

## The Representation of Migrants in Italian Cinema, from the Stereotypes to the Socio-Political Mission of Present-Day Film Directors

*Francesca Colella*

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### 1. Author information

*Francesca Colella*

Department of Communication and Social Research, Sapienza  
University of Rome, Italy

### 2. Contact authors'

E-mail: [francesca.colella@uniroma1.it](mailto:francesca.colella@uniroma1.it)

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*The Representation of Migrants in Italian Cinema, from the Stereotypes to the Socio-Political Mission of Present-Day Film Directors*

Francesca Colella\*

Corresponding author:  
Francesca Colella  
E-mail: francesca.colella@uniroma1.it

**Abstract**

The mass media are more than ever taking on the role of a socialization agency and contributing to the construction of new social representations. They are producing and perpetuating stereotypes that get crystallized in the individual and collective imagination, determined and defined by the goods produced by the culture industry. For decades now, and with different disciplinary approaches, the social sciences have demonstrated the role and importance of the mass media in constructing the social representations, stereotypes and prejudices of immigrants, and therefore the relationships between the different groups and cultures that live throughout the land. The present article deals with the major results of an empirical research, conducted at the Sapienza University of Rome, on the relationship between Italian cinema and the topic of migration: a topic that has always been a favorite leitmotif of the mass media the world over, especially cinema. The main objective of this survey was to compare images and representations formed on Italian immigrants in the world with the more recent ones of foreigners in Italy, through both the study of cultural products that address these issues (such as films and film-documentaries) and interviews focusing on some of the most famous Italian filmmakers who have dealt with this topic. With this in mind, I will analyze (in comparative terms) the corpus of films and stereotypes – positive and negative – that stud our cinematic firmament, in order to try to understand if films are still capable today of conducting the social function they have always done.

Keywords: cinema, social representations, stereotypes, migrants.

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\* Department of Communication and Social Research, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy.

## 1. Introduction

The mass media are more than ever taking on the role of a socialization agency and contributing to the construction of new *social representations*. They are producing and perpetuating stereotypes that get crystallized in the individual and collective imagination, determined and defined by the goods produced by the culture industry (Sorice, 2009). For decades now, and with different disciplinary approaches, the social sciences have demonstrated the role and importance of the mass media in constructing the social representations, stereotypes and prejudices of immigrants, and therefore the relationships between the different groups and cultures that live throughout the land.

On this premise, the present article deals with the major results of an empirical research, conducted at the Sapienza University of Rome<sup>1</sup>, on the relationship between Italian cinema and the topic of migration: a topic that has always been a favorite leitmotif of the mass media the world over, especially cinema. The main objective of this survey was to compare images and representations formed on Italian immigrants in the world with the more recent ones of foreigners in Italy, through both the study of cultural products that address these issues (such as films and film-documentaries)<sup>2</sup> and interviews focusing on some of the most famous Italian filmmakers who have dealt with this topic. The Italian films on this subject tell stories of arrivals and of hope, acceptance and rejection, integration and exclusion. Some are inspired by real events, others not, but all reflect our contradictory social attitudes. While our society appears capable of solidarizing with foreigners, it also criminalizes them with its repressive laws. It integrates them fully in the productive processes even while relegating them to the margins of the community. It is fascinated with their cultural diversity yet considers them dangerous for its 'self-preservation'.

This dichotomy, which is of primary sociological interest, is expressed in the cinematic relationship between immigrants and the social fabric of the host society, which is the specific subject of this article. It is a particularly important subject of international literature but is rarely spotlighted in Italian

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<sup>1</sup> This research was published in 2015, edited by Giovanna Gianturco and Gaia Peruzzi, in a text entitled: *Immagini in movimento. Lo sguardo del cinema italiano sulle migrazioni* (Parma, Edizioni Junior - Gruppo Spaggiari).

<sup>2</sup> The Italian cinematic tradition is rife with stories portrayed by master film-makers. But in contrast to what takes place abroad, only recently has Italian cinema shown interest in stories about the immigration into our country, even though it has become a well-established phenomenon.

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cinema. With this in mind, I will analyze (in comparative terms) the corpus of films and stereotypes – positive and negative – that stud our cinematic firmament, in order to try to understand if films are still capable today of conducting the *social function* they have always done: does our current cinema just tell stories, forgoing the ‘revolutionary’ role that was the cinematic hallmark of a few decades ago? What degree of awareness do directors have of these processes and of the (more or less defined) social messages that are contained in their film products? Is there a ‘sustainable imagination’ capable of not forgetting that the process of constructing *social representations* hinges on three (and not two) great protagonists: the mass media, the (natives) social fabric of the host society, and the immigrants?

## 2. Empirical investigation: a methodological note

The most distinctive feature of our investigation is to attempt to make a comparative interpretation of films on Italian emigration with those on foreign immigration into Italy, through the use of two types of materials: the first primary type are interviews focusing on 15 key observers, including film directors and experts on visual and migration studies.

The directors whose observations were gathered are: Federico Bondi (39 years old), film director of *Mar Nero* (2008); Claudio Cupellini (41), film director of *Una vita tranquilla* (2010); Agostino Ferrente (43), film director of *L’orchestra di Piazza Vittorio* (2006); Claudio Giovannesi (36), film director of *Fratelli d’Italia* (2009) and *Alì ha gli occhi azzurri* (2012); Vincenzo Marra (42), film director of *Tornando a casa* (2001); Giuliano Montaldo (84), film director of *Sacco e Vanzetti* (1971); Francesco Munzi (45), film director of *Saimir* (2004) and *Il resto della notte* (2008); Claudio Noce (39), film director of *Adil e Yusuf* (2007) and *Good morning Aman* (2009); Marco Simon Puccioni (55), film director of *Riparo* (2007) and *Il colore delle parole* (2009); Andrea Segre (38), film director of *A metà - storie tra Italia e Albania* (2001), *Come un uomo sulla terra* (2008), *Il sangue verde* (2010), *Io sono Lì* (2011) and *Mare chiuso* (2012).

We also interviewed two experts of the immigration phenomenon: Enrico Pugliese, author of many studies and books, including *L’Italia tra migrazioni internazionali e migrazioni interne* (2002) and many others; Renato Cavallaro, author of many studies and books, including *Storie senza storia. Indagine sull’emigrazione calabrese in Gran Bretagna* (1981) and *Partire, tornare, raccontare. L’emigrazione nella prospettiva della sociologia qualitativa* (2005). Finally, we interviewed three experts on visual and migration studies: Massimo Ghirelli, author of radio and television programs, including: ‘Nonsoloneo’ (1988-1994), consultant to international organizations and NGOs, he was a member in the Italian Council for Refugees and in the National Carta di Roma

*Observatory*, president of Archivio dell'Immigrazione; Tijana Mamula (John Cabot University), author of *Cinema and Language Loss: Displacement, Visuality and the Filmic Image* (2012); Martino Pillitteri, journalist (*Vita Magazine*, *Yalla Italia*, *IlSole24ore* and *Cappuccino e Narghilè*).

The second type of material concerns the thematic analysis of a large corpus of film products dealing mainly with stories of Italian emigration abroad and foreign immigration into Italy. Our analysis focuses on broad thematic macro-areas that include: work, family, gender issues, but also the relationship of immigrants with their areas of settlement, institutions and the social fabric of the host society. Here we will focus in particular on the relationship between immigrants and the social fabric, and the socio-political role of film directors.

Our research team had to deal with two interdependent issues: first, the size of the available film corpus (consisting of over 100 films), and partly also its indeterminateness (since it is set up as an open and continually implementable database); and second, the poorly codified and shared analytical methodology of film images, at least in the social sciences.

The aim of this study was, I repeat, to compare images and representations constructed on Italian emigrants in the world with the more recent ones on foreigners in Italy, through the study of cultural products that address these issues. The Italian film tradition is full of stories represented by masters of Italian cinema. Instead, in contrast to what takes place abroad, only recently has Italian cinema turned to stories of immigration into our country, although it is by now a deeply rooted phenomenon.

### **3. The image of immigrants, from positive to negative stereotypes**

As we said, Italian directors do not seem to be especially interested in narrating the major changes regarding the immigration, acceptance and integration of millions of citizens and foreign workers. However, there are rare but notable exceptions, such as *Pummarò* (1990), Michele Placido's directorial debut (1990), and Gianni Amelio's *Lamerica* (1994).

It is now well-known how, when we reflect on the relationship between cinema and immigration, we cannot avoid referring to the 'partial and inadequate' thought process (Lippmann, 2004: 47) which lies in *stereotyping*: a 'defense mechanism' (Mazzara, 1997) individuals resort to both because of the superabundance of information and contacts which forces them to interact with an excessively complex environment, and because of the need to simplify their environment, organize their ideas about reality and construct a picture of

the world inside their heads (Lippmann, 2004), a portrait that is, at least in part, culturally determined<sup>3</sup>.

It is interesting to note that in Placido's *Pummarò* we even see the construction of positive stereotypes, though almost always the stereotypes are negative, as a result of the characteristics attributed to them, namely a content not adherent to the facts and partial in its representation, owing to a process of lockstep thinking that prevents change even in the face of new experiences (Lippmann, 2004). But the stereotype can also be positive, as occurs in some of the films we examined in our study.

*Pummarò* stands out as an emblem of positive stereotypes: the story of a young graduate from Ghana who arrives in Italy to look for his brother, nicknamed *Pummarò* because of his steadfast dedication to the tomato harvest, a job that the hero Kawaku will also eventually take on. From the very start, both in regard to the level of education of Kawaku (also 'handsome and personable') and in regard to the (illegal) employment that immigrants are forced to accept, Placido confirms a stereotyped representation of the immigrant present in the collective consciousness, moving from what we can 'label' – in the sociological sense of the term – as a positive stereotype, namely that of the foreigner who arrives in our country with a higher education degree and, in spite of this is relegated to the margins of society. Placido attempts to narrate many, perhaps too many, situations in which immigrants find themselves, as if to give an account of all the possible variations and implications of the condition of foreigners in Italy: from the tomato harvest to seeking refuge in places that seem to produce them (in this case a cemetery); from his purchase of a residence permit to his encounter/clash with the local organized crime; from his love story with the prostitute Nanu to his migration to the racist North to work in a factory, and to his hopeless love story (as we

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<sup>3</sup> The first operational use of the concept of stereotype in empirical research was the 1933 study on ethnic stereotypes by Kats and Braly, in Katz, Q., Braly, K. (1933), "Racial stereotypes in one hundred college students", in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social-Psychology*," 28, pp. 280-290. The stereotype impression as fixed and immutable, an indiscriminate construct that combines many types of experience into a single concept based on a false similarity, describes the characteristics of the members of a given group and manifests prejudice by constructing theories and ideologies that most often generate racist attitudes. In expressing a prejudice one believes that the individual on whom it is targeted, namely the immigrant, belongs to a specific group identifiable by distinctive signs or stereotypes and therefore evaluated in a negative way. At the same time a lumping together takes place, on the assumption that all the members of the group behave in the same way; this generalization is of course accompanied by the often considerable social distance that exists between the targeted group and the group expressing the prejudice.

see from the start), with an Italian schoolteacher who, touched by this simple but honest and educated man, gives herself to him.

Certainly, the film's political stand was in itself an element worthy of appreciation, especially since in the early 1990s Italian cinema had long since abandoned the more pressing and timely social issues (the cinema of social commitment of the 1960s and 1970s was a dim memory of the past).

*Pummarò* has its near 'counterpart' on Italians emigrating abroad in Aldo Fabrizi's 1948 film (also a debut) *Emigrantes*. The film, described by some critics as pious and hackneyed (Aristarco, 1949), tells the story of Giuseppe, who leaves postwar Rome with his pregnant wife Adele and his daughter Maria, to reach Argentina. It is a work that certainly ranks among the historical films on the subject. The film, being one of the first successfully produced in Italy, undoubtedly contributed to the construction of a stereotyped image of the emigrant as primarily concerned with his attachment to his mother country, and the consequent nostalgia and lack of integration of Giuseppe's wife, as well as the mainstay of family and patriotic values.

However, what must be emphasized is that the negative stereotypes as much as the positive ones contribute to an incomprehension of the phenomenon which we wish to understand.

#### **4. The tie with the social fabric of the host society: representing cultures**

The next example in our study of the relationships between cultures and, therefore, the relationship between immigrants and the social fabric, is the film *Lamerica* (1994), an original work of great social commitment that Gianni Amelio set in the collapse of Albania in the early 1990s and the exodus of its inhabitants. Amelio chose to represent the migration process on two levels: Albanian immigration in Italy in the early 1990s and Italian emigration after World War I. In this and many other movies we can detect a common feature of migrations, namely, the one that recalls Goffman's 'theater metaphor,' in which he describes human interactions as an exchange of lines between social actors, each of whom has a character to play and a series of tricks and strategies to convince his audience that he really is impersonating that role he has put together on the stage of social relationships (Goffman, 1969).

This is what Nino Manfredi also tries to do as the hero of Franco Brusati's film *Pane e cioccolata* (1973), in his role as an Italian who migrates to Switzerland to take a seasonal job in a restaurant. He is in his trial period, and since the restaurant can only take one foreign worker, Nino (also the character's nickname) is competing with a Turk. His integration into Swiss society obsesses him, and after he loses his job for having urinated in the

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street, he decides, with the idea of integrating himself or perhaps blending in with the Swiss, to dye hair, mustache and eyebrows blond. He pretends to be Swiss with people he meets on the street – greeting them in German, though he doesn't know them – and at a bar, even with the waiter, who he doesn't realize is also Italian. He is stirred patriotically in when he hears the Italian national anthem played during a soccer match on TV but resists and tries to side with the Swiss who are watching the game with him. But when the Italian team makes a goal he shouts with glee, deciding to reveal his true identity. But now Nino has no work and is expelled from the country. But thanks to his Greek friend Elena, he manages to get a new six-month residence permit to try to find a new job and integrate into Swiss society.

In general, the public debate on the integration process of immigrants in the host society is surely vast but there is no total agreement, because it operates on several levels, in relation to different social spheres that involve persons with differentiated intensity, depending on their personal traits and the contexts in which they live. In this sense we can distinguish the existence of different spheres of integration, often loosely linked together, and the importance of recognizing the differences between the underlying social processes<sup>4</sup>. What emerges from our survey is how the heroes of our films do not struggle alone: in some very interesting and original instances, those who help immigrants to integrate into the social fabric of arrival are children, symbolic figures without superstructures and prejudices, as in Marco Tullio Giordana's film *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (2005). In other films, those who help immigrants to integrate are a child together with an elderly person, as in Andrea Segre's 2013 film *La prima neve*.

In Federico Bondi's film *Mar Nero* (2008), the young Romanian immigrant Angela finds a job as a caregiver for Gemma, an elderly Florentine woman, recently widowed, who becomes Angela's point of reference.

Thus Italian cinema seems to have opened its eyes only recently on the topic of immigration. From 2005 on immigrants as subjects for films begin to be taken seriously. 2011 was significant as the year Italian cinema 'discovered' immigration, with almost 20 Italian films on the subject, two of them, the work of young directors, awarded at the Venice Film Festival: Special Jury Prize for Emanuele Crialese's *Terraferma* and the Luigi De Laurentiis Award for Guido Lombardi's debut film *Là-Bas, Educazione criminale* ('Là-Bas').

In *Terraferma* the sea is a maze of emotions, from the instinct to escape to the impulse to survive: a 'duel' between the law of the land, which prohibits fishermen from helping immigrants, and the law of the sea, which urges the

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<sup>4</sup> Social integration still needs to be studied in greater depth, with clear guidelines furnished to those who work regularly in this context.

fishermen not to deny them aid: a dichotomy we have seen time and time again in the daily life of our country as destination point.

Ermanno Olmi's *Il villaggio di cartone*, presented out of competition in Venice, also in 2011, received critical acclaim for a story about immigration in the meaningful relationship with the Catholic Church, a traditional Italian institution little explored in this connection in Italian films. Olmi chose a parish priest to represent the duality between acceptance and State laws when he houses a group of illegal immigrants in his church. Among the pews and cardboard boxes, the immigrants give new life to the church, by now virtually abandoned by the townspeople, turning it into the title name, a 'Cardboard Village', which attracts the hostile protests and opposition against the immigrants of the local residents and authorities.

Another important thematic point is the relationship between immigrants and institutions, masterfully represented by the director Giuliano Montaldo in the historic film inspired by a true story: *Sacco and Vanzetti* (1971). Set in an America marked by the intense anti-communist suspicions of the 1920s, the film tells the story of two Italians unjustly accused of robbery and murder. Their trial, which lasts seven years, proved not only the innocence of the two Italian anarchists, but also the determination of the U.S. authorities to make a gesture of political vengeance by condemning the two immigrants to death in an exemplary manner as scapegoats in a wave of repression against the 'red menace.' *Io non voglio essere un martire politico! Io voglio vivere!* Nicola Sacco shouts at his lawyer, who has been unable to defend them. Their story became highly symbolic and revelatory at that time. In his famous last monologue, Vanzetti says: *'E quando [...] i vostri nomi, le vostre istituzioni non saranno che il ricordo di un passato maledetto, il suo nome, il nome di Nicola Sacco, sarà ancora vivo nel cuore della gente. [Rivolgendosi a Sacco] Noi dobbiamo ringraziarli. Senza di loro noi saremmo morti come due poveri sfruttati. [Rivolgendosi alla giuria] Un buon calzolaio, un bravo pescivendolo, e mai in tutta la nostra vita avremmo potuto sperare di fare tanto in favore della tolleranza, della giustizia, della comprensione fra gli uomini. Voi avete dato un senso alla vita di due poveri sfruttati.'*

The numerous protests of the local Italian community, the general public and the many liberation committees in Chicago, San Francisco, New York and London proved fruitless. *'Libertà per Nick e Bart! Libertà per Nick e Bart!'* their supporters shouted outside the prison gates. The Workers can save Sacco and Vanzetti, reads one of the many placards of the protesters in the streets (actual archive images). But not everyone showed solidarity with Sacco and Vanzetti. The director takes into account the divided public opinion, especially the many native-born Americans who never missed a chance to show their hatred toward Italian immigrants and immigrants in general. The most explicit scene is the one showing Italians entering the building of one of the 'Sacco &

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Vanzetti defense committees,' and being forced to fend off a howling mob. 'Andatevene via! Tornate al Vostro paese!' to the point of a soldier spitting in the face of one of these Italians. The crowd throws eggs at the giant posters of Sacco and Vanzetti outside the committee. Their story haunted America for decades, and it is known that the film contributed greatly to turn the tide of public opinion in the U.S. and reverse the trial verdict, which in the early years of the twenty-first century established with certainty the miscarriage of justice and the malfeasance of the judges.

It may be useful to take this film as an example for a better understanding of how film after film contributes to forming an overall picture of immigrants in the public eye. Films have always been one of the most powerful mass media for constructing and spreading stereotypes, which permeate society and consequently are crucial in forming public opinion (Boccia Artieri, 2012; Cicognetti, Servetti, Sorlin, 2003). Films enjoy a high degree of social legitimacy and this favors the dynamics through which stereotypes are 'concretized'<sup>5</sup>. The mass media, and of course cinema, thus contribute to constructing new social representations<sup>6</sup> and take on the role of agents of socialization, by virtue of their ability to produce and perpetuate stereotypes, which crystallize in the individual and collective minds<sup>7</sup>. One cannot talk of social representation – as a pure work of labeling by the mass media – without recognizing that this process unfolds on three main actors: immigrants, the social fabric of the host society, and the mass media.

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<sup>5</sup> This process can be broken down into three essential phases: first stereotypes create a consensus on the elements that make up the stereotype, subsequently they support it, despite its partial erroneousness, and in the end they stabilize it over time.

<sup>6</sup> Concerning social representation, we refer to the detailed definition offered by Denise Jodelet: a set of values, concepts and practices with a dual purpose. First, that of creating an order that enables people to orient themselves in their social or material environment and dominate it. Then, that of ensuring communication between the members of a community by offering them a code for naming and classifying unequivocally the components of their world, their individual story (Jodelet, 1992). The author reaffirms Émile Durkheim's concept of collective representations.

<sup>7</sup> The problem of the social construction of reality performed by the media is important if not restricted to an equivalence between media content and the representation systems of individuals. For this it must be borne in mind that, the more the native viewer notes a similarity, if not an actual identity with his cultural makeup – the result of acquisitions that have come about through processes of socialization – with the social representations produced by films and books, the more these representations will be accepted and shared (Colella, 2007a).

## 5. When the 'locals' (natives) are hostile: the role of prejudice

The interaction between immigrants and social fabric therefore becomes the mainstay of an increasingly complex and difficult process, especially when the 'locals' are hostile. In this sense, *Il Sangue Verde*, Andrea Segre's documentary film (2010), can be useful, among others, for understanding the difficulty of this relationship. The film recounts the infamous events of Rosarno in 2010: thousands of African laborers, exploited by an economy heavily influenced by the criminal power of the 'Ndrangheta, demonstrated their anger and brought to the public's attention their daily conditions of degradation and injustice. For a while the TV coverage they got fostered an awareness of the problem among the Italian public, which, reacting out of fear, pressed upon the authorities to dismantle Rosarno in just a few hours, and so considered the problem solved. But it was not solved, and this film, through the testimony of the participants, gives an account that is as complex as it is loaded with stereotypes and contradictions. Young immigrants talk of their sporadic assemblies, but the residents of Rosarno seemed to misunderstand their purpose, fearing that they were meeting to '*organizzare un complotto, ma non era vero. E ci aggredivano*'. These are the words of a young man interviewed by Segre. '*Ci siamo nascosti per riunirci. Abbiamo fatto una piccola manifestazione per incontrare le autorità locali, il Comune e i Carabinieri*'. The media speak of the degradation as a result of illegal immigration and not of Italian organized crime, and the solution seems to lie in preventing the landings in Lampedusa, 'bringing back the rule of law'. There comes into play once again the stereotype as a fixed and immutable impression that combines many types of experience into a single concept based on a 'fallacious resemblance,' describing the characteristics of the members of a given group and manifesting prejudice, constructing theories and ideologies that in most cases promote racism. '*Quando la manifestazione è finita, la gente di Rosarno ha fatto la caccia all'uomo, quando ti vedono ti picchiano. Non andava più bene essere nero a Rosarno*'. Many of the workers decide to leave without being paid: '*Meglio vivere nella libertà che morire cercando di guadagnare*'. The distance between the immigrants and the social fabric now seems unbridgeable, although, as mentioned at the beginning of our study, immigrants perform an absolutely essential function in the local community, although often at the service of organized crime.

In cases like these, films show how a prejudice expresses a belief that the individual to whom it is addressed, namely the immigrant, is a member of a specific group identifiable by distinctive signs or stereotypes and subsequently evaluated in a negative way. All the members of the group are lumped together on the assumption that they all behave in the same way. Of course, this generalization is often accompanied by the often considerable *social distance*

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that exists between the target group, and those expressing the prejudice (Colella, 2007a; Colella, Grassi 2007).

But how many kilometers is the *social distance* between the mongers of prejudice and their targets? And again: what separates the Italians who emigrate abroad from the immigrants who come to Italy from the social fabric of the host society? Evidently, we must take a closer look at social distance, because behind the ‘mythology’ of the stereotypes we risk not recognizing the signs of the times, especially if we consider how difficult it is to make unfamiliar words, ideas or persons customary, proximate and real. The mass media, especially films, succeed in this challenge.

## 6. The end of ‘Revolutionary’ Cinema

The goods produced by the culture industry, in particular cinema, resort to mass production and especially the repetition of patterns. They are not ends in themselves but refer to something else, having a meaning, opening a world of values and symbols, constituting what is usually defined as *the individual and collective imagination*. This is made possible thanks to the process that Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1969) defined as *socialization*. Individuals are predisposed to socializing from birth and become socialized through a *continuous and persistent* process of transmission and internalization of the cultural universe of values and symbols belonging to the group and context in which they are immersed. Through it the individual gathers information on reality and social shibboleths and the set of values, roles, rules, expectations and beliefs that make up ‘culture’<sup>8</sup>. This process becomes even more complex if we think about how it will be articulated in a globalized context. It is a system of elements in constant motion and transformation, which Wendy Griswold studies thanks to the ‘cultural diamond pattern’: cultural objects (symbols, beliefs, values and practices); cultural creators, including organizations and systems that produce and distribute cultural objects; cultural recipients, that is people who experience culture and cultural objects; and the

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<sup>8</sup> For an in-depth study of the *process of socialization*, in particular of the key features of Berger’s and Luckmann’s theory, *exteriorization, objectivization and interiorization*, described as ‘phases’ of a dialectical process, see: Berger P.L., Luckmann T. (1969), *La realtà come costruzione sociale*, il Mulino, Bologna (Or. Ed.: *The Social Construction of Reality*, Garden City, New York, 1966). For an in-depth study of the cultural construction process, see: Geertz, C. (1983), *Interpretazione di culture*, Bologna, il Mulino, (Or. Ed.: *The Interpretation of Culture*, New York, Basic Books, 1983) e Geertz, C. (1993), *I frutti puri impazziscono*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, (Or. Ed.: *The Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge – London, Harvard University Press, 1988).

social world, that is, the context in which culture is created and experienced (Griswold, 2008)<sup>9</sup>.

It is thanks to this system of elements – implying, in turn, a system of processes – that the interaction between cinema and the social fabric is articulated: an interaction that is made possible by the sharing of a common language, as Agostino Ferrente states:

Cinema can influence society, both immigrants and Italians, if it speaks the language of those people: if you want to convince a racist not to be racist you have to speak his language. (...) You have to convince him. You can not do a thing too moviegoer, I do not know how much our films can affect.

According to the directors interviewed, can cinema have a profound effect on society and on what people think?

It's done! Mussolini said: 'The cinema is the strongest weapon' and invented Istituto Luce. Even Stalin and Hitler did the same thing. Someone must have said that the messages are the strongest weapon. But the brain is the strongest weapon! (Montaldo's Interview).

As already indicated, *social representations* play an important role in this process, and they become more and more important when the unifying systems at our disposal (religion, science, ideology, state) become more and more mutually incompatible (Farr, Moscovici, 1984). In this respect, mass communications have accelerated this trend and increased the need for a suture between, on the one hand, the abstract status of our sciences and our general beliefs, and, on the other, our concrete activities as social beings. In other words, there is a growing need to continue to reconstruct a common outlook, a set of insights that constitutes the substratum of images and meanings without which no society can work (Farr, Moscovici, 1984).

In this sense, the director Vincenzo Marra, talking about his film *Land Wind* ('Vento di terra'), recalls how after its screening in Cuba, the local authorities asked him to circulate his film as widely as possible:

if I show how life is here, maybe people will have less desire to identify this part of the world as 'the most beautiful country'; television tells you that you have to work a little and you enjoy life so much, but instead there is a lot of people who is ill, who has very hard difficulties...

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<sup>9</sup> Between these four elements, distributed across the cusp of the diamond, six links or connections are given.

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The cinema can bring attention to those issues, and on those places and people that do not agree from the start. Many community centers have used my films to try to get more people in your community center (Segre's Interview).

Segre also expressed his opinion about his use of types (or stereotypes) in films, and about films as a second-level cognitive experience:

I hope that my films can give the migrant the possibility to be an individual and not a 'political-social type', that is: I am not an immigrant but I'm Andrea! And that gives the public a chance to recognize the history of the migrant story of an individual who also could be him. I hope it helps to deconstruct the labels that society and the media communication impose on us. It can be an advice from someone you know: the cinema is a cognitive experience of a second level that helps you to make indirect experiences. There are different types of cinema: one type that deliberately replicate stereotypes and crushing individuals and represents the migrants according to type... the black man that speaks like the blacks, the Venetian entrepreneur is racist, the student is precarious. There are movies that use only stereotypes and do not disclose an individual experience that helps you re-read those categories of persons.

The crucial nature of the matter is, therefore, inherent in the role that cinema plays in this situation. It facilitates the incorporation of something that is familiar and that, in some cases, can cause a criticality within the network categories that are specific to the individual. In literature this process is known as *anchorage*: it allows one to place an unknown object in a familiar frame of reference in order to interpret it; because when theories, information and events multiply, they must be duplicated and reproduced in an immediate, accessible way. It is a process that introduces an alien, 'disturbing' element within our particular system of categories and compares it with the paradigm of a category that we consider suitable (Farr, Moscovici, 1984). To sum up, the process of anchoring opens the way to a cognitive, or rather functional, integration of the 'alien' object represented in the existing system of thought (Jodelet, 1984). Anchoring is, therefore, classifying and giving a name to something. Things that are not classified and have no name are alien, non-existent and, at the same time, threatening. We experience a resistance, a distance when we are unable to evaluate something, to describe it to ourselves or to others (Farr, Moscovici, 1984).

I hope that immigrants have a positive effect thanks to the film: an Italian who has seen the film can change his attitudes. He can have a more human attitude and immigrants are thus not the protagonists but the target! (Ferrente's Interview).

The film product also interacts with the immigrants themselves, even if recent research shows that immigrants are unable to fully access the film medium, though they would like to<sup>10</sup>:

Immigrants do not usually go to the movies because they are placed in the lower middle class and Cinema is an elite art now (Ferrente's Interview).

Often immigrants do not attend Cinema (...) it would be interesting to see the film with the foreign community. (...) In general, they do not go to the Cinema. The Chinese are not going to see the film 'Io sono Li'. For them We are clients and they don't talk to customers. (...) there is no integration, we are still far from being integrated (Bondi's Interview).

As for an individual's cognitive experiences, it seems useful to look at the issue also from the director's point of view: in this sense, Noce introduces the topic of making a film about immigration without ever having had direct experience of it:

When you write stories about immigration and contexts of immigration it is obvious that if you put things on stage fetched, it is probably because you have not had relations with associations and with migrants. It is clear that you can write a film about immigration without encountering any immigrant. You can do that, but then it is obvious that this thing is very noticeable in your film.

Surely, though, film can be a tool for reflection and self-awareness on the part of immigrants who act in a film. Giovannesi comments on this:

The film's impact on the actor is a path of awareness. If I make a film with an immigrant (...) I make a movie with Nader, not with a generical immigrant (...). It's a completely different point of view. (...) There is an awareness of him, of his own life in the construction of the film. Speaking about migration is like speaking about reality. It's not like you're at home, you write, you invent a story, then take two actors with dark face and make the film. It is to build a path with them and tell about their biography from their point of view. Telling their conflicts from their point of view and in that case the film has a total incidence in the process of awareness for those who do. Of this I am sure.

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<sup>10</sup> For an in-depth study, see: Peruzzi, G., Talucci, V. (2011), *Tempo libero e consumi culturali degli immigrati: esercizi di profiling*, in Savioli, M., Mingo I. (a cura di), *Il loisir della società italiana*, Milano, Guerini Scientifica.

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The directors interviewed criticize today's film system in several ways, concerning both the topics selected and the objectives that directors aim to achieve. Marra's opinion exemplifies the first issue:

Nowadays, when I see some films and I ask myself: 'why did you talk about such stupid issues?' Many directors tell stories of rich people, living in luxury apartments and living situations of great wealth, and then you can devote to sex, love... I don't care about this type of deception: I want to be consistent, I want to try to be honest than the real things I see. Mine is a revolutionary spirit.

But the issue is certainly broader and more complex, as Segre suggests:

people like me who have started making films as a tool closely tied to the rebirth of the documentary are pretty much committed.

In the films about immigrants, documentary and fiction come together and merge in many Italian works, since documentaries are based mainly on life stories and, likewise, dramas tell the stories of immigrants through the same method. Segre adds:

Surely I am one of the most committed directors, other directors have some awareness but tend to hide it a bit, perhaps because of shyness. Some directors do not want to be considered too socially committed and serious. In generation of filmmakers who grew up in the years '80-'90 there are some who think: 'You have to talk about the micro. Don't think about macro if you want money!'

Regarding the political and social commitment of contemporary film directors, a subject dealt with in the second section of this chapter, a widely held view is to closely link political action with the choice of the topic to be treated. In this sense, Munzi emphasizes in his interview the political importance of choosing this or that theme to develop in a film 'by putting your finger on certain worlds,' choosing perhaps little-known actors and taking first-person risks. On the other hand, in recent years increasing use has been made of the camera for the simple purpose of documenting 'different' existences without indicating or demonstrating anything other than the effort *to look in order to know*. What most of the respondents say seems to lead to a conclusion of this kind. But the reflection we want to stimulate converges on the following question: is it really possible to tell a story in a neutral, almost 'sterile' way, without this story 'interfering' with the world view of the viewer?

For an interpretation of the interests of scholars, Coser suggested paying special attention to the social and intellectual contexts in which they worked (Coser, 1971). Following Weber's lesson, he maintained that the choices about

the issues to be investigated and the general orientation of scientists (of the social actors in general and their 'understandable' motivations), therefore what is considered worthy of being known, depends on the perspective of the scholar who performs the research (Coser, 1971).

Similarly, in shifting everything to the process of constructing a film, it becomes obvious that the choice of subject can be related to the context of the director and his particular value system. The topic chosen is therefore one of these elements, since the evaluative question inevitably affects his choices. Therefore, it already constitutes a message to his audience and to society.

Actually, we cannot say whether directors who insist they 'only want to tell a story' without embodying the 'revolutionary' cinema that a few decades ago dominated our movie screens, are aware or not of this process. What we can say is that a film product is unlikely to convey a more or less unequivocal social message. Nonetheless, it fulfills the *social function* it has always fulfilled, ever since movie theaters came into being between March and December of 1895.

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