

Studies in European Cinema Volume 3 Number 2 © Intellect Ltd 2006.
 Article, English language. doi: 10.1386/seci.3.2.105/1

Multiculturalism in new Italian cinema

Alberto Zambenedetti *Department of Italian Studies,
 New York University*

Abstract

Many factors contributed in the last 30 years to bring to the fore the need for a new representation of the Italian nation in the media. They span from the local economic boom to the combination of global political events – the widespread process of de/counter-colonization, the demise of communist/socialist/dictatorial regimes in Eastern Europe, the poverty and the climate of terror in North Africa, the dissolution of the Yugoslavian federation, Italy joining the European Union and so forth – and they all contributed to the formation of a wave of mass immigration in the peninsula. On a daily basis, since the early nineties, mass immigration prompts the country to re-think its identity in terms of culture, religion, heritage, and to re-situate itself in a European and global context, and while in literature the hyphenated identities of the contemporary diasporic writers begin to emerge, the televisual and cinematic representation of their correlatives is still missing or incomplete. As a rule, the patriarchal eye of the Italian director is still the privileged lens through which the Italian audiences see immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities. However, some filmmakers, displaying a more perceptive sensibility than their peers on the changes that occur around them, manage to incorporate instances of multicultural openings within the ongoing narrative of a national cinema.

Keywords

multiculturalism
 Italian cinema
 Benetton
 Gianni Amelio
 Ferzan Ozpetek
 Marco Ponti

*Getting my facts from a Benetton ad
 I'm lookin' thru African eyes
 Lit by the glare of an L.A. fire
 Black tie, white noise*

(David Bowie 1993)

Redefining the nation

The co-existence of multiple peoples and cultures on the Italian peninsula and its islands is an historical fact. Before unification, Italy was understood more as a geographic location than as the territory of a nation, and if the Risorgimento brought political unity and led to the birth of a new country, it was the Fascist regime that attempted cultural unification through its coercive strategies of nation formation. Nevertheless, the diverse regional traits that characterize the multiple identities of the peoples of Italy were never entirely obliterated by the homologizing efforts of the State. Diversity amongst citizens in post World War II Italy was marked by language, food, local traditions, clothing and – to a much lesser degree – religion.

As historian Paul Ginsborg writes, the 'economic miracle' that took place between 1958 and 1963 'meant much more in the history of Italy than a booming economy and rising standards of living. It meant an unparalleled movement of the peninsula's population', (Ginsborg 1990: 218) especially – but not only – from the agricultural south to the industrialized north. This displacement contributed to bring the regional traits in contact, and as often happens, sparked reactions in the resident population that spanned from tolerance to assimilation to ghettoization. In this respect, the Italian people could be re-framed both in the context of the national and the international discourse in terms of a multicultural/diasporic nation, endowed with diversity rather than doomed to fragmentation. As a consequence, the films that are embedded in the narrative of the Southern Question, such as *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and His Brothers* (Visconti 1960), or *I Fidanzati* (Olmi 1963), can be re-contextualized and interpreted as proto-multicultural films, inasmuch as they deal with issues of tolerance, integration and assimilation. Of course, diversity in terms of race was in the sixties still absent from the screens because the face of the country was still almost uniform, even if Elio Vittorini, in his proto-resistance novel *Conversazione in Sicilia/Conversations in Sicily*, registers the presence of Chinese itinerant traders in Sicily as early as 1937. Many factors contributed in the last 30 years to bring to the fore the need for a new representation of the Italian nation in the media. They span from the aforementioned local economic boom to the combination of global political events – the widespread process of de/counter-colonization, the demise of communist/socialist/dictatorial regimes in Eastern Europe, the poverty and the climate of terror in North Africa, the dissolution of the Yugoslavian federation, Italy joining the European Union, and so forth – and they all contributed to the formation of a wave of mass immigration in the peninsula. This relatively new phenomenon is best epitomized by the episode of the cargo ship *Vlora*, which on 6 August 1991 transported over 20,000 Albanians to the coasts of Puglia, in the vicinity of Bari. The impact of that dramatic episode on the imagination of Italians is so resilient that in 2004, 23-year-old filmmaker Roberto De Feo reconstructed those tragic moments in his short film *Vlora 1991* by editing fictional and documentary footage.

On a daily basis, since the early nineties, mass immigration prompts the country to re-think its identity in terms of culture, religion, heritage, and to re-situate itself in a European and global context: 'the increasing conflict over what Italians call *extracomunitari* (non-European immigrants) is tied to a central aspect of European integration: the development of a new conception of citizenship. Although a shared sense of European identity and the institutions to legitimate that identity remain notoriously difficult to consolidate, it has proven far easier to forge a common conception of 'those who do not belong.' (Dawson and Palumbo 2005: 166; my italics) At the same time, the still largely multifarious nature of the 'native' population in terms of regional differences often translates into an ambivalent

attitude towards the processes of integration and/or assimilation of the immigrants and refugees. On the whole, mass immigration is often regarded as a large-scale contemporary version of the Southern Question, and handled in a very similar fashion: this 'new' cross-section of the population provides cheap labor for the industries of the north-east and the north-west, as well as for the regions whose economy is still driven mainly by agriculture. However, immigrants are still largely looked at as an alternate population, destined to serve the needs of the country, but not to partake in the enjoyment of its resources: B-class individuals, when individuals at all, posited as 'others' against the alleged uniformity of the citizens by birthright.

The media representation of this phenomenon is just as problematic as the phenomenon itself. At the inception of the nineties, the country presented to the European Union a seemingly optimistic image of itself, thanks to its growing economy and enjoying a period of civil and political stability. However, the bubble of confidence that harbored it in the bosom of the Union was destined to burst soon. While ridding the country of its closeted skeletons (oftentimes with questionable techniques of intimidation and blackmail), Tangentopoli – the all-embracing investigation carried out by a pool of judges based in Milan and also known as *Operazione Mani Pulite/Operation Clean Hands* – destabilized Italy both on a political and economic level, further widening the division between left and right, the poor and the wealthy. With the rise of the neoconservatives to power, and the beginning of the Berlusconi era, the country has grown progressively more ideologically divided, and the strengthening of the national secessionist parties such as *Lega Nord* and their local constituencies has exacerbated the polemics revolving around the question of national identity. The language of the parties at power – and oftentimes of the ministers themselves – is tainted with tones of intolerance and racism: the leaders intentionally turn the clock back to 1934, when 'the Duce worried aloud that the 'numeric and geographic expansion of the yellow and black races' meant that 'the civilization of the white man [was] destined to perish'. (Ben-Ghiat 2001: 128) The main ideologues of the Roman Catholic Church do not miss the opportunity to echo this Counter Reformation language: when musing on the 'missed opportunity' of referencing the alleged Judeo-Christian roots of Europe in the European Constitution Treaty of 2004, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), wrote that 'Europe, in the hour of its greatest success, seems to be emptied from the inside, as if paralyzed by a circulatory crisis, a crises that endangers its life by relying on transplants that efface its identity. The yielding of the supporting spiritual forces tallies with an increasing ethnic decline.' (Pera and Ratzinger 2004: 60)

If the official culture is infused with intolerance and provincialism, it is by looking through the interstices of the fairly globalized Italian pop culture that one can find a better representation of these issues and their impact on the way Italians perceive themselves and their identity. Cinema, advertisements, and popular music seem to offer a much more refined and

subtle understanding of the effects of the phenomenon of mass immigration and the issues it raises in a country that is relatively young and that cannot reductively be equated with a single, united and homologous nation.

Immigration cinema: *Vlora* and *Lamerica*

The spring-summer 1992 campaign designed by Oliviero Toscani for *United Colors of Benetton* featured photographs of strong social content: an AIDS patient on his deathbed surrounded by his family in a *pietà*-like composition, a victim of a mafia killing covered by a white sheet and lying in a pool of his own blood – in his turn mourned by women in traditional southern Italian black attires, and the aforementioned arrival of the *Vlora* cargo ship in Puglia. In her book on the shocking, thought-provoking, controversial campaigns that Toscani realized for the clothing manufacturer from Treviso, Lorella Pagnucco Salvemini thus writes of the picture of the Albanian odyssey:

A ship is besieged by hundreds of wretched people, who are chasing a chimera of freedom and economic dignity, oppressed in their own country and refused entry elsewhere. "It looks like a timeless photograph but it nevertheless belongs to days which we have only just experienced, while we were all on the beach enjoying Italian good-will", Oliviero Toscani wrote not sparing to blame himself as well.

It was inevitable that this impressionist vision of hordes of starving people looking for a crumb of bread and a crumb of hope should powerfully recall the memory of the great, tragic migrations across the ocean in the early 1920s and 1930s, when there was a mass exodus of Italians degraded by poverty and ignorance to the United States, South America, Australia and Canada. But they were also reminiscent of the compulsory transfer of crowds of Italian workers to Belgium, Germany and Switzerland after World War II, albeit traveling by rail rather than by sea.

It is possible, therefore, that these sad stories of misery and desperation, given international exposure by the Benetton campaigns, transcended the Italian-Albanian context of the images, referring to the drama of earlier exoduses including the Cuban one.

(Salvemini 2002: 91)

Avoiding facile accusations of exploiting social issues at the advantage of rampant capitalist agendas, Salvemini touches on a point that is crucial in the discussion of how the Albanian exodus impacted Italy: she notes that Toscani is holding up a mirror for the Italians, through which they should look at the history of their own migration in order to understand the motives behind such humiliating acts of desperation. In fact, the photographer's 'in your face' aesthetics, albeit inherently demagogic, seeks to transcend the logic of commerce and blow a whistle for the international community to hear, reaching peoples all over the world through the powerful vehicles of pop culture, such as fan-magazines and billboards.

The issue of the Albanian exodus was addressed by Gianni Amelio in his 1994 film *Lamerica*. The film tells the story of a fraud concocted by two ill-intentioned Italians, Gino and Fiore, who pretend to open a shoe factory in Albania with the actual purpose of embezzling emergency aid funds from the Italian government. In order to succeed with their plan, they need an Albanian figurehead to pose as the president of the company. Their choice falls on Spiro, an elderly man who they believe they can easily manipulate. Their patronizing ways with the locals, their ignorance of the history of the country, and their limited understanding of the situation they are trying to exploit will ultimately sentence their plans to failure.

The opening credits are juxtaposed with an *Istituto Luce* newsreel from April 1939 that shows the arrival of the Italian troops in the harbor of Durrës (Durazzo in Italian) on the occasion of the annexation of Albania. While squads of soldiers are deposited to shore, the voice-over illustrates the grand plans that the Fascist regime has for the colony which, since 1925–1926, had been tied to Italy under an informal agreement of protectorate. The invading forces are seen marching in the streets of rural Albania, saluted by men and women as liberators and bearers of progress. The director then cuts to a shot of the same harbor in 1991, where men in rugs, hoping to board a ship to Puglia, are battling the police while chanting 'Italy, Italy, you are the world!'

A series of vicissitudes in the course of the film lead the younger of the two phony entrepreneurs, Gino, to be incarcerated and to have his Italian passport confiscated. This emasculating plot-twist levels the disparity between him and the undistinguishable hordes of Albanians who are desperately trying to flee the country and reach Italy. Gino's loss of the ability to assert his national identity and therefore his 'otherness' from the people he so much despised and looked down upon in his odyssey across the barren, hungry, forsaken country, causes his gaze – and ours with his – to be sutured with that of the refugees when he finally manages to board the *Partizani*, an Italy-bound cargo ship that the director clearly modelled on the *Vlora*. In other words, if through the Benetton campaign Oliviero Toscani forced consumers to look at people who had lost their purchasing power and, as a consequence, their own identity in the post-Cold-War world, Gianni Amelio forces viewers to align with them, to look through their eyes. Hence, the spectacle offered by Italian television – that bleeds into Albanian houses, hospitals and bars in all its superficiality and sex/money driven programming – becomes the illusory notion of the world beyond communism and dictatorship, a kaleidoscope through which the disenfranchised can look and pine for the alluring riches of the West.

On the deck of the ship, Gino comes across Spiro. At this point in the narrative, the viewer is aware that the old man turned out to have been an Italian soldier who had participated in the 1939 invasion, had been traumatized by the tortures he suffered under the communist dictatorship that followed the end of the war, and believes to be still in his twenties. Spiro delivers the melodramatic speech that concludes the film and seals the director's

argument: mistaking the world around him and the perception of his own self, the infantilized man believes to be on a ship to the United States, and expresses his concern for not knowing English. He also underlines the failure of the Fascist language policies – of imposing the national standard code over the regional dialects – by confessing his inability to speak Italian too. The closing of the circle (the conflation of 1920/30s Italian diaspora with 1990s Albanian diaspora) is juxtaposed with swelling music and an emphatic montage of faces of Albanian refugees. In the attempt at being noticed and acknowledged, the prospective immigrants look into the camera, thus returning the condescending gaze of the Italian spectator and rejecting the objectification of the cinematographic eye.

Other's cinema: The case of Ferzan Ozpetek

Istanbul-born director Ferzan Ozpetek moved to Italy in the end of the 1970s to pursue a college education in cinema studies at the university La Sapienza in Rome. In the course of the 1980s he worked with several theatre companies in the country and at a number of films as assistant director. Using Hamid Naficy's terminology, the Turk could be defined as an exilic filmmaker: he is part of those 'individuals or groups who voluntarily or involuntarily have left their country of origin and who maintain an ambivalent relationship with their previous and current places and cultures'. (Naficy 2001: 12) Ozpetek's feature debut *Hamam/Steam – The Turkish Bath* (Ozpetek, 1997) is the story of a young designer who is bequeathed property in Istanbul by his long-forgotten aunt. Wanting to quickly sell the unexpected legacy, Francesco flies to Turkey and stays with the family that his dead relative had befriended. When he finds out that the property he inherited is an old hamam, a Turkish bath, and that his prospective buyer plans to tear it down to replace it with a mall, he decides to keep it, refurbish it, and run it. The length of his stay in Istanbul becomes undefined, and the experience changes his life, first prompting him to loosen up on his efficiency-driven lifestyle and later to come out as a homosexual.

Italy and Turkey, and more specifically the respective capital cities, are posited as two dramatically beautiful ancient sites that cannot be fully grasped. Rome is always seen through the ribbon-windows of the modern house on the hill where Francesco and his wife Marta live. The geometric lines and the glazed surfaces contrast and complement the panorama of the ancient city, which the protagonist can overlook but not possess. In fact, the Italian identity is alien to him, even if he can gaze at its supposed cradle from a high vantage point. On the contrary, Francesco finds pleasure in roaming aimlessly through the old streets of Istanbul, discovering its hidden beauties, its colors, its smells and its inhabitants. Through its protagonist, Ozpetek portrays and inverts his own trajectory: just like the director 'went West' and found a career in the withering Italian industry becoming one of its prime directors, Francesco needs to 'go East' and assimilate the Turkish culture, learn the language and so forth, in order to come

to terms with his sexuality and ultimately to define his own identity. He moves across four main locations/locales: from his cold, aseptic house overlooking Rome he travels to Istanbul, where he finds shelter in a much warmer and darker, almost murky house. The latter is connected to the hamam by a little door, a threshold that leads to the final stage of his voyage.

Opzpetek's third feature, *Le Fate Ignoranti/His Secret Life* (Opzpetek 2001), is set entirely in Rome. Antonia and Massimo are a seemingly happy couple of professionals in their late thirties. After a car runs over her husband and kills him, Antonia accidentally learns about the man's seven-year-long infidelity. Devastated by the two-fold loss, the woman starts looking for answers, and discovers that her husband's lover was in fact a man named Michele. Once the initial shock is overcome, she befriends Michele and enters his world.

If the obliviousness of Antonia's bourgeois mentality is established as the normalcy of the Italian people, the 'otherness' of Michele's community constitutes a submerged alternative at the core of which the complexity of one's identity can be unveiled and embraced. Through means of color palette and décor, Opzpetek initially depicts these worlds as unreconcilable and colliding, and slowly scrambles the boundaries that separate them, pointing at the recognition and acceptance that the gay community claims for itself (which is sealed in the end credits, where the cast of the film joins the annual Gay Pride parade). The director's glamorization of queerness does not neglect to expose his target spectator – the middle-class after-pizza Sunday night Italian moviegoer – to some common issues related to homosexual and trans-sexual life, while at the same time he 'orientalizes' the community – and indexes his own roots – through the characters of the Turkish political refugees Emir and Serra.

La Finestra di Fronte/Facing Windows (Opzpetek 2003), Opzpetek's fourth feature, is the story of Giovanna, a 29-year-old mother of two who is married to Filippo. Despite being burdened by the mundanity of their routine and their financial troubles, the couple decides to take care of a Jewish holocaust survivor who enters their life by accident. While helping the amnesiac, senile man Giovanna befriends the handsome young professional who lives in the apartment facing hers, whom she sometimes spies from her kitchen window during her nightly reveries. The two become romantically involved, but Giovanna shies out from the escapade before it becomes adultery and rejoins her unaware family.

Giovanna lives in the same building of her co-worker Eminè and her family. The woman – presumably a Turkish immigrant, since the character is played by Opzpetek regular Serra Yilmaz – lives with the African Jumbo (short for Giovanni Battista) and his (their?) two children. In the course of a pizza dinner with Giovanna and her family, Emirè scolds her little girl for having dropped food on her shirt and says: 'Remember, you always need to be cleaner, better mannered, and tidier than the others'. Without directly wording it, the character addresses the issue posed by the children's colored

skin in a still predominantly white society. In order not to be looked down as little primitives – a trope that recurs in the Italian brand of racist discourse – the children are suggested to assimilate the culture and outsmart it by being better players at its own game, an attitude towards life that, inevitably, entails the suppression of the influence of the cultures of origin of their own parents on their new, hyphenated identity, and the distancing from their heritage. In fact, as David Ward notes, '[r]acist arguments against immigration no longer bear on the question of the biological inferiority of the immigrant, for that is now untenable in scientific terms. Rather, racist strategies bear now not so much on the fear of difference, but the fear of equality. For racist groups, the threat now posed by the immigrant is to the integrity of the host country's culture, which they fear risks being diluted by the bearers of other, antithetical cultures.' (Ward 1997: 91)

Multiculturalism Italian style: Marco Ponti and the Benetton Youth

In 1997 and 1998 Oliviero Toscani exhibited a series of photographs in Florence and Copenhagen. Here is how Giovanni Agosti, in the introduction of the volume that gathers these pictures, comments on the shows:

On pylons, among which one wanders as in a wood, the images are displayed – each printed more than three meters high. Hundreds of faces stare straight into the camera lens, reducing the presence of the photographer to nothing. Contravening all photographic norms, the aim is to make a huge identification photo, like the ones issued by photo booths in train stations: the result has the usual cleanness of the images that characterize Toscani's work. White background, lit from front and behind, a rudimentary use of technology – the same principles as the snapshot – and always shot from the same angle. In this way, objectivity becomes poetic. [. . .]

For him [Toscani], the faces almost make up a map of the beauty of today's youth, where whoever is photographed isn't there just to be looked at, unlike professional models, but is directly addressing us. And, despite the fact that the photos have all been taken in exactly the same way, saying much the same thing, it's not a homogeneous, canonic kind of beauty set in stone. Instead, it's like topography that is still tangible, where one town might be famous for its cathedral, another for the parish church, yet another for the cemetery: before everything becomes the same.

Compared to Toscani's most recent work, the novelty here lies in the deliberate introduction of the concept of beauty, in all its ethnic possibilities. [. . .] [T]here's the almost illuminist aspiration to create an anthropological atlas.

(Toscani 1997: 8–9)

Toscani's photographs construe, rather than represent, a typology of the modern youth that Douglas Coupland, in his novel *Shampoo Planet*, labeled *Benetton Youth*, defined as 'global kids whose histories, memories and experiences began in the Reagan era of greed and conspicuous consumption.'

(Giroux 1993–1994: 11) The photographs initiate a movement of de-localization of the Benetton product, from the foggy plateaus of the Veneto where the company is based to the metropoli of the globe that the consumers inhabit. Caren Kaplan comments on the Toscani/Benetton paradigm by noticing that ‘Benetton offers us a “united world” of different, ethnically inflected models all wearing virtually the same product,’ (Kaplan 1995: 50) and this model is criticized for its political shallowness by Henry A. Giroux, who argues that ‘the harmony and consensus implied in these ads often mock concrete racial, social and cultural differences as they are constituted amid hierarchical relations of struggle, power and authority’.

(Giroux 1993–1994: 10) More specifically, Karen Pinkus addresses the tense relationship between the residues of Fascist culture in contemporary Italy and the globalizing movement of the Benetton campaigns: ‘[t]he positive, youthful association of the Benetton name with a new world order of global unity is also another way of forgetting the colonialist legacy, and then, by association, the very mechanism of power forged under the regime that may still persist at some level in Italy today.’¹ (Pinkus 1997: 149)

In his first two feature films, writer and director Marco Ponti tells the story of metropolitan, post-Reaganite youngsters who closely resemble the *Benetton Youth*. The opening credits of his debut *Santa Maradona* (Ponti 2001) are juxtaposed with a montage of the goals of the famous Argentinian soccer player Diego Armando Maradona, a global icon of success and self-destruction, of stubborn individualism in the context of a team game, and of multiple falls and comebacks. The soundtrack to this montage is the eponymous song *Santa Maradona* by Mano Negra. The legendary Franco-Spanish band named after an Andalucian anarchist group is on the forefront of anti-globalization counter-culture, and in the nineties has been politically active across Europe and the Americas: we can argue that the band stands in as a signifier for the aesthetics of cross-contamination that permeate the film. The unmistakable hybrid sound of the band, collated onto the images of Maradona – who also synecdochically evokes the world of soccer and its global reach – lead the viewer into the life of Andrea and his friend Bart(olomeo), two unemployed graduates in the humanities affected by arrested development and who cannot find a satisfactory placement in the post-college world. Their story is set in Turin, the most diverse city in Italy. The protagonist falls in love with the girly and beautiful Dolores while his friend and roommate secretly dreams of Lucia, the exotic Indian-Italian student who completes the quartet.

The references to popular culture – mainly Italian and American – are many and multi-layered, and they constitute the foundations on which the hypertrophied language of the youngsters is based. Their creativeness, impeded by the superstructure of the capitalist society, is let loose in their profuse profanities, their word mongering and their hyperbolic loquaciousness. Bart – the lazy couch potato who cannot find a reason to leave the apartment – desires Lucia – the exotic woman whose otherness is comfortably dimmed through hyphenation. However, this sexual tension is not

- 1 Pinkus, K. (1997), ‘Shades of Black in Advertising and Popular Culture’, in Allen, B. and Russo, M. (eds), *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 149.

- 2 Parati, G. (1997) 'Strangers in Paradise: Foreigners and Shadows in Italian Literature', in Allen, B. and Russo, M. (eds.), *Revisiting Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 187.

addressed directly, but it is mitigated through its dissemination in the media. After Lucia's boyfriend publishes some pictures of her nude in the Photo magazine, Bart is seen gazing at them and telling Andrea that he is going to 'dedicate a melancholic wank to our friend Lucia'. The man is then seen coming out of the bathroom and pretending to talk to the girl through her photograph. Bart sits on the couch, turns on the TV, flips through the channels and stares at a dance scene from a Bollywood film in a mixture of arousal and catatonia. The director then cuts to Lucia, who is shaving her legs and watching the same movie. The girl's exoticness and sexuality – she is one of the very few instances of a non-one-hundred-percent white character in New Italian Cinema – are fetishized and filtered within the same cinematic/televisual shot.

A/R (Ponti 2002), Marco Ponti's second film – a heist comedy with a romantic core – features more ethnic characters, the most prominent of them being Tolstoj, a middle-age, gentle, charismatic and soft-spoken Indian bellboy played by legendary actor Kabir Bedi, who has been working in Italy since 1976, when he starred in the TV miseries *Sandokan*, which was based on the colonial novel by Emilio Salgari. The boundaries of the Italian culture are once again teased out in the conversations between him and Dante, a disenchanted Benetton Youth who is about to embark on a trip around the world in the attempt of escaping from an existence that he perceives as meaningless. Dante and Tolstoj – as their names cry out – have a penchant for word mongering and storytelling, although their pacing and deliveries are very different. If Dante's sarcasm is often conveyed through surreal punch-lines, urban slang and staccato jokes, Tolstoj's velvety voice and composure lend themselves to mesmerizing anecdotes and words of 'oriental' wisdom.

As a way of concluding a non-conclusive argument

At the inception of the nineties popular culture began to offer representations of the migration question. One of the first films that can be included in the category here outlined as Immigration Cinema was *Pummaró* (Placido 1990), in which the main character, a medical student from Ghana, faces the inadequacy of Italian politics and mentality when dealing with issues such as black labor, race, miscegenation, and so forth. While in literature the hyphenated identities of the new diasporic writers begins to emerge, the televisual and cinematic representation of their correlates is still missing. The patriarchal eye of the Italian director is still the privileged lens through which immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities are seen by the Italian audiences. However, as Graziella Parati underscores, 'the ongoing process of the creation of non-essentializing concepts of sexual, racial, cultural and ethnic difference is reflected in the national and narrative contexts that the immigrants have created and continue to create'.² (Parati 1997: 187) Some filmmakers, displaying a more perceptive sensibility than their peers on the changes that occur around them, manage to combine other instances of multicultural openings in different incarnations of popular culture with the ongoing narrative of

a national cinema. The cases of Gianni Amelio, Ferzan Ozpetek and Marco Ponti are to be taken as example of a trend that is still in the formation process and that is starting to produce films such as *Volevo Solo Dormire Addosso* (Cappuccio 2004), in which a 30-year-old disillusioned corporate executive cradles escapist fantasies through the figure of Angelique, a Cameroonian lap dancer. Her dark skin triggers colonial desire and identity search in the confused man, who ultimately decides to quit his job and rekindle his ties with his family in the attempt of re-humanizing himself.

As a way of conclusion, Hamid Naficy writes, '[d]iaspora, exile, and ethnicity are not steady states; rather, they are fluid processes that under certain circumstances may transform into one another and beyond'. (Naficy 2001: 12) And if neither of these states can be fully embraced as identity defining, nor can the old-fashioned concept of Nation State utilized to pinpoint the ever-shifting European multiplicity, especially in the case of the multifarious peoples who currently inhabit the Italian peninsula.

Works cited

- AAVV. (2000), *The Outsider: Prejudice and Politics in Italy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Allen, B. and Russo, M. (eds.) (1997), *Revisloning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ben-Ghiat, R. (2001), *Fascist Modernities. Italy, 1922–1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bocca, G. (1998), *Gli Italiani sono razzisti?* Milan: Garzanti.
- Braccini, B. (2000), *I Giovani di Origine Africana: Integrazione socio-culturale delle seconde generazioni in Italia*, Turin: L'Harmattan.
- Colors, sample issues.
- Dawson, A. and Palumbo, P. (2005), 'Hannibal's Children: Immigration and Antiracists youth Subcultures in Contemporary Italy', *Cultural Critique*, 59, pp. 165–186.
- Giroux, H.A. (1993–1994), 'Consuming Social Change: The "United Colors of Benetton"', *Cultural Critique*, 26, pp. 5–32.
- Ginsborg, P. (1990), *A History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics 1943–1988*, London: Penguin.
- Goldberg, V. (2005), 'Benetton and the Uses of Tragedy', in V. Goldberg (ed.), *Light Matters: Writings on Photography*, New York: Aperture, pp. 166–171.
- Gómez-Reino Cachafero, M. (2002), *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Italian Politics. Inventing the Padania: Lega Nord and the northern question*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Grillo, R. and Pratt, J. (eds.) (2002), *The Politics of Recognizing Difference: Multiculturalism Italian-Style*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Kaplan, C. (1995), "'A World Without Boundaries': The body shop's trans/national geographics", *Social Text*, 43, pp. 45–66.
- Mantle, J. (1999), *Benetton: The Family, the Business and the Brand*, London: Little, Brown and Company.
- Naficy, H. (2001), *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Pera, Marcello and Ratzinger, Joseph (Benedict XVI). (2004), *Senza Radici. Europa, Relativismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, Milan: Mondadori.
- Rivera, Annamaria. (2003), *Estranei e Nemici: Discriminazione e violenza razzista in Italia*, Rome: DeriveApprodi.
- Salvemini, Lorella Pagnucco. (2002), *United Colors: The Benetton Campaigns*, London: Scriptum Editions.
- Toscani, O. (1997), *Facce*. Rome: Castelveccchi.

Suggested citation

Zambenedetti, A. (2006), 'Multiculturalism in new Italian cinema', *Studies in European Cinema* 3: 2, pp. 105–116. doi: 10.1386/seci.3.2.105/1

Contributor details

Alberto Zambenedetti was born and raised in Venice, Italy. He has a Laurea in Foreign Languages and Literatures from Università degli Studi di Venezia Ca' Foscari, an MA in Cinema Studies from New York University and is currently pursuing a PhD in Italian Studies in the same institution. Contact: 24 West 12th Street, New York, NY 10011, USA.
E-mail: zambenedetti@nyu.edu