

Migrant Anxieties: Italian Cinema in a Transnational Frame

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Migration and trauma appear to be inseparable from pre- and post-migrant flows. The process of migration itself can be conceptualised as a process involving cumulative reactions and traumas with profound and lasting effects at whatever age the journey is undertaken (Grinberg and Grinberg 1989, 87–98). Films, books and even children’s books – the arts in general – are starting to tell migrants’ tales and include them in the fabric of national voices, allowing for their plight, and their silent, tragic, stories, to be included, paralleled, even showcased alongside Italian and European stories.

Aine O’Healy’s research focuses on migrations and their representation across a range of media, especially documentary and feature films. Her proposed project with the web portal Daum, entitled *Gender, Sexuality, and the Difference that Borders Make*, explores Italian film and media practices vis-à-vis the intersecting questions of sex, gender, race, and trans-border mobilities. This interdisciplinary approach is bound to enrich scholarly discourse in a number of fields in the humanities. In her book, *Migrant Anxieties*, O’Healy explores a corpus of films produced in Italy between 1990 and 2016 that echoes, to varying degrees, the anxieties produced by new and increased flows of migration, and she goes as far as proposing that these films are an attempt to reconfigure Italy’s social landscape in light of recent geopolitical transformations. In O’Healy’s opinion they constitute a particularly compelling cinematic project. She argues that this corpus reveals links with similar films produced in other areas of Europe, and proposes the reimagining of social space in an era of unprecedented mobility. Her purpose is to develop a critique of those films that address specific anxieties – such as gender, identity, nativity, race, border (de)construction, and multi-ethnic cohabitation – aiming to show how these bring, in turn, a symbolic reconstruction of the national landscape. The author is interested in art that reconstructs an audiovisual history of what she calls the ‘global present’.

In each chapter O’Healy explores a different configuration of dismantled geopolitical structures that have caused new migration fluxes, and which transformed Italian filmic landscapes, such as the aftermath of the Cold War, women migrants from Eastern Europe, migrants from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. She also examines urban peripheries and their modalities, migratory policies affecting Italy’s new borders, and cinematic narratives of multi-ethnic cohabitation throughout the Italian peninsula. Once we have created a community of understanding and awareness, she maintains, we can push for reforms to address the massive traumatic experiences that occur before and during the migrant flow, and after arrival on Italian soil. Then we can make sure that the affected individuals can begin their much-deserved healing process, striving to ensure that everyone seeking asylum finds safe refuge with the option to eventually integrate.

The book is divided into six chapters exploring a corpus of films produced in Italy between 1990 and 2016 that deal with migrants’ anxieties induced by wars, relocation, and globalisation. More specifically, Chapter One includes the movies produced after

1989 dealing with Italy's relationship with the Balkans, from *Lamerica* by Gianni Amelio (1994) to *Venuto al mondo* by Sergio Castellitto (2013), including the beginning of trafficking and organised criminal societies putting down roots in Italy. Chapter Two focuses on trafficking from Eastern Europe and Russia, including topics such as women, gender, transgender, labour, and biopolitics: among the films covered here are *Un'altra vita* by Carlo Mazzacurati (1992) and *La sconosciuta* by Giuseppe Tornatore (2006). Chapter Three is centred on the African immigration of the 1990s, analysing films that range from *Pummarò* by Michele Placido (1990) to *Sud Side Stori* by Roberta Torre (2000). In Chapter Four, entitled *Migration, Masculinity and Italy's New Urban Geographies*, O'Healy introduces us to dramatic films that unfurl a variety of urban *periferie* and locations rarely depicted in earlier Italian films: among these are *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* by Tullio Giordana (2005) and *Cover boy: L'ultima rivoluzione* by Carmine Amoroso (2006). Chapter Five provides a broader discussion on how migrant flows are re-imagining and extending Mediterranean borders, how policies have changed in trying to manage borders, and how this is affecting identities. The final chapter introduces films such as *Gomorra* by Matteo Garrone (2008) and *Io sono Li* by Andrea Segre (2013), which examine narratives of multi-ethnic cohabitation, identity and difference. The chapter shows how the processes of identification, misidentification and disidentification create what the author calls a period of stagnation, of living with differences that are best depicted in noir or melodramatic movies.

In O'Healy's words, it is necessary to 'renew discussion of the fraught issue of national cinema in a way that moves beyond the question of language by identifying the need to place both the national-cinema approach and the transnational cinema within a larger framework' (p. 226). This would give rise to the depiction in film of a new subjectivity and mode of *existing* in the world, rather than merely the illustration of social issues. Out of the traumatic experiences of migration, and with the help of a corpus of films that lead us through them, the audience could reach a new way of interpreting these new *existences*.

References

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Since his formative years within the New Neapolitan Cinema and debut with *L'uomo in più* (2001), Paolo Sorrentino has developed into the most celebrated and arguably most