

Article

Gender and Migrant Roles in Italian Neorealist and New Migrant Films: Cinema as an Apparatus of Reconfiguration of National Identity and ‘Otherness’

Marianna Charitonidou ^{1,2,3} 

¹ Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta), Department of Architecture, ETH Zurich, Stefano-Franscini-Platz 5, CH 8093 Zürich, Switzerland; mchariton@ethz.ch

² School of Architecture of National Technical University of Athens, 42 Patission Street, 106 82 Athens, Greece

³ Faculty of Art History and Theory of Athens School of Fine Arts, 42 Patission Street, 106 82 Athens, Greece

Abstract: The article examines an ensemble of gender and migrant roles in post-war Neorealist and New Migrant Italian films. Its main objective is to analyze gender and placemaking practices in an ensemble of films, addressing these practices on a symbolic level. The main argument of the article is that the way gender and migrant roles were conceived in the Italian Neorealist and New Migrant Cinema was based on the intention to challenge certain stereotypes characterizing the understanding of national identity and ‘otherness’. The article presents how the roles of *borgatari* and women function as devices of reconceptualization of Italy’s identity, providing a fertile terrain for problematizing the relationship between migration studies, urban studies and gender studies. Special attention is paid to how migrants are related to the reconceptualization of Italy’s national narrations. The Neorealist model is understood here as a precursor of the narrative strategies that one encounters in numerous films belonging to the New Migrant cinema in Italy. The article also explores how certain aspects of more contemporary studies of migrant cinema in Italy could illuminate our understanding of Neorealist cinema and its relation to national narratives. To connect gender representation and migrant roles in Italian cinema, the article focuses on the analysis of the status of certain roles of women, paying particular attention to Anna Magnani’s roles.



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1. Introduction

The point of departure of this article is the conviction that the interest of post-war Neorealist cinema in reinventing female and national identities should be contextualised and related to a more generalised concern of post-war European cinema about reconstructing female and national identities. Neorealist cinema’s interest in urban dynamics and the way female roles embodied the vividness of cities are important for understanding the strategies through which it aimed to re-conceptualise and reshape the national identity during the reconstruction years. The vividness of female roles and urban conditions in Neorealist films should be interpreted in relation to Neorealist cinema’s intention to reconceptualise urban modernity. The intense presence of both gender roles and urban representation in Neorealist films have been addressed in numerous studies such as Noa Steimatsky’s *Italian Locations: Reinhabiting the Past in Postwar Cinema* (Steimatsky 2008; Steimatsky 2009), John David Rhodes’ *Stupendous Miserable City* (Rhodes 2007), and Mark Shiel’s *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City* (Shiel 2006) among other books. *Stupendous Miserable City*, for instance, places particular emphasis on the role of Rome in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s films and literary work (Rhodes 2007). Neorealist cinema’s approaches concerning the conceptualisation of urban modernity should be distinguished from those of films concerning more northerly European metropolitan cities, such as Berlin or Paris. An important difference

between these approaches and the Neorealist approach lies in the fact that the models employed to capture the dynamic dimension of northern European metropolitan cities would not be relevant for representing the post-war Italian urban conditions, which are at the center of Neorealist cinema. As Mark Shiel has remarked, “the Italian neorealist city does not necessarily lend itself directly to the ways in which most studies on cinematic city have approached questions of urban modernity in other countries” (Shiel 2006, p. 66).

An aspect that should be taken into account when analysing Italian Neorealist cinema is the polarity between northern and southern Italy. The large numbers of people made homeless during the war constituted a major issue within the post-war Italian context. This problem remained unresolved even during the years of the so-called *miracolo economico*—the period of strong economic growth in Italy after WWII from the 1950s to the late 1960s—during which the housing shortage problem remained largely unresolved. The specificity of the cinematic representation of post-war Rome in Neorealist films should be understood in relation to the fact that during the post-war years the number of people who were either homeless or lived in slums and in miserable conditions had risen significantly. Referring to this issue, I could mention that “in Rome, by 1951, almost seven per cent of the population was living homeless or in temporary accommodation, and a further 22 per cent in unacceptably crowded conditions” (Shiel 2006, p. 76). According to a survey on insecure dwellings and their resident population, ordered in 1957 by the city council, 13,131 dwellings occupied by 13,703 households consisting of a total of 54,576 people, or 3.75% of Rome’s resident population were insecure (Salvucci 2014). Stefano Chianese, in “The Baraccati of Rome: Internal Migration, Housing, and Poverty in Fascist Italy”, refers to the “huge migrations that crossed the country between the two wars” (Chianese 2017, p. 3) due to the fact that large numbers of Italians moved from the countryside to the big cities of central and northern Italy. In order to grasp the impact of internal migration we should bear in mind that “[f]rom 1958 to 1961 Rome received more than 200,000 immigrants, growing from 1,961,000 to 2,181,000” (Bertellini and Giovacchini 1997, p. 95).

Cinema, as Gilles Deleuze claims, in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, “constitutes a whole ‘psychomechanics’” (Deleuze 1989, p. 262). In this sense, it can be understood as a “psychomechanical” apparatus that affects our senses. The aesthetic apparatus of cinema mediates the emotions of the public, reconfiguring the national narratives. (Bhabha 2013; Anderson 2006). The main argument of the article is that the reconfiguration of national narratives that is achieved in the case of Neorealist and New Migrant cinema in Italy is closely related to the formation of new subjectivities, and to the transformation of the stereotypes accompanying migrant and gender roles into apparatuses of creative processes. Here, I use the concept of apparatus or *dispositif* as Michel Foucault understands it, taking also into account what how Gilles Deleuze defines it:

But what is a *dispositif*? In the first instance it is a tangle, a multilinear ensemble. It is composed of lines, each having a different nature. And the lines in the apparatus [*dispositif*] do not outline or surround systems which are each homogeneous in their own right, object, subject, language, and so on, but follow directions, trace balances which are always of balance, now drawing together and then distancing themselves from one another. Each line is broken and subject to changes in direction, bifurcating and forked, and subject to ‘drifting’. Visible objects, affirmations which can be formulated, forces exercised and subjects in position are like vectors and tensors. Thus the three major aspects which Foucault successively distinguishes, Knowledge, Power and Subjectivity are by no means contours given once and for all, but series of variables which supplant one another. (Deleuze 1992, p. 159)

Foucault writes regarding the concept of apparatus or *dispositif*:

What I’m trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical,

moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus [*dispositif*]. The apparatus [*dispositif*] itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus [*dispositif*] is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely. Thirdly, I understand by the term ‘apparatus’ a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. (Foucault 1980, pp. 194–95)

What I argue here is that converting the stereotypes concerning migrant and gender roles into their very terrain of exploration, the films of Neorealist and New Migrant cinema in Italy reconceptualize the way national and gender narratives are understood. The article also intends to shed light on how the New Migrant cinema continues and reworks key Neorealist tropes and tendencies. Many Neorealist films aimed to address the urgency of housing shortage through the figures of *borgatari*. The issue of the illegally built slums within the Italian post-war context was a central topic in Vittorio De Sica’s *Il tetto* (*The Roof*, 1956) and Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Accattone* (1961). Examining the ways in which the situation of the *baraccati*¹ in post-WWII Rome were presented in an ensemble of Italian Neorealist films, such as Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Accattone*, and Vittorio De Sica’s movie *Il tetto*, one can understand how migrant incorporation triggers processes of place-making opening up new social and conceptual spaces in the city. According to Stefano Chianese, the term *baraccati*, which refers to a kind of informal dwelling, was not defined in a clear way “in the Governorate’s census”, but useful for understanding the status of the *baraccati* is the fact that the “census [aimed] [. . .] to pinpoint the slum settlements in order to proceed to the successive demolition of unlawful constructions” (Chianese 2017, p. 9; Forgacs 2014, p. 61).

What I argue here is that cinematic representations of working women and migrants in Italian Neorealist cinema reveal filmmakers’ perception of a newly conceptualized Italy. Within this context, the roles of *borgatari* and women function as devices of reconceptualization of Italy’s identity, providing a fertile terrain for reflecting upon the intersections between migration studies, urban studies and gender studies. At the core of this article is the intention to shed light on the importance of representations of women and the migrant experience in Italian Neorealist and New Migrant cinema. A key issue for the article is how both Neorealist and New Migrant cinema in Italy aimed to address immigrants’ placemaking mechanisms through the reinvention of the subjectivities of the *extracomunitari*, which, in contrast with the terms ‘immigrants’ and ‘foreign workers’, have a negative connotation. The notion of ‘placemaking’ is comprehended here as Jeffrey Hou understands it, in *Transcultural Cities: Border-Crossing and Placemaking* (2013), where he refers to the idea of ‘transcultural placemaking’ in an attempt to recognize “address the dynamic processes of cultural changes, overlays, and cross-cultural interactions in the context of migration and diversity” (Hou 2013, p. 7). The specificity and the potential of the concept of ‘placemaking’ lie in its capacity to address “not only the intercultural exchanges but also the cultural trans-formations that takes place in urban places and through urban peacemaking” (Hou 2013, p. 7). Aine O’Healy, in *Migrant Anxieties: Italian Cinema in a Transnational Frame*, maintains that the concept of “placemaking” is useful for interpreting the “‘crossings’ [that] mediate the unfolding drama and dilemmas of transcultural cohabitation for local audiences”, and underscores that, for this reason, is fruitful for the analysis of films of New Migrant cinema (O’Healy 2019, p. 7). The article, in the first instance,

¹ L’assistenza sociale negli anni del Governatorato di Roma. L’inventario dell’ Ufficio Assistenza Sociale (1926–1935). Boxes concerning the Baraccati.

analyses Italian Neorealist cinema, and, secondly, examines some key concepts of New Migrant cinema in Italy. In its concluding section, it presents their connections and the potentials of methodologies based on the combination of approaches belonging to gender studies and migration studies.

2. The Figures of Borgatari and Women in Post-War Italian Neorealist Films: Anti-Heroic Reinvention of National Identity

2.1. The Borgatari and Their In-Betweenness

During the 1920s and 1930s, the term *borgate* was used to refer to the areas that were created under the decision of the Governatorato of Rome and the Autonomous Institute of Popular Housing (Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari) in the suburbs of Rome that aimed to host low-income internal migrants (Berlinguer and Seta 1960; Greco and Petaccia 2016). To understand better the term *borgate*, it would be useful to mind the German term *burg* that refers to “small settlements in rural settings”. However, within the Italian context, *borgata* referred to a “quite large satellite of a metropolis” (Cecchini 2020, p. 207) and to “a section of the city that does not have the completeness and organization to be called a ‘neighborhood’ [and to] [...] a piece of the city in the middle of the countryside that is neither city nor countryside.” (Insolera 1962, p. 144). As Laura Moure Cecchini remarks, in “The Via della Conciliazione (Road of Reconciliation): Fascism and the Deurbanization of the Working Class in 1930s Rome”, “[w]hile moves to the *borgate* were often presented as temporary, they were part of a systematic strategy to restrict migration to the cities and encourage exodus to the countryside.” (Cecchini 2020, p. 209).

To better grasp the ‘otherness’ of the *borgatari*, we should bear in mind that they belonged neither to the city nor to the countryside, but to a kind of communities that Spiro Kostof has described as “Ersatz communities” and “scraps of city” (Kostof 1973, p. 19). This inbetweenness of their identity was at the center of interest for many of the directors of Neorealist films. Within this context, the *borgatari* were interpreted as symbols of creation of new forms of identity. To realize to what extent the creation of *borgate* changed the outskirts of Rome during the 1930s, it suffices to think that “twelve *borgate* were created from 1930 to 1937 in the Ager Romanus, the rural area that surrounds the city” (Cecchini 2020, p. 207). Despite the fact that, at the beginning, “the *borgate* were built to accommodate the urban poor who lived in shacks throughout the city, [later on they] [...] served to house low-income families who had lost their” (Cecchini 2020, p. 207) accommodation in the city under the pressures of the fascist regime to leave Rome. This also explains why the *borgate* function, in both literature and cinema, as symbols of political engagement and as contexts within which a plethora of anti-Fascist movements emerged.

During the fascist years, a large part of the inner-city working-class communities were forced to move to the so-called *borgate*, the slums on the outskirts of Italy’s major cities, while after the end of WWII many Italian citizens decided to migrate from rural areas to the cities hoping to find a better quality of life. These internal migrants from the countryside to the cities were installed in the *borgate*. This provoked a rise in the populations of the *borgate*, which “expanded, and progressively absorbed former *borghi rurali* (rural towns) into the boundaries of the newly enlarged cities” (Bertellini and Giovacchini 1997, p. 96). Neorealist cinema was interested in depicting post-war urban crisis. The representations of the city in Neorealist cinema and their international reception after the end of WWII should be comprehended in conjunction with the fact that “Italy was the only one of the defeated Axis powers whose cinematic representations of the city achieved iconic status internationally so soon after its military defeat” (Shiel 2006, p. 69).

2.2. Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Accattone* and the Quotidian Life in the Roman *Borgate*

The endeavor to transform the daily life in the Roman *baraccati* into the very essence of reflection is very present in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s novel *Ragazzi di vita* published in 1955. Pasolini, in this novel, which preceded his film *Accattone* (Figure 1), aimed to capture the quotidian life of the Roman *baraccati* during the post-war years. *Accattone*, which is

Pasolini's first film and is often cited as the last Neorealist film² (Greene 2017, p. 36; Barattoni 2012), constitutes a case where gender relations within the context of post-war Roman *baraccati* played a central role. For this reason, the performativity of the female characters in *Accattone* is of great importance for this article. Giorgio Bertellini and Saverio Giovacchini remark regarding this issue, in "Ambiguous Sovereignities: Notes on the Suburbs in Italian Cinema":

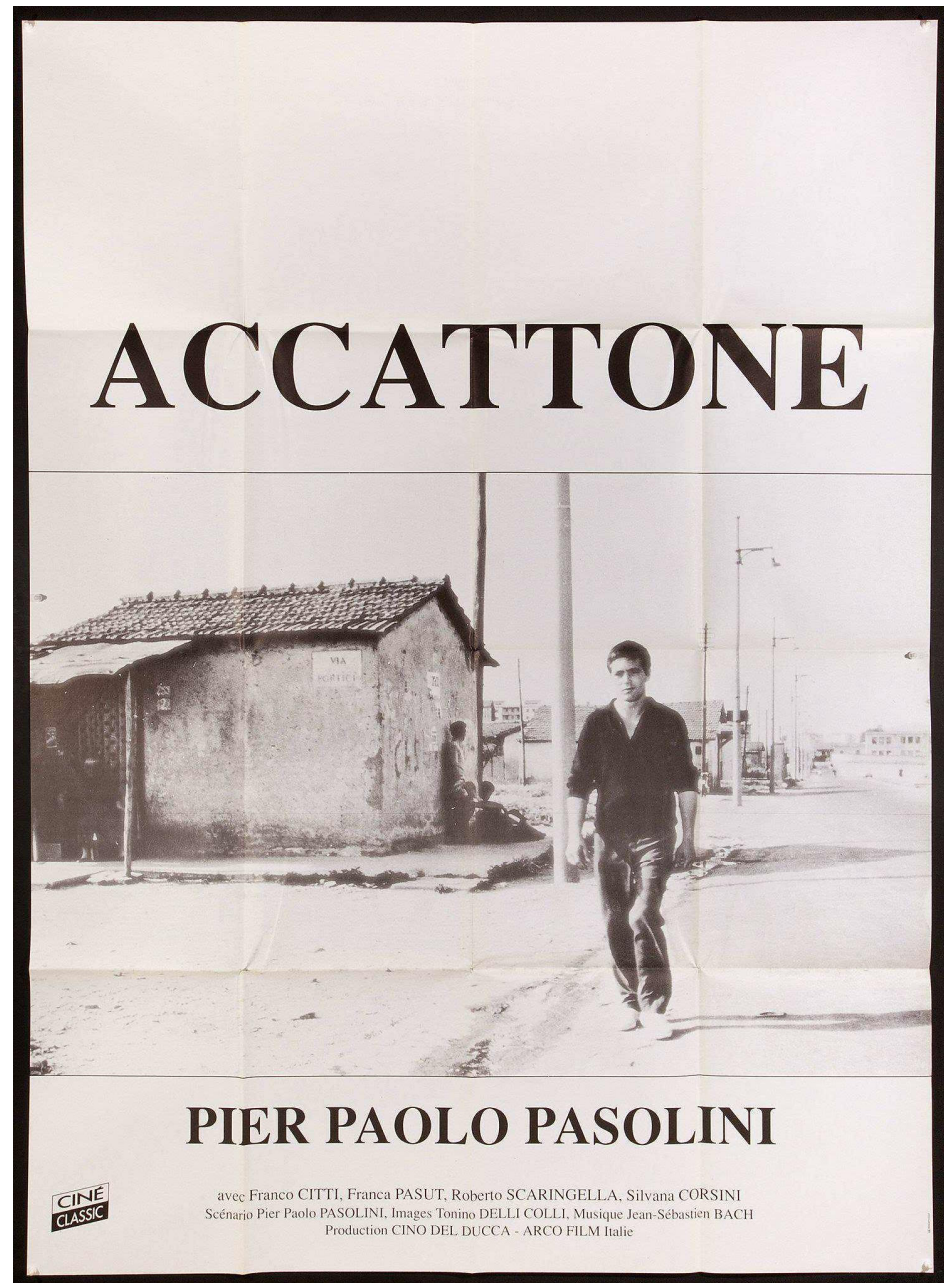


Figure 1. Poster for Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Accattone* (1961).

² Some scholars have supported that the films of Pasolini are not Neorealist. However, Naomi Greene (2017) writes in *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Cinema as Heresy*: "while Pasolini's discussion of neorealism bears more upon writers—Pavese, Vittorini, Partolini—than upon filmmakers, his attempts to situate the phenomenon in cultural and political terms are clearly applicable to cinema. And one must also keep in mind that neorealist cinema did not by any means follow parameters laid out first by literature. In fact Pasolini pointed out, quite the contrary was true: "[...] cinema has been ahead of literature ... Cinematic neorealism (Rome, Open City) prefigured all the literary Italian neorealism which came after the war and lasted into the 1950s" (2017, p. 36).

with *Accattone*, Pasolini radically reshaped the Italian cinematic representation of the proletarian *borgata*, representing it not merely as a site of oppression to be transformed and eliminated, but as the context where new, oppositional values were forged. (Bertellini and Giovacchini 1997, p. 101)

The female figures in the aforementioned film could be distinguished in the following two categories: mothers (*mamme*), and women (*donne*). In Pasolini's *Accattone*, the female characters are presented as the most dynamic and vital characters of the film. Pasolini's endeavor to fuse the characteristics of motherhood, prostitution, and womanhood aimed to challenge the stereotypes dominating the role of women within Italian society. The relationship of *Accattone*—the male character of the film—with the three main female characters of the film—Maddalena, Ascenza, and Stella—should be interpreted as an apparatus that Pasolini employed in order to challenge the stereotypes dominating the role of women in the Italian society. As Julia Khrebtan-Hörhager and Carl R. Burgchardt remark, “the female characters [of this film] perform complex identities that fuse motherhood, prostitution, and womanhood” (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Burgchardt 2016, p. 227). Khrebtan-Hörhager and Burgchardt also claim that these “female characters’ identities [. . .] contain a strongly historicized and cultured motherly element, which facilitates the poverty-stricken *borgate* and enables continuity of life in the Eternal City” (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Burgchardt 2016, p. 227). Given the importance of the female characters in this film, it is paradoxical that gender issues in Pasolini's work are relevantly understudied. Khrebtan-Hörhager and Burgchardt note regarding the gender roles in *Accattone*:

His complex, oxymoronic, and subversive art invites diverse interpretations, including the interrogation of culturally determined Italian gender roles—and especially the relational dynamics and performative fluidity between boys (*ragazzi*), mothers (*mamme*), men (*uomini*), and women (*donne*). Nowhere is this better illustrated than in Pasolini's ground-breaking film *Accattone* (1961). (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Burgchardt 2016, p. 227)

Another issue that is of major importance for understanding Pasolini's *Accattone* is the cinematic representation of the *borgate*. The special characteristics of Rome were very important for Pasolini's work, which should be understood in conjunction with the endeavor to reflect on the contradictions between the “grandiose aspects” of Rome, to borrow his own words, with the situation in the *borgate* during the post-war years. Silvana Mauri described the daily life in Rome during the post-war years, when the *borgatari*'s protest dominated Roman political life, as follows: “Here I am in a life that is all muscles, turned inside out like a glove [. . .] Rome, ringed by its inferno of *borgate*, is stupendous right now [. . .]” (Mauri in Pasolini 1986, p. 491). Pasolini believed that a “genocide” took place in the *borgate* and claimed that “a population was culturally destroyed” (Pasolini 1976, p. 154) (Figures 2 and 3). Italian sociologist Franco Ferrarotti has described the *borgate* as “a Third World [. . .] at home”, interpreting the *borgate* as a colony where the down-and-outs lived: “they haven't got the right of citizenship; they are illegal by definition; they are invisible men and women” (Ferrarotti cited in Bartolini 2017, p. 200). Giorgio Bertellini and Saverio Giovacchini, in their essay entitled “Ambiguous Sovereignities: Notes on the Suburbs in Italian Cinema”, shed light on the ambiguous identity of the *borgatari*:

No longer peasants and not yet blue collars, the post-war *borgatari* hardly fit the categories of Italian, rigid Marxism, which were predominant among the major exponents of Italian cinema. Who were they? Were they the future? Or did they represent the past. (Bertellini and Giovacchini 1997, p. 98)



Figure 2. Pier Paolo Pasolini at “monte dei cocci”, Rome, 1960. Photograph by Paolo Di Paolo © Archivio Paolo Di Paolo. Courtesy Collezione Fotografia Museo nazionale delle arti del XII secolo (MAXXI).



Figure 3. Rome, 1960. Pier Paolo Pasolini playing soccer with the boys of the Roman district of Centocelle. Photograph by Federico Garolla © Federico Garolla.

2.3. Vittorio De Sica's *Il Tetto* and the Contrast between the Slum Dwellings and the Newly Constructed Housing Blocks

In Vittorio De Sica's *Il tetto*, which was a fruit of a collaboration between De Sica and Cesare Zavattini, a young couple decides to build a single room with a roof. As Howard Curle reminds us, this film was based on a sketch by Zavattini for a documentary about Italy (Curle 2000). The film, which was first screened at the Cannes film festival in 1956, features the story of newly-weds seeking a place to live. In the periphery of Rome, they

would build slums on uncultivated land. The authorities that patrolled these practices would then order the immediate demolition of the illegally built slums. The plot revolves around their efforts to roof their illegal home in a single night before the arrival of the police. A main characteristic of the film is the juxtaposition of the Fascist city with the real city of cramped living conditions and poverty.

The contrast between the slum dwellings and the newly constructed middle- and upper-class housing blocks makes clear the social arguments on which *The Roof* was based. *The Roof* constitutes the final neorealist collaboration between De Sica and Zavattini and at its core lies the intention to address the impossibility of resuscitating the past (Liehm 1986, p. 139). An important scene of the film is that showing a vehicle passing through the *borgate*. As the vehicle passes Luisa tells: “Goodness, so many houses!”. This scene was taken from the front of the bus and displayed the apparently endless landscape of new housing blocks. According to the movie critic and film historian Arthur Knight, “[t]he apprentice bricklayer and his young wife [. . .] are so real because De Sica has seen to it that every incident, every detail in every shot contributes to a sense of unstrained, unforced actuality” (Knight 1959, p. 23). While working on this film, De Sica had carefully researched the housing laws of the time (Curle 2000, p. 210). At the end of the film, Natale and Luisa celebrate their new home, after having paid a small fine.

2.4. Anna Magnani as Popolana

An issue that is at the center of interest in Neorealist films is the role of women. It is related to the intention to address the tension between forgetting the national past and keeping its memory, turning this tension into the very force of cinema making. Marga Cottino-Jones, in *Women, Desire, and Power in Italian Cinema* (Cottino-Jones 2010), claims that male characters in Neorealist films acquire their significance through their political autonomy, while female characters are granted importance through their victim status. Between 1940 and 1965, the figure of the prostitute featured in more than ten per cent of all Italian-made films (Hipkins 2008; Hipkins 2016). Within this context, the figure of the dynamic woman that copes with the problems of daily life, which is exemplified in the roles that Anna Magnani acquired a very central place in the strategies of cinema making. She performed roles that had challenged significantly the stereotyped roles of women in cinema. Some representative examples are her roles in Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma città aperta* (Rome, Open City, 1945), Luchino Visconti’s *Bellissima* (1951), and Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Mamma Roma* (1962). O’Rawe, in “Anna Magnani: Voice, Body, Accent”, refers to the “[c]ritical discussion on Magnani [. . .] around her passion and authenticity”, and her spontaneity, not only in the case of her role of Pina in *Roma città aperta*, but also in her “performances as feisty mothers in Luchino Visconti’s *Bellissima* and Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Mamma Roma*.” (O’Rawe 2017, p. 158).

Magnani’s legendary performance in *Roma città aperta* (Rome, Open City, 1945), the film credited with founding Neorealism, was the expression of “a collective soul called society” (Chiarini 1979, p. 141). In the case of this film, the fears and anxieties concerning the struggles of daily life during the post-war years are transformed into a creative mechanism of reinvention of ‘otherness’. As Stephen Gundle remarks, “Anna Magnani poured every possible dose of humanity into this figure whose personal tragedy turns her into an emblem of the suffering of the ordinary Italians” (Gundle 2019, p. 154). Gundle sheds light on Magnani’s “[r]ich, larger-than-life personality, her ability to play women outside of the clichés of the cinema of the Fascist period and her capacity to inject emotional intensity into her performances in a way that made it seem as if she was emptying herself into them” (Gundle 2019, p. 152; Gundle 2004).

In order to better grasp the importance of Magnani’s performances for the transformation of gender stereotypes in Italian cinema, one should bear in mind the definition of the *popolana* as a “woman of the people” (Culhane 2017) Anna Magnani’s embodiment of the figure of *popolana* or the “woman of the people” (Culhane 2017), and her identification with post-war Rome makes explicit how female roles symbolized the vividness of the city.

The strategy of mapping Magnani onto Rome's cityscape reinforces her performance as a *popolana*. Within this context, the urban marketplace of Rome often functions as a site of performance par excellence for the *popolana*. Through the filming of Magnani in familiar urban contexts and through the emphasis placed on her daily activities and struggles what is achieved is an identification of the spectators with her. In this sense, she often embodied the *popolana*. This is further reinforced by the vividness of her playing, implying a connection between her authenticity and the vividness of the city.

André Bazin, in "Cinematic realism and the Italian school of the liberation", maintains that Neorealism as a film movement rejected the star concept (Bazin 1997). Anna Magnani, as the opposite of the Hollywood star, was compatible with the anti-heroic narratives that Neorealism wished to promote (Sieglöhr 2020). She promoted Neorealism's collectivist ethos. Magnani's place within the institutional discourse of Neorealism should be understood in conjunction with the notion of authenticity (Rigoletto 2018), which, in the case of neorealist films, "was the result of an 'amalgam' of players: non-professional actors and film stars such as Aldo Fabrizi and Anna Magnani, who became famous for their informal, unassuming self-presentation both on-screen and off-screen" (Bazin 1997, pp. 35–37). Magnani's image has been heavily shaped by the aesthetic, political and ethical concerns of Neorealism. Within this context, she has often been seen as the embodied cinematic sign of a national identity, which cinema was called on to reinvent during the post-war years.

Regarding the screen persona of Magnani and how she embodied the culture of Neorealism, Catherine O'Rawe has shed light on her passionate authenticity as Pina in Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* became a "critical topos" (O'Rawe 2017). Mark Shiel has also underscored that this role is representative of the endeavor of Neorealism to reflect upon the suffering of Italian citizens during the post-war years. In *Roma città aperta*, Pina could be interpreted as an embodiment of the post-war face of Rome. Silvana Mangano in Giuseppe De Santis' *Riso amaro* (1949) had a similar impact on the re-invention of gender roles in post-war Italian cinema.

Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo's remark that "Neorealism defined a place for women on the screen rather than behind the camera", producing "its own star personae" can help us better understand the representation of women in films by directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Bernardo Bertolucci, Vittorio De Sica, Federico Fellini, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Roberto Rossellini, and Luchino Visconti. The representation of women in many of the films of the aforementioned directors differed "from the glamorous images of both the diva of the silent era and the Hollywood star who had come to colonise Italian cinema" (Luciano and Scarparo 2017, p. 431; O'Rawe 2010; McGlazer 2016). Pivotal for understanding the importance, for Pier Paolo Pasolini, of shaking gender roles is *Mamma Roma* (1962), an effort to challenge the stereotypical roles of women in cinema, in which Anna Magnani's performance had an important impact (Figures 4 and 5). In the case of this film, Pasolini focused on the story of the prostitute Mamma Roma who decides to move with her son Ettore, a teenager whom she had allowed to grow up, to a new neighborhood. Marga Cottino-Jones has highlighted "the recurrent concern of Italian cinema with gender issues", claiming that "[t]his concern is a demonstration of the centrality of gender issues in both Italian society and art" (Cottino-Jones 2010, p. 7; Mitchell 1989). Other female icons within this context, apart from Anna Magnani, were Gina Lollobrigida, Silvana Mangano, and Sophia Loren, who "were configured as youthful embodiments of a new national landscape" (Luciano and Scarparo 2017, p. 431; Small 2009; Bruno 1990).

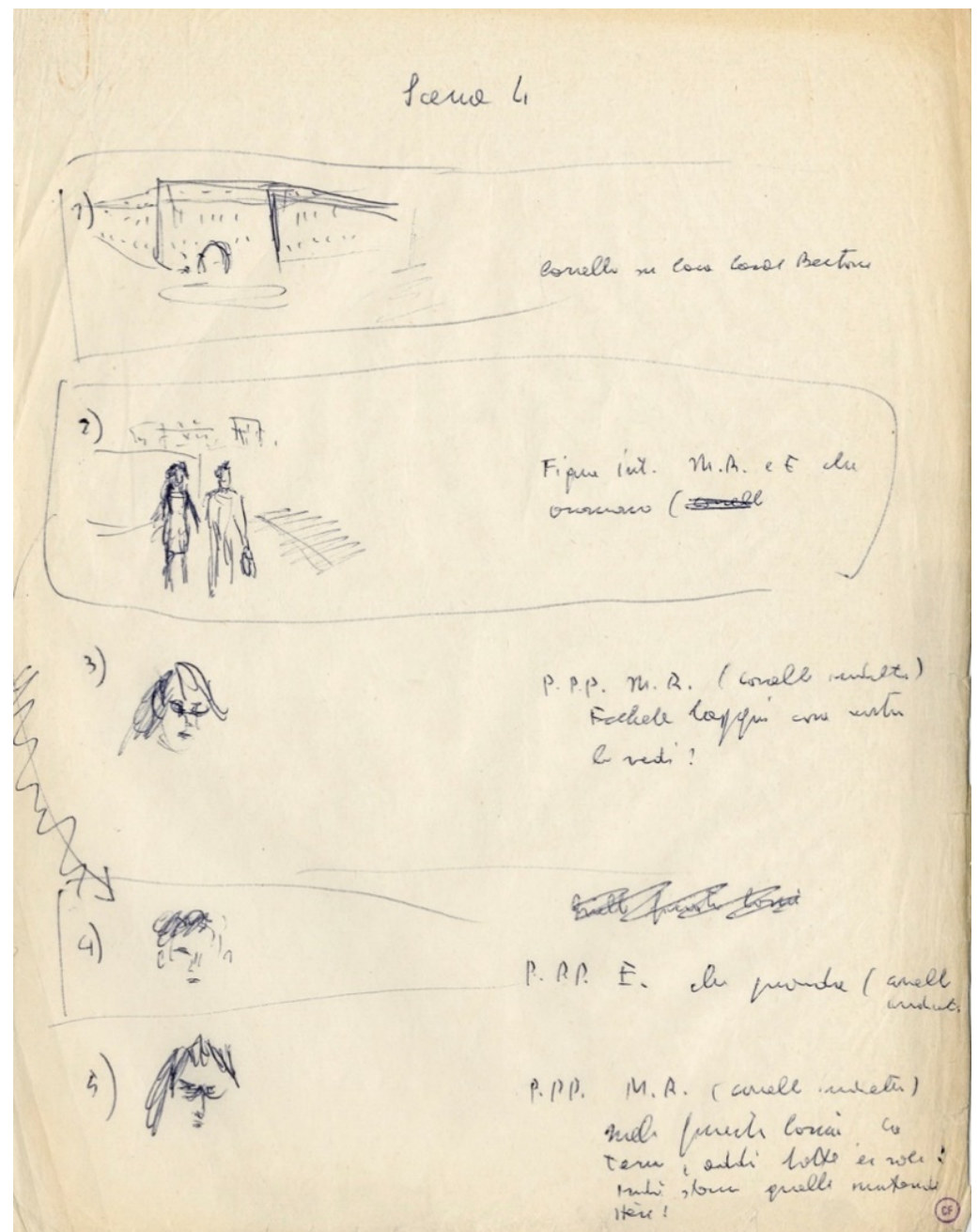


Figure 4. Pier Paolo Pasolini's manuscript sketch for Scene 4 of *Mamma Roma*. Credits: Cinémathèque française. Gift of Pier Paolo Pasolini.



Figure 5. Italian actress Anna Magnani discussing with Italian director, writer and poet Pier Paolo Pasolini on the set of the film *Mamma Roma*. Rome, 1962. Photograph by Angelo Novi. Credits: Mondadori Portfolio via Getty Images.

3. The New Migrant Cinema: Reinventing Migrants' 'Otherness'

The New Migrant cinema in Italy was concerned with depicting spaces in which migrants can inscribe their 'otherness'. Analyzing an ensemble of films that belong to New Migrant cinema in Italy through the lenses of 'otherness' carries certain risks, since it presupposes a binary relationship between the self and the other. In order to overcome these risks, one could try to interpret the migrant personas in the films adopting the ethico-political thought of difference drawing upon Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's approach. The concept of difference in Deleuze and Guattari's thought is based on the idea of "an (un)becoming-subject that always becomes other and thus overcomes any opposition between self and other" (Thiele 2012, p. 59). Another concept of Gilles Deleuze that is useful for interpreting migrant roles in cinema and the practices of placemaking, is that of 'island'. Gilles Deleuze drew a distinction between two types of islands: 'continental islands' and 'oceanic islands'. Deleuze's reference to the "imagination that makes the deserted island a model, a prototype of the collective soul" (Deleuze 2004, p. 13) is useful for grasping the creative anxiety of the migrants during their endeavor to establish a new beginning through the construction of a "collective soul". Deleuze's conception of the 'deserted island' not as creation but as re-creation, and not as a beginning but as a re-beginning is closely connected to the mentality of placemaking of the migrants when they try to settle in their new homes.

3.1. The Subjectivities of *Extracomunitari* and *Terrone* within the Postcolonial Context: Coming Communities vs. National Identity

The roles of the migrants and their practices of placemaking mediate the emotions of the spectators regarding the re-configuration of the national identity, replacing a rigid understanding of *italianità* with a more flexible one. Useful for understanding how the migrants transform their 'otherness' into a positive attribute is the tension between the concept of national identity and the concept of the 'coming communities' as Giorgio Agamben understands it. Giorgio Agamben's analysis of the notion of community, in *The Coming Community* (*La comunità che viene*) (Agamben 1986), is useful for comprehending how the formation of new ideas of community and the nation building project of Italian cinema are interconnected. Agamben uses the term 'coming community' to refer to a

“community that is always in the process of coming and is here in the present (as the community that is coming), but its potential has not yet been grasped” (Murray 2010, p. 50).

What I argue here is that Agamben’s concept of the “coming community” is useful for interpreting the nation building project of Italian cinema—referring to both post-war Neorealist and post-colonial New Migrant cinema. At the center of the concept of the ‘coming community’ lies the reinvention of the subjectivities of figures such as the *borgatari* and the *extracomunitari*. Renée van Riessen’s remark that “*The Coming Community* was an answer or rather a reaction to the collapse of communist states and the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989” (van Riessen 2011) is useful for comprehending that Agamben used the concept of the “coming community” to address the processes characterizing the formation of the state apparatus. This explains why his analysis of the concept of the ‘coming community’ would be helpful for examining the migrant roles and their processes of placemaking making in Italian New Migrant films. In parallel, it would help us better understand how the potentials of ‘otherness’ become the very force of the Italian New Migrant and how the state apparatus and the cinema apparatus are related to each other.

Many films of the “New Migrant Cinema” in Italy are based on the intention to establish visual devices aiming at reinventing the subjectivities of *extracomunitari*. The cinematic expression of the *extracomunitari* (Russo Bullaro 2010; De Franceschi 2013) should be understood within the postcolonial context. It should also be related to the intention to establish visual strategies aiming at re-inventing the notion of ‘otherness’. The filmography on immigration in Italy is a phenomenon that started with the arrival of the first migratory movements in Italy, in the 1990s. Unauthorized immigration has emerged as a generalized fact in all Western economies in the post-Second World War era. What is noteworthy is that in Italy, before 1986, the entrance of migrants was regulated by the *sanatorie*, which are a kind of mass amnesty (Rivi 2007). Given that there was no formal legal control for migrants, a large part of them gained their status of migrants through *ex-post* regularization programs. The *ex-post* regularization programs which aimed “[t]o cope with the discrepancy between planned legal inflows and the actual needs of economy [. . .] presenting them each time as exceptional “one time only” measures” (Doomernik and Bruquetas-Callejo 2015, pp. 62–63). These details are useful for understanding the specificities of migrant roles in Italian cinema because they render it explicit that immigration to Italy was not the outcome of a strategic decision to attract international workers.

A turning point for the migration movements to Italy was the collapse of Eastern European Communist regimes, which caused a significant increase in the number of migrants from Albania and the former Yugoslavia. Within this context, large numbers of Albanians have moved to Italy since 1991. This should be related to the intensification of the interest of contemporary Italian cinema in migration practices. This intensification was accompanied by an interest of New migrant cinema in depicting the informal character of the strategies of placemaking of the migrants and the anxieties that accompany their new beginnings. A parameter that should be taken into consideration in order to understand the strategies of New Migrant cinema in Italy is the shift, during the last thirty years, from Italy as a country of emigration towards a country of immigration. The “New Migrant Cinema” should be understood within the context of postcolonial cinema in Italy. As Sandra Ponzanesi and Verena Berger remark, “the terms ‘migrant cinema’ and ‘postcolonial cinema’ are often used interchangeably” (Ponzanesi and Berger 2016, p. 111). A concept that is really at the center of the subjectivity of migrants in Italian cinema is that of the so-called *extracomunitario*. In the case of the Italian cinema the intention to conceive cinema as a nation building project has always been very present since the post-war years.

3.2. Gianni Amelio’s *Lamerica* and Neorealism

Some representative films of the New Migrant Cinema are Helen de Michiels’s *Tarantella* (1995), Gianni Amelio’s *Lamerica* (1994) (Figure 6), Ermanno Olmi’s *Il villaggio di cartone* (*The Cardboard Village*, 2011), and Giuseppe Tornatore’s *La sconosciuta* (*The Unknown Woman*, 2006). According to Francesca Colella, what is at the center of *Lamerica* is

“the relationship between immigrants and the social fabric (Colella 2017, p. 170). A key article concerning *Lamerica* is Luca Caminati’s “The Return of History: Gianni Amelio’s ‘Lamerica’, Memory, and National Identity” (Caminati 2006; Douglas 2012). An issue that Caminati analyses in this article and brings to mind the common concerns of Neorealist and New Migrant cinema is the “North/South divide, la questione meridionale, as it is experienced by southern emigrants to the industrialized North” (Caminati 2006, p. 597). He also highlights the attention that this film paid to “the ‘cinematic past’ of Italy”, given that many of its scenes refer “to moments of Italian history, and of Italian film history” (Caminati 2006, p. 597). This becomes very evident especially in the “second half of the movie that is devoted entirely to the coming to consciousness of Gino and Michele/Spiro and the rediscovery of their Italian past” (Caminati 2006, p. 670). The fact that this dialogue with the cinematic past of Italy at the center of *Lamerica* renders it a fertile case for reflecting upon the similarities between Italian Neorealist and New Migrant Cinema.



Figure 6. Shot from Gianni Amelio’s *Lamerica*, 1994.

Constantin Parvulescu agrees with Caminati as far as this strong presence with the cinematic past in *Lamerica*, claiming that “[t]he Albanian landscape, its inhabitants, and its economic relationships bring back cinematic images of post-WWII Italy” (Parvulescu 2010, p. 54). Parvulescu also highlights Amelio’s “admiration for De Sica and Rossellini” (Parvulescu 2010, p. 56). A meeting point between *Lamerica*’s aesthetics and the aesthetics characterizing Neorealist films is the instrumentalization of documentary power. Apart from Caminati and Parvulescu, Piera Detassis has also highlighted the impact that Neorealist cinema had on Amelio’s *Lamerica* (Detassis 1994). Throughout the film one can decipher several references to Neorealism, and, particularly, to Rossellini films such as *Germania anno zero* (*Germany year zero*, 1946).

In contrast with Detassis, Aine O’Healy has highlighted the dissimilarities between Amelio’s cinematic techniques and those characterizing Neorealist cinema, emphasizing Amelio’s choice to “shoot the film in Panavision, with sweeping, wide-screen vistas” (O’Healy 2004, p. 246), which is closer to American cinematic approaches than to the Neorealist ones. O’Healy also refers to Guido Aristarco’s critique of this choice of Amelio in *Lamerica* (O’Healy 2004). Constantin Parvulescu underscores that the choice of Amelio to use wide screen shots “should be regarded as a statement against media realism, and an acknowledgement of narrative cinema’s different way of signifying” (Parvulescu 2010, p. 57).

He also maintains “Lamerica’s dialogue with neorealism unfolds on several planes”, placing particular emphasis on Amelios’ admiration for De Sica and Rossellini’s work, particularly on Rossellini’s *Paisà* and on the film’s “humane representations” of the other (Parvulescu 2010, pp. 65–66; Landy 2006).

As Derek Duncan has remarked, “Lamerica explicitly links the phenomena of migration to Italy in the 1990s with the Italian emigration and colonialism”. Duncan also highlights that “Lamerica quite ostentatiously avoids the types of film-making technique associated with Neorealism” in the sense that it presents the notion of national identity as “labile” and “porous”. Duncan has also shed light on the fact that “cinema in Italy has been seen as the cultural form in which national identity is most securely located” (Duncan 2008, p. 277).

3.3. New Migrant Cinema in Italy and the Figure of Terrone

Another figure that is also very present in Italian cinema is that of *terrone*, which refers to the figure of “African” in the popular imagination (Pell 2010; De Franceschi 2013; Russo Bullaro 2010). This figure is present in the films *Io, l’altro* (*I, the Other*, 2007) directed by Mohsen Melliti, *Tornando a casa* (*Sailing Home*, 2001) directed by Vincenzo Marra and *Il villaggio di cartone* directed by Ermanno Olmi. The scenario of Marra’s *Tornando a casa* is the following: a group of fishermen who crosses clandestinely the borders of navigation between Sicily and North Africa. Salvatore, their captain, wants to push their boat into African waters at the risk of their lives. Of great interest, here, are the ways in which the aforementioned films depict the endeavors of the *terrone* to turn the specificity of their identities into something positive. The plot of Olmi’s *Il villaggio di cartone* is the following: when a group of African immigrants builds a cardboard village between the pews of a church soon to be closed, an elderly priest must choose between his calling and his orders. The group of illegal immigrants, who find shelter in the church, give the priest a new role and set of responsibilities. At the center of this film are the anxieties of contemporary immigration. The priest disobeys to immigration laws and helps a group of undocumented African migrants escaping the authorities in spite of the pressure exercised by the authorities.

3.4. Gender Roles and the Affect of Ambivalence in Giuseppe Tornatore’s *La sconosciuta*

In Giuseppe Tornatore’s *La sconosciuta* (*The Unknown Woman*, 2006), the role of gender is central since the film addresses the issue of sex trafficking, relating it to migration the from countries of the former Eastern bloc to Italy, as well as the question of illegal adoption of migrant women’s infants (O’Healy 2019; Hipkins 2008; Hipkins 2016). The noir aesthetics that Tornatore employed in this film to convey the anxieties related to the aforementioned phenomena are very apparent in the opening scene of the film, which takes place in a disused warehouse that is depicted in a way that brings to mind a stage-like experience (Figure 7). The appearance of a group of women that wear masks and underwear convey emotions of anxiety since it implies the gaze of a hidden observer.

In *La sconosciuta*, as Vetri Janal Nathan remarks, “the immigrant is configured within and against [. . .] [Italy’s] historical and cultural tradition”. The migrant bodies play an important role in communicating a sense of ambivalence that characterizes the understanding of national identity in Italy. The treatment of the body of Irena symbolizes the conditions of migration in contemporary Italy. Tornatore “develops an *affect of ambivalence* to highlight the hybrid condition of being ‘in-between’ the identities of Self and Other, Italian and extracomunitario”. This affect of ambivalence is closely related to the anxieties of migration. Tornatore, through this film, aimed to express a “sense of menace and disquiet that characterizes the hybridity of the migrant condition of ambivalence in Italy” (Nathan 2010, p. 264; Nathan 2017).



Figure 7. Opening scene from *La sconosciuta* (*The Unknown Woman*, 2006) directed by Giuseppe Tornatore.

3.5. Ferzan Özpetek's *Le Fate Ignoranti* and the Fluidity of the Notion of 'Otherness'

Ferzan Özpetek, through *Le fate ignoranti*, criticizes the homogeneity of the Italian identity, drawing a parallel between foreign immigration and internal immigration from the Southern to the Northern Italian regions. More specifically, Özpetek aimed to challenge an ensemble of stereotypes concerning foreign immigrants and Southern Italians, and the notion of *italianità*. In this way, Özpetek reveals the fluidity of the notion of 'otherness'. As Luca Caminati underscores, *Le fate ignoranti* presents "a dialectical approach to living spaces" (Caminati 2008). Caminati compares Antonia in *Le fate ignoranti* with Katherine in Roberto Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* (*Voyage in Italy*, 1953). The Neorealist model could be seen as a precursor of the narrative rhetorical strategies of *Le fate ignoranti*. Architecture plays an important role for conveying the feelings of ambivalence, which are central in this film. This becomes apparent from the very beginning of the film, when Antonia and her husband meet in the Centrale Montemartini, an electric plant converted into a museum in the heart of the Ostiense neighborhood (Figure 8). The tension between the industrial and the monumental character of this place could be interpreted as an allegory of the ambivalent status of Italy's identity, which is characterized by a tension between memory and its denial. The way Antonia is confronted with the statue could also be interpreted as an allegory of this ambivalence (Figure 9). The ending scene with the couple sharing an intimate conversation, that brings to mind the atmosphere of the interior space of a home in front of the skyline of Rome, could also be understood as a device that aims to challenge the contrast between the intimacy of interior spaces and the chaotic character of the urban landscape (Figure 10). Through this device, the director manages to convey a new understanding of the emotions related to urbanity.



Figure 8. Scene from *Le fate ignoranti* (*His Secret Life*, 2001) directed by Ferzan Özpetek.



Figure 9. Scene from *Le fate ignoranti* (*His Secret Life*, 2001) directed by Ferzan Özpetek.

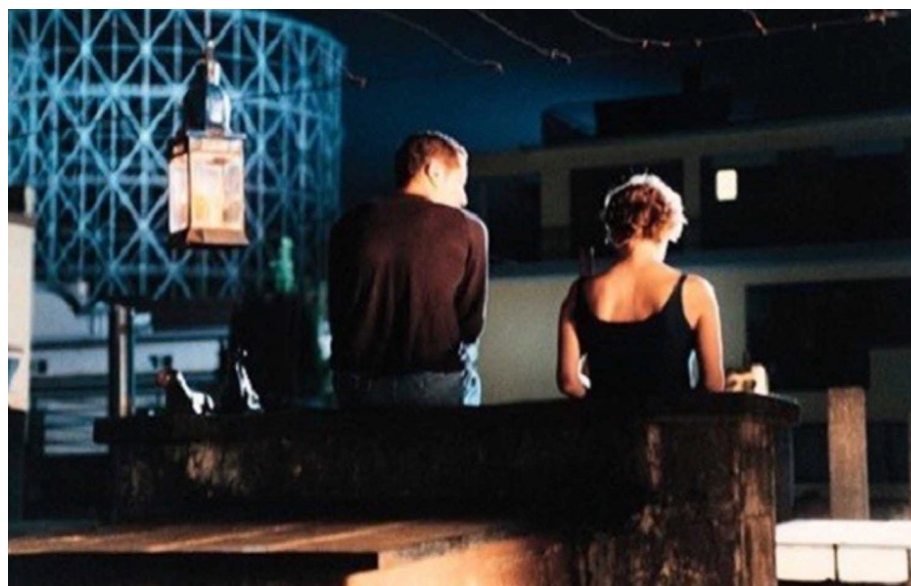


Figure 10. Scene from *Le fate ignoranti* (*His Secret Life*, 2001) directed by Ferzan Özpetek.

4. Migrants in Italy and Their Cinematic Framing

The representation of migrant subjects in both Italian Neorealist and New Migrant cinema was based on the intention to re-configure the stereotypical narratives of national belonging. Cinema is understood here as “the cultural crucible of Italian national identity” (Duncan 2008). As Mary P. Wood remarks, the “preoccupation with the integration, or not, of non-Italians into Italian society’ has become a significant theme in contemporary Italian cinema” (Wood 2005, p. 145). Placing the *extracomunitari*, *borgatari*, and *terroristi* (De Franceschi 2013; Russo Bullaro 2010) at the center of their narratives, Italian Neorealist cinema and New Migrant cinema aim to reinvent the ways in which we conceive the relationship between the State apparatus and migration (Günsberg 2005).

4.1. The Paradoxical Character of the Representations of Italy in Cinema: The Tension between the Colonial Memory and Its Denial

A main concern of the New Migrant cinema in Italy is how migration can contribute to the emergence of new forms of living together. For this reason, it pays special attention to the notions of hospitality, home, belonging, emotion and identity (Hage 1997; Heynen 2005; Levin 2014; Levin 2016; Lozanovska 2011; Lozanovska 2019; Morley 2000). These notions, within the context of New Migrant Cinema in Italy, acquire a re-invented status, which could be characterized as hybrid-performative. The re-invention of the status of the above-mentioned notions goes hand in hand with a new understanding of the concept of community. Insightful for comprehending the implications of different interpretations of the concept of community are Marta Segarra’s observations, in her essay entitled “The Diaspora Identity of the Roma People”, in which she examines the concept of “community”, paying special attention to the ways Jacques Derrida, Roberto Esposito, and Jean-Luc Nancy conceived it. Segarra’s analysis of the “symbolic construction of the Roma community” (Segarra 2019, p. 75) draws upon Benedict Anderson’s understanding of “image-nation” (Anderson 2006), and especially upon his remark that “[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style they are imagined” (Anderson 2006, p. 6). This remark is helpful for understanding the importance of imagination in the creation of a sense of belonging to a community.

Another issue that is closely connected to the re-invention of the concept of community is the representation of the ‘other’, which in the European migrant cinema is a topic that has attracted the attention of various scholars, such as Guido Rings, who, in *The Other in Contemporary Migrant Cinema Imagining a New Europe?*, argues that cinema, thanks to its capacity to express the collective ideas can influence the generalized views concerning migration (Rings 2016, p. 19). His analysis could help us to better grasp the complexities that characterize the cultural representations in contemporary Italian migrant cinema. A concept that is also useful for comprehending the paradoxical character of the representations of Italy in cinema is that of ‘outlandish cinema’, coined by Sandra Ponzanese, in “Outlandish Cinema: Screening the Other in Italy”. The paradox to which Ponzanese refers is related to the fact that the diverse representations of Italy in post-war and contemporary cinema are characterized by a tension between the colonial memory and its denial. Ponzanese claims that this dichotomy is very present in the cinematic expressions of Italy, especially in the case of New Migrant cinema. This ambiguity between the colonial memory and its denial should be interpreted taking into account the fact that alterity is an important component of Italy’s national narration (Ponzanese 2005, p. 270). In both Neorealist and New Migrant cinema in Italy, the roles of migrants and women and their practices of placemaking function as devices aiming at expressing this ambiguity. In parallel, they mediate the emotions of the spectators regarding the re-configuration of the national identity, replacing a rigid understanding of *italianità* with a more flexible one (Burdett et al. 2019).

4.2. *The Blending of Gender and Migration Studies as a New Interpretation of Italian Neorealist and New Migrant Cinema*

Given that migrant roles and gender roles are central in Neorealist and New Migrant cinema in Italy, the incorporation of methods from migration and gender studies in the analysis of films could reveal aspects of the Neorealist agendas that remain understudied today (Hipkins 2008; Hipkins 2016). The work of Danièle Bélanger and Andrea Flynn is useful for shaping methods aiming to merge migration studies and gender studies. A remark that is particularly enlightening is that “[t]he feminist reading of migration allows for the inclusion of gender as a central aspect of migration flows, labour patterns, trajectories, and experiences.” (Bélanger and Flynn 2018, p. 185). Given the intention of Italian Neorealist and New Migrant Cinema to address social issue, it is useful to examine which methods would be most efficient for understanding the relationship between cinema and social change. A study that could serve for scrutinizing this relationship is Natalie Fullwood’s *Cinema, Gender and Everyday Space*, which examines the relationship between cinema and social change during Italy’s economic boom of the 1950s and early 1960s (Fullwood 2015). An article that is pivotal for any research aiming to address the relationship between gender studies and film studies is concerned is Teresa De Lauretis’s “Technology of Gender”, in which gender is understood as a product of various social technologies, including cinema (De Lauretis 1987).

The research methodologies concerning both migration studies and gender studies have changed considerably since the 1980s, shifting from discipline-specific studies of women immigrants and sex roles toward multidisciplinary analysis. As Silvia Pedraza underlines “[d]espite the overwhelming presence of women in migration flows, until recently the role of women in migration had been totally neglected” (Pedraza 1991, p. 303). The intersections between migration studies, urban studies and gender studies can provide a new reading of the concepts of domesticity, citizenship and displacement in Italian Neorealist and New Migrant cinema. Over the last four decades, there has been a change in the paradigm of migration studies, which are gradually paying more attention to the gender composition of migration streams. Representative of this tendency is Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo’s interpretation of “gender as a constitutive element of immigration” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003, p. 9). This trend of conjointly studying gender and migration phenomena becomes more and more dominant. Important for these endeavors aiming to merge the methods of gender scholarship and those of migration scholarship is the intention to draw upon approaches of social science, on the one hand, and to treat gender as an institutional part of immigration studies, establishing legitimacy for gender in immigration studies, on the other hand.

According to Stephanie J. Nawyn, “[t]he integration of gender analysis in migration studies first emerged in the 1970s and early 1980s” (Nawyn 2010, p. 750). Nawyn also highlights the underpinnings of the shift from studying women to studying gender, claiming that this shift took place in the mid- and late-1980s. Symptomatic of this shift is the 1984 Special Issue of *International Migration Review* devoted to the topic “Women in Migration”. The feminist gender-based migration studies understand gender as a system of relations which is influenced by migration. By the 1990s, one can observe an intensification of the tendency of understanding migration as a gendered process, promoting gender as a dynamic and constitutive element of migration and immigrant integration. More recently, an ensemble of studies such as the 2006 Special Issue of *International Migration Review* devoted to the theme “Gender and Migration Revisited” aimed to shed light on the intersection between gender studies and migration studies. The key insights of these studies lie in their intention to incorporate key questions concerning gender studies into historical research, emphasizing “the need for longitudinal analysis in any study of gender and migration, and not[ing] some approaches to the concept of time used by historians” (Sinke 2006, p. 82). Another concept that would contribute to such an effort to bring together methods coming from gender studies, migration studies and film studies is that of “intersectionality” (Levin 2014; Giuliani 2018).

What I argue here is that we should take into account methodologies coming from both migration and gender studies in order to better understand the way Neorealist cinema addressed questions related to gender and the problem of homeless people and *borgatori* within the post-war Italian society. This would help us better comprehend how a reinvention of the concepts of gender, inhabitants, domesticity and citizenship takes place through Neorealist cinema (Rybczynski 2014; Casarino 2017). Saskia Sassen's understanding of immigration as "a process constituted by human beings with will and agency, with multiple identities and life trajectories beyond the fact of being seen, defined and categorized as immigrants for the purposes of the receiving polity, economy and society" (Sassen 2014, pp. 20–21) is useful for grasping the impact of migration on the status of public space, leading to a more open conception of it and to the reconceptualization of the notion of place beyond traditional definitions, while challenging the boundaries between what is public, communal and domestic. The way migrant incorporation triggers processes of place-making which open up new social and conceptual spaces in the city was a major concern for Neorealist and New Migrant films in Italy, which share an interest in surgically examining matters of society, paying an almost documentary attention to the struggles characterizing daily life.

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