Mediterranean Transformations: The Frontier Apulia and its Filmmakers after 1989[1]

Flavia Laviosa

When Eastern European national borders collapsed in 1989, a new chapter in European history began. The southeastern Italian province of Apulia[2] was suddenly drawn into a new historical era and was assigned an unexpected geo-economic (re)location on the Mediterranean map: shifting from the extreme periphery of the Adriatic, it acquired a new, attractive barycentric position in the Mediterranean.

That Apulia, a region on the margin of the Bourbons' kingdom, often underestimated[3] and ignored,[4] would suddenly become a place of economic and cultural resonance is not immediately self-evident. According to Oscar Iarussi[5] such renewed interest in the region must be related to the change in historical scenario produced by the collapse of the Berlin Wall; the Wall had not only divided Berlin — and Germany with it — into East and West, but ideologically it also stretched to the "wall of water erected by Tito and Enver Hoxha,"[6] as the Iron Curtain that, running through Europe and along the Adriatic, reached the extreme east end of Western Europe, that is precisely Apulia. When the political bastions of communism were abolished, ideological borders were erased, and the relics of the communist empire were abandoned, new geographical horizons were delineated. This reconfigured European geo-political order, with its open borders, inevitably favored incontrollable migratory movements of people, cultures, and religions from the *other side* of the fallen wall, thus starting an exodus of biblical proportions.

Apulia was only seemingly far away from such international events, and immediately felt the repercussions of these overwhelming European changes, unexpectedly becoming *subject of History*. The destination of countless numbers of political refugees and immigrants — women, men, children and elderly — coming from the Balkans, Central Asia, and the distant East Asia, the region found herself harboring populations crossing an arm of the sea of about seventy miles with a historical lag of fifty years — the geo-historical distance between Albania and Otranto. Rent was the curtain that forbade the East and West from looking at each other; and the Adriatic became a highway of the sea. The harbors of Bari and Otranto turned into points of junction,

[1] This essay was made possible thanks to professional contributions from the following people to whom I wish to express my gratitude: Oscar Iarussi, journalist and film critic for the newspaper *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*; film directors Nico Cirasola, Edoardo Winspeare, and Carmine Fornari. These interviews were video-recorded with the interviewees' formal permission to be used for academic purposes and publications. All translations of Italian texts, citations, and interviews are mine.

[2] Dante Alighieri calls Apulia "fortunata terra di Puglia" in canto XXVIII, *Inferno* (vv. 7-21), where 'fortunata terra' means fateful land exposed to various events of Fortune, for her geographical position and the wars that have taken place on her soil.

[3] The railroad line *La Valigia delle Indie*, connecting London-Suez Canal-Bombay, was built in 1870 and was active until 1940. Starting from London, traveling through North Europe, Paris, Turin, Bologna, and running along the Adriatic coast, it crossed Apulia, all the way to Brindisi.

[4] For this reason, the region inspired only imaginary stories. Ignored by the Grand Tour, Apulia was the subject of fantastic stories of travelers like Jordan de Colombier, who at the end of 18th century wrote about epic battles in the *Land of Otranto*, a place that he never visited. Stendhal, in the second edition of *Rome, Naples et Florence* (1826), invented a long journey in the Apulia and Calabria regions, which he had never explored. Even Horace Walpole, author of the first gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), never went to Apulia.

[5] Oscar Iarussi, *Ciak si Puglia. Cinema di frontiera 1989-2001* (Bari: Laterza Edizioni della Libreria, 2002).

[6] Raffaele Nigro, *Diario Mediterraneo* (Bari: Editori Laterza GLF, 2001), 309.

shunting the sea traffic of new arrivals and departures of boat people. Iarussi explains that "these arrivals changed radically the social fabric and the historical role of Apulia, which became the landing place, a natural geographical bridge between West and East."[7] The sea serves as both a boundary and frontier: separating countries and ideologies. The Adriatic, the ancient *Mare Superum* (for its supremacy and large size), became an internal sea between nations drawing the profile of new Europe. Apulia acquired the role of a trans-Adriatic region with Bari as one of the "gateway cities,"[8] or better, an Adriatic Ellis Island for those escaping from poverty, endemic hunger, dictatorship, war, genocide, and political unrest. The region witnessed the beginning of the "*Questione settentrionale*," as a newly chosen destination for massive immigration and as a preferred area for the coexistence of a multitude of ethnic groups. These phenomena and changes in the Mediterranean in the past twenty years have thus established a multi-directional inclusive gaze oriented towards other countries in the basin. Therefore, History's sudden change has overthrown geographical order and reconfigured maps of political power. Apulia, as a Northwestern outpost, combines the globalization of goods with the migration of people and mediates her new Euro-Mediterranean role.

This geographical realignment and subsequent flow of immigrants across the Mediterranean Sea have inspired a number of Italian directors who, fascinated by the spirit of the frontier, have chosen Apulia as the setting for contemporary human odysseys, modern legends, and new heroes. Italian cinema has portrayed many stories of immigration, and such production includes several films directed by Apulian filmmakers who frame their stories with elements of regional culture, sounds of local dialects, and rhythms of traditional music and dance.

Cinema from Apulia

The frontier is a place of encounters, exchanges, and negotiations that produces new suggestions. "Immigrants' past contributes to delineate our future,"[9] while "immediate identities [are] referenced in an extraterritorial space, where inherited traditions are breached to become the site of ongoing translations."[10] Apulia is a sea frontier without weapons, a horizon of adventures, the nearest shore between East and West, which offers dreamy images of a better future, epic stories, nostalgic emotions, visions of hope and symbols of freedom and wealth. Chosen as a cinematographic location and vibrant setting for merging cultures, Apulia produces films whose dramaturgy and dialectics are expressions of "cinema-*passeur* of ideas, passions, and dreams,"[11] emphasizing the close connection between tradition and human relations, folk dance, music and ancient myths, drugs and criminals, historical emigration, and recent immigration.

The use of urban suburbs as vital places, rich in narrative and stylistic strength and of local dialects spoken in Bari or in the Salento region, which had been marginalized until the late 1980s,[12] are common features of films directed by Apulian filmmakers. The careful choice of

[7] Interview with Oscar Iarussi. Bari, 12 October 2002.
[8] As defined in the Union's document on the European spatial development plan. These are cities with harbors, airports, exhibitions, and cultural activities, in other words, places of access for the EU. Gianfranco Viesti, *I vicini sono tornati. Italia, Adriatico, Balcani* (Bari: Laterza Edizioni della Libreria, 2002), 74.
[9] Oscar Iarussi, "Sud: la frontiera del Mediterraneo che seduce registi, produttori e sceneggiatori," *Punti di vista sull'internazionalizzazione* (2001), 22.
[10] Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings. The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 47.
[11] Iarussi, "Sud," 22.
[12] In comparison to the more popular Neapolitan and Roman dialects.

soundtracks, composed and played by local artists, also brings new music genres and art forms "made in Apulia" to the attention of viewers and critics. All of these elements offer an unforeseen and unprecedented international visibility to the region. Finally, in the intertwined glocal series of cultural and anthropological phenomena, the Apulian cinema has developed a unique profile revealing the distinct geo-political identity of the region with her trans-Mediterranean position being ideal for the encounters of religions, cultures, and economies. Two films that deal specifically with Albania as seen from Apulia and the journeys between the two coasts are *Albània Blues* (2000) by Nico Cirasola,[13] a film about two women's illegal immigration to Apulia and a man's trip to Albania to rediscover the happiness he cannot find in his own town, and *Sangue vivo* (2000) by Edoardo Winspeare,[14] a story of a man's forced journey to bring an illegal teenage immigrant from Albania. A third film, *Hotel Dajti una storia oltre il mare* (2001) by Carmine Fornari,[15] is a romantic tale about a man returning to Albania in search of his dying wife. These films are about exchanges of cultures, and they tell private stories of human encounters of people from lands connected by the same sea.

[13] Nico (Domenico) Cirasola (Gravina di Puglia - Bari, 1951) is one of the most eclectic, independent Italian film directors. He completed his degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Bari in 1977. In 1973, he founded the first cine-club in Puglia called 25 aprile and between 1973 and 1977 directed several documentaries on student movements, and organized cultural meetings at the Centro Sperimentale Universitario di Cultura S. Teresa dei Maschi. Between 1980 and 1984, Cirasola organized the first film and video festival Cinema e Tv nel Meridione. He also edited the book *Da Angelo Musco a Massimo Troisi-Il cinema comico meridionale*, and between 1977 and 1987, he directed the video-clips *Onde Medie*, *Storie di gesti*, *Eva e Lou*, and the shorts *Tuta blu* (1980) and *L'altro Figaro* (1987) for RAI. Cirasola was assistant to the director for the German film *Tommaso blu* (1985). In 1989, he directed his first long feature, *Odore di pioggia*, with a screenplay co-authored with Tommaso di Ciaula. Later he directed the episode *Stonde, stonde, le ortiche di Seneca* of the collective films, *Corsica!* (1991), the films *Da una sponda all'altra* (1992), *Da do da* (1994), *Albània Blues* (2000), *Bell'epokèr* (2005) and *Focaccia Blues* (2009). Cirasola also acted in the films *L'estate di Bobby Charlton* (1995) by Massimo Guglielmi, *Sangue vivo* (2000) by Edoardo Winspeare, *My name is Nico Cirasola* (1999) by Giovanni Piperno, and *Francesca e Nunziata* (2001) by Lina Wertmüller.

[14] Edoardo Winspeare (Klagenfurt, Austria, 1965) grew up and lives in Depressa, a town in Salento. He studied modern literature in Florence and cinema at the Münich Film School founded by Wim Wenders. There, he worked as assistant to the director, cameraman, sound editor, and technician. Between the late 1980s and the early 1990s, he traveled around the world working as a photographer and directing several documentaries: *I Tedeschi del Volga* (1989), *Il ghetto di Venezia* (1989), *L'ultimo Gattopardo* (1991), *San Paolo e la tarantola* (1991) co-directed with Stefanie Kremer-Koehler, *I grandi direttori della fotografia: Luciano Tovoli* (1992), and the short *A toilette's short story* (1989). For several years, he was active in the revival of Salentine folk culture, researching local music and dance and organizing gatherings for young and old "pizzica" musicians. This experience led him to his debut, the long feature *Pizzicata* (1996), followed by *Sangue vivo* (2000). His most recent films are: *Il miracolo* (2003), *La guerra privata del tenente Guillet* (2005), and *Galantuomini* (2008).

[15] Carmine Fornari (Bari, 1951), after studying film direction at New York University in the 1970s, produced, with Kounellis, Vito Acconci, Simon Forti, and Alighiero Bonetti, the first art-videos. In 1977, in collaboration with Michele Buono and Piero Ricciardi, he founded the production company *Film* that produced TV documentaries and reportages for BBC1 and the three RAI channels. Fornari also directed a number of socially committed, medium-length films: *Ancona, gli emigrati della boxe* (1981), *Messaggi speciali* (1984), *Ciavkini: storia di un piccolo ladro zingaro* (1988), *Storie di clausura* (1989), *Storia di Gualtiero* (1998), *Vito e Macbeth* (*Vito e il giorno della prima)* (1999), *Jack Sal* (2000), and *Cenerentole* (*Haiti) La petite Saint Anice* (2001). He co-directed, with Buono and Riccardi, the documentary *Femminielli* (1994), and directed his first long feature *L'amico arabo* (1991), and the film *Hotel Dajti* (2002). In the past several years, he has authored and directed documentaries and radio scripts for RAI International: the documentary *Canti di passione a Castelsardo. La quinta voce* (2003); the radio programs *La regina che venne dal mare* (2004); and *Le ali sul deserto* (2005); the documentary *The Living Theater, Viaggio in Italia 1976* (2005) for Cult Net; the radio programs *Viaggio in Oriente* (2006), and *Giobatta detto anche Sceicco Mansur* (2007); the docufilm *Eliodora* (2007) for RAI 3; and the radio programs *Viaggio a Rangoon* (2007), and *Avventure e esploratori* (2008).

In *Albània Blues,* Nico Cirasola explores the theme of a horizontal escape from the East (Albania) towards the West (Apulia). Two lands whose people share the same geographical latitude, temperate climate, landscape, and skin color.[16] The film is about Fefè (Nico Cirasola) and his encounter with a group of Albanian refugees. Fefè's grandfather built the first radio connection between Italy and Albania, and Fefè repairs TV antennas, although, in the age of satellite dishes or cable TV, his business is not going well. The film starts with Fefè's voice over: "For the poet, fantasy is reality and reality is nothing." This statement sets the oneiric tone of the film which, hovering between dream and reality, presents a surreal story. His assistant Nanuccio never speaks and he spends his time watching commercials and game shows on television. Fefè and Nanuccio travel in an old, light-blue Citroën across the wide, sunny, and deserted country roads in Apulia. While driving, they listen to *Radio Apache* broadcasting ironic news about bottles of polluted mineral water sold in supermarkets, the war in the Balkans, illicit business between Apulian and Albanian criminals, news about the *Fiera del Levante* in Bari as the place for commercial exchanges between Apulia and Albania, and the landing of refugees on the Apulian coast. Fefè listens to the news, while Nanuccio follows the television game show where viewers are asked to guess the exact number of Albanian refugees packed onboard the ship in the picture shown on the screen.[17]

One day, Fefè finds out that his wife is having an affair with another man. Hurt and humiliated, he drives to his old farmhouse, where suddenly two young and attractive Albanian women, Aida and her cousin Ornella, appear on the roof-garden. They have found a hiding place in his farm after escaping the police controls on clandestine immigrants. Their arrival marks the beginning of a dreamlike time for Fefè and Nanuccio. These women are looking for work and hope that Fefè will find them a job in television, while Fefè inevitably falls in love with Aida. His farmhouse is located in a strategic position between both sides of the Adriatic coast. Consequently, the house becomes the ideal hiding place for an underground boss and some young Albanian squatters, Aida and Ornella's "cousins." Fefè realizes too late that the Albanian men are in business with the local boss, Capone, and that they plan to use his place for their illicit dealings. Later, *I Riciclotteri*,[18] an avant-garde troupe of artists, occupies his house and wants to take care of his property. Cirasola introduces a humorous, although forced and repetitive, caricature of Andy Warhol, with a distinct American accent and mannerisms. At the end, Fefè does not tolerate the presence of his lazy and intrusive guests; although he tries to kick them out of his house, they refuse to leave. Desperate and disillusioned after finding that Aida is in love with one of the young Albanian men, Fefè decides to sail with Nanuccio to Albania to fix antennas there.

With music by Nino Lepore, *Ziringaglia*,[19] *Ziganamama*, and Amir, the film's fragile narrative structure, fragmented plot and disjointed dialogues are held together. *Albània Blues* is the expression of Cirasola's poetic vision of pure cinema and is characterized by his witty, non-linear, provocative filmmaking. With a vivid, humorous tone and an overtly ironic political comedy about television, war, and immigration, the histrionic director presents Apulia as the frontier region and a bridge to the East. With the sea as the liminal space separating and connecting lands, Apulia is a place of hybridization of cultures and the metaphor for a journey. Beautifully shot by Sabrina Varani, the quiet Ostuni countryside with its gigantic olive trees, the

[16] Shot in the countryside of Ostuni and Fasano, in the Brindisi area, and in the Murgia region, near Bari.
[17] The photo of the ship is a reference to the ship *Vlora* with 20,000 Albanian refugees on board.
[18] So-called because they use recycled objects.
[19] The name *Ziringaglia* means an ideal wagon that brings together the gypsies of a musical and poetic community. The group unifies traditional music from different countries in the south of the world.

desolate landscape of the Murgia region, and the deserted cliffs of the Adriatic coastline represent the narrative and psychological void that creates humor and drama in the film. *Albània Blues* is considered "Visionary, intelligent, sarcastic and sharp … [T]he film could have been a manifesto for the South in a very delicate moment in the 1990s."[20] Cirasola states that the film presents, in a grotesque and ironic way, the story of the 1991 landing of the ship *Vlora* and how this event is exasperated by the cynicism of a television game show. Further, the director explains that, in spite of the criminal intent of Fefè's guests, he did not "portray the Albanians as refugees and desperate human beings and that he wanted to tell stories about humanity and the encounter of ethnicities. […] These nomadic fluxes are beneficial as they bring […] abundant flows of positive energy."[21]

Albània Blues presents a few scenes that can be linked to other films. The first is when Fefè films Aida dancing to a 1960s twist tune on a red jalopy using an old black and white camera. Sensual shots of the beautiful young woman, intercut with counter-shots of Fefè dancing with her while filming, can be associated with the memorable dance scene in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994). Another interesting sequence in Cirasola's film is the brief but remarkable performance of one of Aida's "cousins" swinging and singing in a style reminiscent of early Adriano Celentano from the 1959 song "*Il tuo bacio è come un rock*." This scene recalls a comparable longer sequence in Gianni Amelio's *Lamerica* (1994), when the Albanian girl performs a spectacular rendition of a Michael Jackson dance routine that she had seen on TV.

In *Sangue vivo*,[22] Edoardo Winspeare portrays the places, faces, sounds, and dialects of contemporary Salento. Inspired by the real life of the protagonist, Pino Zimba, the film tells "a real story about deviance and redemption with real, not realistic characters."[23] In the outskirts of Lecce, two brothers, Pino, a smuggler, fruit vendor, and talented musician, and Donato, a small-time criminal, drug addict, and gifted tambourine player, struggle through life. Their father's death magnifies the pain tormenting their souls – an accident, for which Pino feels responsible and for which Donato refuses to forgive his brother. Pino subsists on odd jobs and smuggles cigarettes from Albania: driving at night through the quiet roads in an isolated landscape, waiting until dawn in a disquieting bay for the arrival of the motorboat, and finally, with the help of his friends, loading and unloading cargos of cigarettes, all become part of his life and provide a secure source of living.

One day, the local Mafia boss offers to repay Pino's 20 million lire debt without interest, in exchange for a favor: to illegally bring an Albanian woman from Valona to the Salentine coast. Although reluctant to get involved in a risky venture with a human life inevitably destined for prostitution, Pino is forced to accept the deal. When in Valona, he finds out that the woman is actually an underage girl. Horrified by the extent of corruption and brutality involved in this business, he refuses to take the girl with him and screams, in his Salentine dialect to the Albanians, "You send young girls to the streets … or you beat them to death … but for us

[20] Vito Attolini, Alfonso Marrese, and Maria A. Abenante, *Cineasti di Puglia. Film paesaggi associazioni* (Bari: Edizioni dal Sud, 2007), 234.

[21] Nico Cirasola, "*Albània Blues:* Nico Cirasola Filmmaker senza compromessi," *Imaging 22* (December 2000), 9.

[22] The screenplay was written by Edoardo Winspeare and Giorgia Di Cecere and shot in Tricase, Alessano, Lecce, and on the Salentine coast. The soundtrack was composed and played by the *Officina Zoè*. The film was considered of national and cultural interest. Dialogues are in Salentine dialect and subtitled in Italian. The film participated at the Sundance Film Festival, was awarded the New Directors Prize in Donostia-San Sebastian at the International Film Festival in Spain; the Antigone d'Or prize at the Festival International Cinema Mediterraneen Montpellier in France; and three prizes from Grolla d'Oro for Best Film, Best Music, and Best Producer at the Saint Vincent Festival in 2000 for Italian Cinema.

[23] Interview with Edoardo Winspeare. Taranto, 24 June 2002.

women are sacred."[24] Prepared for such predictable reaction, and as part of a well rehearsed scene, the girl looks for something in her bag, and then shows a wedding ring to reassure Pino that she is indeed going to Italy to join her husband. While Pino is not convinced by this farce, he has no choice but to take the girl on board and to deliver her to his boss.

The quick boat trip at night underscores the short distance between the two countries and their chilling gangster subcultures. This scene, parallel to the previous sequence, in which Pino is involved in the contraband of cigarettes, gives a sense of the dramatic extent of illegal smuggling as regular business where tobacco, drugs, weapons, and human beings are treated equally and unscrupulously traded as highly profitable goods. In both the cigarettes' importation and Albanian girl's immigration episodes, the pulsing engine of the car driving at night and the rolling of the motorboat parting the rough waves of the sea at sunrise fade into the incessant and hypnotic rolling of Salentine tambourines. While framing the two comparable incidents of smuggling, the soundtrack merges with the action.

The eponymous film soundtrack, *Sangue vivo*, includes songs and instrumental pieces of the traditional repertoire played by *Officina Zoè*.[25] The plot follows the crescendo rhythm of the "pizzica-pizzica" and "pizzica-tarantata," as the music comments on the story, underscoring the dramaturgy of its heroes' lives. Lamberto Probo's and Pino Zimba's vital beats of tambourine playing, Cinzia Marzo's and Raffaella Aprile's piercing vocals, accompanied by organs, violins, flutes, guitars and castanets, explode in a flow of unrestrained energy, both wild and suggestive. The pulsing music, along with the intensely paced editing of images, as parallel narrative channels, blend and harmonize, as the tragic story unfolds.

In *Sangue vivo*,[26] Winspeare works with non-professional actors and a script in the Salentine dialect. The use of the local dialect is not merely a stylistic and formal choice, but rather it is determined by the intent to allow actors to speak their own language with its musicality and rich expressivity, and to facilitate a free flow of emotions as well as a more credible performance. For these reasons, Winspeare's films have been tentatively defined as expressions of the so called *neo*-neorealist movement. However, his cinema is more interested in stories of contemporary society and culture, than in being neorealist or appropriating a documentary tone. Winspeare's linear and transparent style, Paolo Carnera's superb photography, and Luca Benedetti's editing of shots and counter-shots in a rapid succession of extreme close-ups, emphasized by the crescendos of the musical rhythms, create energy and dramaturgy, while establishing a tense emotional and cinematic tempo.

In *Hotel Dajti una storia aldilà del mare*,[27] Carmine Fornari gives life to memories and emotions that bring people together from the two Adriatic shores. The director explains that the film is inspired by the true, tragic love story of the Barisian conjurer, Andrea D'Aquino.[28] Set in Rome in 1938, Andrea is forced to escape to Albania after having double-crossed his debtors

[24] "Vui mannati le vagnunceddhe su 'nna strada… si no le crepati de mazzate. Ma pe' nnui le fìmmane suntu sacre." Georgia Cecere and Edoardo Winspeare, *Sangue vivo* (Nardò: Besa Editrice, 2006), 137.

[25] The players of *Officina Zoè* are also the protagonists of the film *Sangue Vivo*.

[26] Also in his previous film *Pizzicata*.

[27] Shot in Apulia and in Albania, the film was world premiered on 5 April 2002 in the theater Millennium in Tirana with Agron Tato, the Albanian minister of culture, and Mario Bova, the Italian ambassador, as special guests. The film later premiered in Italy on 11 April at the theater Nuovo Palazzo in Bari. The film was awarded the Prize of the Pubblico at the Festival Cinema di Frontiera in Marzameni, Siracusa and the prize for Best and Original Screenplay at the International Film Festival in Salerno.

[28] Andrea Inghirami, with the stage name D'Aquino. The director was told this real story by his father, Giovanni, who worked as medical doctor in the hospital in Tirana during the Fascist regime and WWII. Interview with Carmine Fornari. Rome, 12 June 2003.

who are local criminals. In Tirana, he finds employment in the Grand Hotel Dajti. Through a priest, he meets Sara, a young, attractive, Catholic, middle-class Albanian lady. Sara is a skilled magician herself, and is also able to levitate, while twirling on the stage. Andrea and Sara immediately fall in love and get married. The Grand Hotel Le Mont Dajti, built during the Italian Fascist occupation, is the place where the newly-wed couple performs spectacular shows.[29] They live happily for six years. In 1944, Andrea is tracked down by his creditors and is forced to leave Tirana with his wife and their son, Emir. They decide to sail across the Adriatic to reach Italy, but as they try to board the ship, Sara is shot by the criminals. She falls into the sea and is presumed to have drowned. Upon their arrival in Italy, Emir also dies.

Andrea saw Sara disappear into the dark waves in a moonless night, but the irrational hope to find her again never abandoned him. This tragic loss becomes the cause of Andrea's heartbreaking isolation, as he lives tormented by a deep sense of guilt for the death of his young wife and child. Forty-six years later, in the 1990s, he is living in Molfetta, a small town in Apulia, on the Adriatic coast. There he meets Pinuccio, a Sicilian orphan exploited as a laborer by illegal Italian traders and Albanian smugglers, and they establish a friendship that deepens over time. Pinuccio informs Andrea that Sara is still alive and persuades the old man to return to Albania. When they finally reach Durrës, Andrea finds a terminally ill Sara. Their tender meeting mends and heals old wounds. Andrea succeeds in reuniting his family as Pinuccio pretends to be their son, a sort of melancholic magic trick that allows dying Sara to smile, while holding the son that she believed was lost forever.

The story unfolds around the themes of magic, memories, and regrets of young lives tossed between two shores, both united and separated by a shared sea of hopes and dreams, pain and death. This romantic tragedy, "suspended between symbols and metaphors, expresses a critical view of the present and a careful re-evaluation of the past."[30] In fact, in *Hotel Dajti*, the director exposes the socio-economic ruins of contemporary Albania along with the art of surviving through illicit traffic of goods between Apulia and Albania. While there are no overt political allusions, nor explicit historical references to the fascist and communist regimes, Fornari, a filmmaker sensitive to social struggles and pervasive forms of juvenile exploitation in poverty stricken areas, provides an accurate representation of the socio-economic causes for the unlawful behavior of the sub-proletarian youth. The first part of the film is in fact entirely focused on the character development of Pinuccio and his difficult life as an abandoned child, first held in a community of orphans and then mistreated and exploited by an unscrupulous family in the old part of Bari. A second instance of youth exploitation is presented on the ship to Durrës, where Andrea witnesses the explicit and disturbing scene of an Albanian teenage girl forced to prostitute herself for money in the restroom on the boat, under the eyes of her impotent, quietly crying, and complacent mother. This scene becomes more distressing as it is juxtaposed with a television show publicizing Italian beauty contestants and their attractive future careers.

Hotel Dajti stems from Fornari's desire to explore the subtleties of feelings and emotions in Andrea's and Sara's lives. The soundtrack by Elvira and Giovanni Lo Cascio is a poignant tune that is played, sang, hummed, and whispered as the film *leitmotif*, striking the emotional chords of the two protagonists. Framed within the recollection of old memories, the story has an intimate and nostalgic streak. The film flows on two narrative levels. One, the inert present, is

[29] The hotel takes the name from the Mount Dajti situated in the background of Tirana. Between 1939 and 1943, Albania was occupied by the Italian Fascist regime. Mussolini commissioned the building of the biggest and most elegant hotel in Tirana with the idea that it would be the most important in Europe. The theater in the hotel was closed during the fifty years of communist dictatorship under Enver Hoxha.

[30] Attolini et al., *Cineasti di Puglia,* 237.

crowded with vivid memories of marital happiness and successful theater performances, along with tormenting regrets and guilt, while suspended in the desperate longing for rejoining. The other, the vibrant past of blossoming youth and beauty, is enflamed with sensuality and love, inspired by art and poetry, and aspires to freedom and shared dreams. The aesthetic contrast between the bright daylight of the scenes along the Adriatic coast and in Andrea's house in Molfetta, as well as in the sequences in Durrës and in Sara's bedroom set in the present, and the dimly lit and claustrophobic interior scenes of the past, give the film a powerful emotional rhythm and highlight dramatic transitions between the time of life and time of memory.

Hotel Dajti is fundamentally based on Andrea recounting his life to Pinuccio. However, the storyline is consistently non-linear in the chronological and spatial development of events. The film is built around a complex and systematic sequence of flash-backs, with a present-past structure and a geographical separation-spiritual union continuity. The editing presents the story through seemingly telepathic connections between an old Andrea in Molfetta and a bedridden Sara in Durrës. Andrea's teary moments of melancholic remembering are juxtaposed with Sara's wistful memory, thus linking their simultaneous thoughts of their youth. As they both evoke the past, their shared feelings lead them to recollect a series of mutual memories. This technique provides a dynamic succession of events and establishes an emotional climax.

The three Apulian directors, Cirasola, Winspeare, and Fornari, represent themes of cross-cultural encounter and dramatize forms of inter-ethnic connectivity. Their fictional stories and legends do not romanticize contemporary social realities. On the contrary, they problematize the fragile coexistence of Apulians with the complex identities of the newcomers. Their films address common themes – illegal trades, local and international criminal networks, and private tragic plots drawn around encounters with people from the Albanian shore.

Dedicated to Nicla and Osvaldo Laviosa

Bibliography

Attolini, Vito, Alfonso Marrese, and Maria A. Abenante. *Cineasti di Puglia. Film paesaggi associazioni*. Bari: Edizioni dal Sud, 2007.

Cecere, Georgia, and Edoardo Winspeare. *Sangue vivo*. Nardò: Besa Editrice, 2006.

Chambers, Iain. *Mediterranean Crossings. The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.

Cirasola, Nico. "*Albània Blues*: Nico Cirasola Filmmaker senza compromessi." *Imaging* 22 (December 2000), 8-11.

Iarussi, Oscar. "Sud: la frontiera del Mediterraneo che seduce registi, produttori e Sceneggiatori." *Punti di vista sull'internazionalizzazione*, 2001.

Iarussi, Oscar. *Ciak si Puglia. Cinema di frontiera 1989-2001*. Bari: Laterza Edizioni della Libreria, 2002.

Nigro, Raffaele. *Diario Mediterraneo*. Bari: Editori Laterza GLF, 2001.

Viesti, Gianfranco. *I vicini sono tornati. Italia, Adriatico, Balcani*. Bari: Laterza Edizioni della Libreria, 2002.

Filmography

Albània Blues. Nico Cirasola (2000).

Hotel Dajti una storia oltre il mare. Carmine Fornari (2001).

Sangue vivo. Edoardo Winspeare (2000).