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Review of Esodi e frontiere di celluloidi. Il cinema italiano racconta le migrazioni. Edited by L. Trapassi and L. Garosi. Florence: Franco Cesati, 2016.

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Abstract

Review of the book *Esodi e frontiere di celluloidi. Il cinema italiano racconta le migrazioni*.

Keywords: Cinema and migrations; Immigration in Italy; Interculturality; Italian emigration; Migrations.

The book edited by Leonarda Trapassi and Linda Garosi seems to use the techniques of the art to which it is dedicated. The subject of migration alternately focuses on the arrivals and on the departures from Italy, almost creating a sort of cinematographic flashback. The book examines, through the cinema, the history of the transformation of Italy from country of emigration to platform in the middle of the Mediterranean, first shore for hundreds of thousands of desperate people seeking a better life in the European continent.

The three parts of the book reconstruct a story of two centuries, based on the trace proposed by Leonarda Trapassi in her introduction: «L'indagine è rivolta alle strategie sia formali sia tematiche nella narrazione cinematografica dei destini dei migranti e di esodi o frontiere tra le culture e tocca soprattutto questioni come conflitti di civiltà, processi di accoglienza e integrazione che caratterizzano i flussi migratori – anche quelli italiani dei secoli scorsi – senza trascurare lo sguardo critico dei registi sulle varie forme di convivenza sociale nell'Italia di oggi» (p. 10). This perspective outlines a complex panorama of history, personal stories and great social changes: challenges that the migrations towards Europe, in this beginning of the new millennium, pose to politics, civil society and individual consciences.

The first part of the book assumes the concept of insularity as a synonymous to border, but also – in an apparently paradoxical way – of “contamination”: the routes which intertwine in the Mediterranean connect different worlds, each of them with the pace of its structures (Braudel), in that “immobile world”, described by Carlo Levi about the Lucania of the '30s, which even history has denied. Nevertheless, the sea connects those solitudes, put them in contact, mix their features, reverse the relation rulers/ruled, like in the movie “Mediterraneo”, directed by Gabriele Salvatores: «la cultura che doveva essere sottomessa, in questo caso, si rivela, in certa maniera, dominante rispetto a quella che pretendeva di sottometterla» (p. 23). *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit*.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the transformation of Italy from country of emigration to place of immigration. The article of Barbara Galeandro starts from the concept of otherness and examines how the representation of the Other has been built by strengthening the image of the extra-Community citizen as a man who scares, who nobody wants to know and everyone removes. On the other hand, the author shows how arbitrary concepts of identity, to be opposed to the fear of the different, have been built. Concepts of identity/difference that, according to the needs, are applied to the foreigner of any origin (p. 40). And the Other? The foreigner is suspended between two worlds, two cultures, two languages, representing an hybrid culture (p. 49). He does not belong to the country of destination nor to that of origin: a sort of double strangeness.

In the same section, Daniela Bisello Antonucci proposes, through a reading of Carlo Mazzacurati's “La giusta distanza”, an idea of the fear of the Other, which rises from prejudice and silently accepts that the foreigner is accused of horrendous crimes and even that, not standing an unfair condemnation, he commits suicides. The silence of those who believe to be innocent, as well as the silence of those who claim a tranquillity undermined by many “Others”; the silence of the “old little bourgeoisie” sung by Claudio Lolli, which is happy if a thief dies.

The last article of this section, dedicated by Anna Nencioni to the movies of Andrea Segre, considers migrations as a concept which defines the present world, a sort of extreme representation of it. It poses, therefore, a problem about the interpretation of the notion of border: an ambiguous concept, based on the contradiction between splitting and connecting,

between barrier and passage, which always has a temporal dimension: «è la forma dell'avvenire e, forse, della speranza» (p. 64). The border, indeed, within the poetics of Segre continues to move in search of new contaminations.

In such a way the Italian border - from far place, from challenge to face in order to improve their own condition and that of their family - in last decades has become the boundary of a too small country, scared by an invasion of poorness and desperateness, worried to preserve its "cultural identity" and its "root".

The third part addresses the topic of Italian emigration through cinema and literature, going back to the beginning of the Italian Diaspora, to the time when the foreigner, the stranger, the Other, was the illiterate Italian described by De Amicis or Pirandello - protagonists of two articles of this part - as well as by Dino Campana, Italo De Vincentiis, Vicente Gerbasi, only to mention some of them. Homéro Manzi - author of extraordinary lyrics of tango - called them los «hijos nuevos de la patria vieja», referring to the Italian migration to Argentina.

Rethinking the stories of Pirandello, on which the plot of the movie "Kaos", directed by the Taviani brothers, is based, it is not difficult to imagine that the scenes of desperation for the travel are the same under both the burning sun of Sicily, and under that of Senegal and Nigeria, of Ethiopia or of the other places from which the crowd of desperation and sorrow moves.

In the same way, the blob which comes on board of the ship in Genoa, narrated by Edmondo De Amicis, has the same sore humanity of the chock-full boats crossing the Mediterranean to arrive on the coasts where, hundred years ago, the protagonists of the Pirandello's novels left.

In conclusion, two reflections. First, the myth of the travel, of the voluntary or forced moving, is much more ancient than cinema. Since millennia it has been telling the desire of discovery, the hope for future or for coming back, but also the fear of terrible shipwrecks. Oral and, later, written traditions have transmitted the most extraordinary cinematographic subject dedicated to migrating before the invention of the camera: the Odyssey. The peregrination of Odysseus intersects the routes of the present desperation, meets its places, anticipates its outcomes, until the accomplishing of the destiny of everybody.

The book retraces, without mentioning it, the travel of the king of Ithaca through the Mediterranean, using the evocative ability of the cinematographic images, speaking of migrants and of the desperation that, for almost two centuries, have first left the Italian ports and then have reached the coasts of the *Magna Graecia*.

Here starts the second reflection.

Much has been said about the evocative ability of the cinematographic images, about their ability to overcome the difficulties of the interpretation of the written text and to use an universal language. The XX century, in some cases, has been defined as the century of the image and it is argued that the image is the paradigm of the contemporary history, the most adequate interpretative key to understand the complexity of the present world. Actually, the photography, and later the cinema, have represented a real torsion of the reality which narrates itself and, moreover, of history that tries to understand its development.

The book represents a play of mirrors, in which the written word describes the images which narrate departures and arrivals. This is a typical form of the cinematographic narration: think, for example, to the extraordinary interpretation of Julie Andrews in "Victor Victoria", a woman who pretended to be a man who pretended to be a woman. In the book, indeed, sometimes the word is to the language, sometimes to the image, and sometimes the one take the place of the other.

The run of the words revolves around the thematic core indicated by Leonarda Trapassi: the destiny of migrants, the conflict among civilizations, the processes of integration, the ability of reciprocal contamination.

An image, coming from a movie analyzed in the book, encloses the deepest sense of this collective work: the *Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio*, a multi-ethnic band which uses a common and universal language, that of music, contaminating it thanks to the many cultures of the individuals musicians. The unity and the harmony of sound are the fruit of the "regulated" union of differences. Probably, a lesson to be learned.