films dealing with Albanian migrants where the opportunity to voice a narrative of ambition is patently at odds with the actual unfolding of the plot. This ‘fiction within the fiction’ presents an ideal scenario whose realization is always stymied in what seems almost like an orchestrated rebuttal to this moment of wishful thinking. Typically, these stories echo the desire for assimilation and disappearance expressed by the aspiring migrant in Amelio’s film, but recast it by dint of the fact that this future wish is translated into disappointment at its failed realization.

These stories have a confessional tone that reflects the fact that films dealing with the Albanian presence in Italy find it difficult to resist the imputation of criminal conduct to the

¹⁶ Hamid Naficy’s work on ‘accented cinema’ is relevant here to establish a point of comparison. Naficy focuses on the work of migrant filmmakers who deploy the marked voice in order to assert a transnational presence. Here I emphasize the ways in which voice is used to establish the limits of the national. See Hamid Naficy, *Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

migrant, even though they takes pains to demonstrate that its origins are sociological rather than pathological. In *Lamerica*, Gino, who is already on the wrong side of the law, is also targeted by thieves. Films such as Francesco Munzi's *Saimir* (2004) question, but in effect end up by reiterating, the links that bind migrants to some level of criminal activity. The association is explored in its most extended form in Ennio De Dominicis's *L'Italiano* (2001) where the criminal status of the main character, Giorgio, is underlined from the outset. Having evaded the authorities in order to enter Italy, his next move is to break into a house where he steals some money, but also has a good wash, disproving at least the claim that Albanians are dirty. The film has a dual time-line and immediately cuts to a scene eight years later where Giorgio is clearly involved in more serious criminal activity, although again his criminal nature is attenuated by his inability to carry out a shooting. *L'Italiano* is also a romance. Giorgio had gone to Italy in the hope that his Italian grandfather would help him find work. He discovers that his grandfather is dead, but is welcomed in the village where his grandfather had lived.¹⁷ His insistence, in fluent but accented Italian, that he is 'Italian' is accepted under erasure, yet revoked when his affair with a girl in the village is discovered. His clandestine and criminal status is reported to the authorities who finally arrest him for the accidental stabbing of Silvestro, the girl's boyfriend. Imprisoned and repatriated, he meets the girl by chance some years later in Rome (she, in the meantime, having left the village and entered into a now-failed marriage). His account of the intervening years, not shown on screen, underlines his transitory status and explains the inevitability of his criminal association: 'sono tornato facendo quello che fanno migliaia di albanesi, cosovari, cinesi, africani - tre volte ho tentato di venire in Italia ogni volta che venivo qui loro mi prendevano e mi rispedivano in Albania - poi due mesi fa ho trovato un passaggio dalla Jugoslavia con l'aiuto di certi russi'. Criminalized by the state, Giorgio now works as a criminal, and the narrative concludes when he is shot dead, caught up in the gang rivalry of competing Albanian and Russian clans, interrupting the rekindled romance with Luisa. What the death of Giorgio does is solve the narrative burden of the romantic plot intimated in *Lamerica*. The dream of assimilation/integration through heterosexual love and procreation will not do in a gesture that shows the films foundering between their mimetic and utopian intents. The possibility of assimilation is engaged in all these texts, yet its terms are exorbitant and always rejected. Tellingly, the pre-publicity for *L'Italiano* indicated that Giorgio and Luisa return to

¹⁷ De Dominicis claims that the story is based on that of a man from his native village who had taken part in the Albanian campaign.

the village and their seven-year-old child, yet there is no indication of this in the completed film.¹⁸

One of the most striking factors about Giorgio's telling of his story is the way in which it is shot. In this scene, in which it is to be assumed that Giorgio and Luisa are speaking to each other across the table in a bar, Di Dominicis problematizes the spatial relationship of the characters to each other. Edited as talking heads, the couple no longer address each other, but speak, like the boy in *Lamerica*, into a void. This structure is repeated, albeit in a different format in Matteo Garrone's *Ospiti* (1998). The film deals with responses to the presence of two teenage Albanian boys in a suburban community. The end of the story is conveyed through subtitles as the credits role. The two boys don't need to die because they are just guests, so eventually, as the closing titles tell the spectator, the boys go back to Albania.

The self-conscious nature of these forms of address are part of a range of strategies that distance the spectator and underline the highly mediated representation of the migrant. The selective use of news footage, or of imagery familiar from it, is used to relativize, not document, how the migrant is seen. Authentic footage is incorporated into the films' structure to invoke some kind of historical memory. De Dominicis's film concludes with LUCE footage of the invasion of Albania in 1939 that emphasizes the arrival by sea, inverting the pattern of movement more than fifty years later. *Lamerica* begins with a similar Fascist reportage exalting the regime's civilizing mission. Yet the period voice-over that accompanies these images calls into question their status as historical documents. Announcing the series of events that followed the request, by 'Albania Redenta', for annexation, the commentary's claim that civilization had thus arrived in the Balkan state is no longer viable and reveals the visual and auditory fields to be zones of contestation and ambivalence. What these cinematic reminders do achieve, however, is to embed insistently the migrant experience of the 1990s in Italy's repressed historical memory of a Fascist and colonial past, even though its interpretation remains open. This openness is also reiterated through the films' narratives. In *Lamerica*, the journey through a blighted Albania allows Gino to uncover elements of Italy's hidden past and of his own history of emigration and poverty as a Southern Italian. In *L'italiano*, Giorgio's decision to settle in Italy is motivated by the knowledge that his grandfather was an Italian soldier in Albania at the time of the invasion. Yet the former offers

¹⁸ For a discussion of a range of European films that use the inter-ethnic as a means of indicating a positive multiculturalism, see Anneke Smelik, "For Venus Smiles Not in a House of Tears": Interethnic Relations in European Cinema', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 6, 2003, 55-74.

no definitive conclusion, while Giorgio's status in Italy is never resolved. A key element of this representational economy is the uncertain temporality that Albanian migrants are seen to inhabit in that they both invoke the memory of Italy's Fascist, colonial past and symbolize its contemporary moral and political desolation. They are not there on their own account, or on their own terms, but are at best the trigger to collective memory.

The inclusion of contemporary news-footage is used similarly to push the realm of the visual beyond that of documentation. In *Aprile*, his highly personal state-of-the-nation essay, Nanni Moretti, one of Italy's most political, and arguably most autobiographical filmmakers, includes interviews shot in Brindisi in 1997 with newly-arrived Albanian migrants who had survived a boat collision that left eighty-nine people dead.¹⁹ Moretti berates Italy's politicians of the Left, none of whom visited the site of the tragedy, underlining the moral and ethical redundancy of Italian political culture. Neither does he exempt himself from critique as his inappropriate questioning of the survivors reveals his own inability to respond adequately and humanely to the situation. Lingering shots panning over a large ship full of arriving migrants conclude this section of the film which cuts to a scene in which Moretti, several months on, confesses that at that point work on his own film ceased. The pathos of the Albanian migrants presents a kind of moral and narrative impasse that Moretti is unable to overcome. Its recording documents the inadequacy of news coverage to its task.

On a visual level, it is the image of the overloaded boat that blocks Moretti's story. The cinematographic reiteration of such images invites reflection on their function that might most usefully be seen in terms of what Bakhtin calls 'chronotopes'. Shohat and Stam define these images as 'materializing time in space, mediating between the historical and the discursive. Providing fictional environments where historically specific constellations of power are made visible' (*Unthinking Eurocentrism*, p. 102). This image of the boat has consistently appeared in the media to encapsulate the humanitarian side of Italy's response to migration, but also to suggest the invasion of Italy's precarious coastal borders.²⁰ Its prevalence is no doubt what motivated the precise choice of LUCE footage in the two films mentioned and the creation of a neat historical parallel through a gesture of ironic citation. In

¹⁹ This refers to the collision of the *Kater I Rades* with an Italian naval vessel. For an analysis of this event in the media, see Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-persone: l'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2004), pp. 187-200.

²⁰ The sheer versatility of the image is indicated by the fact that it has been used, to cite only a couple of examples, as part of a Benetton advertising campaign, and appears on the web-sites of both Forza Italia and *Bota Shqiptare*, the newspaper for Albanians in Italy.

Amelio's *Lamerica*, the crossing occupies the lingering concluding sequence where the camera's putatively humanizing individuation of members of the throng raises the question of how the (Italian) spectator looks at the migrant body on the screen and of the extent to which the film's management of the narrative invites identification with, rather than objectification of, it.²¹ The most self-conscious referencing of the media's adoption of the overloaded boat as a determining image occurs in De Dominicis's *L'Italiano*. The film begins with authentic footage from RAI television and the report of TG1's distinguished war correspondent, Pino Bruno, on the incarceration of Albanian migrants in the stadium in Bari in August 1991. The shots of the boat are almost identical to those in *Aprile* shot in 1997. The spectator only becomes properly aware of the citational nature of these images when they transmute into black and white as the sequence shifts to the home of an Albanian family who are watching the transmission, offering their own critical commentary that challenges the notion of the gullible Albanian viewer. Their conversation (in Albanian with Italian sub-titles) refers to their son Giorgio whom they assume to be in the stadium, but also indicts the way in which the arriving migrants are treated by the Italian authorities. This is interspersed with shots of Giorgio being rounded up by police and finally deported. From the outset, the film poses the question of who sees in a national frame, and consistently calls into question the logics of spectatorship and identity. The early scenes in the film are shot primarily from Giorgio's perspective with a conventional mixture of middle-distance establishing shots, eye-line matches, and close-ups that confirm his primary status within the narrative. Yet when he arrives in his grandfather's village and meets Silvestro for the first time, the editing of the shot removes him from the centre of the narrative and positions him as the outsider.

All these films draw on the image of the boat both to familiarize and distance the spectator. Yet to insist on this singularity is misleading. The mechanisms of spectatorial identification can never be assured. Whatever effect the use of the Albanian language in these films has for the Italian audience, the vagaries of casting threaten to disturb the response of the Albanian spectator and as a result create quite a different 'phantasmatic construction'. Giorgio is played, with a strong non-Albanian accent, by the Turkish actor Mehmet Günsür, while the Kosovan prostitute speaks with the accent of Tirana.²² Such potential disruption in the communication of sound and image challenges Brunetta's optimistic, but exclusionary,

²¹ Marco Tullio Giordana's *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (2005) unusually makes the space of the boat integral to the plot's unfolding, rather than as the object of distant contemplation. In this film the migrants on board represent a wide range of nationalities to indicate the increasing complexity of patterns of migration.

²² I would like to thank Arber Kadia for allowing me to appreciate this point.

national subject that film brings into being both on and off screen. The LUCE footage also intimates the radical discontinuity of spectatorship across different historical moments. All of these films demonstrate an anxiety over how to tell the migrant's story which is reflected both in terms of plot development and narrative perspective. They raise questions too about the very purpose of visualizing the 'other's' body, and of hearing the 'other's' voice. Rather than seeing national cinema as a positively cohesive force, Angelo Restivo suggests that in a country marked by strong traditional divisions (for example between north and south, urban and rural), the very idea of the nation necessarily appears as a 'site of contestation and arbitrariness' (p. 20). He argues that the significance, and indeed function, of films such as *Lamerica* produced in Italy in the 1990s is to point up the tensions, social changes, and disintegrations of contemporary life. The dissolution of the nation is figured through the body of the migrant.

These films about Italy tell a complex story about the production of alterity in Italian cinema. While I have suggested that one of the things these films do is 'produce' the migrant subject through a combined insistence on visibility and audibility, they are also involved in the production of a 'modern' Italian national subject in a move that recalls Brunetta's observation that contemporary cinema has rediscovered its unifying function amidst, amongst other factors, 'spinte secessioniste'. In *Lamerica*, the past of mass emigration that is revisited is above all a Southern Italian one; a fact reiterated through Gino's heavily marked regional accent. In Giordana's *Quando sei nato*, the most overtly racist characters are the southern *scafisti* and two women who speak in Brescian dialect. These linguistically discordant voices are patently at odds with the film's humanitarian project that throughout makes questions of linguistic and cultural translation central to the process of migration and settlement. The difference of voice intimates the marking of internal and external borders, not multicultural diversity.

Although the new migrant population embodies shifts in the global economy, demographic trends, and political transfigurations, responses to their presence in Italy have exceeded the conventionally economic, political and juridical (although elements of these discourses do indeed underpin the responses). Alessandro Dal Lago argues that the phenomenon of migration presents cognitive problems for the society in which migrants settle, instigating a process of anxious self-questioning. Indeed, in this its role is exemplary: 'l'immigrazione, più di ogni altro fenomeno, è capace di rivelare la natura della società detta di accoglienza. Quando noi parliamo di immigrati, noi parliamo di noi stessi in relazione agli

immigrati' (p.13).²³ He highlights the functional role of the migrant whose perceived alterity (regardless of empirically identifiable qualities) serves as a pole against which a singular national identity can be asserted. The migrant is the structural enemy of the nation, and the xenophobic representation of Albanians in the press is nation-building. I am not trying to suggest that the films I have discussed operate in quite the same way. Nevertheless, their own project depends on the production of a visible and audible alterity through which to imagine the *passato prossimo* of the nation.

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²³ Irit Rogoff notes that while 'much of initial sexual and racial identity in the field of vision is formed through processes of negative differentiation [...] all of these are socially constructed, "performative" rather than essentially attributed, and therefore, highly unstable entities': 'Studying Visual Culture', in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Nicholas Mirzoeff (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 21-22.