CHAPTER 4

Migration, Masculinity, and Italy's New Urban Geographies

By the turn of the twenty-first century, the number of foreigners living legally in Italy had exceeded one million and was growing steadily. After the victory of Berlusconi's rightwing coalition Casa della Libertà (House of Freedom) in the election of 2001, immigration control became a central priority of the new government. The following year saw the passing of the so-called Bossi-Fini law—named after the leaders of Lega Nord and Alleanza Nazionale, respectively—which introduced the most repressive measures to date, including the criminalization of failure to comply with expulsion orders.[1] It was followed, however, by an amnesty decree facilitating the regularization of undocumented foreigners already resident in the country. Yet irregular arrivals from the former Eastern bloc, the African continent, and other locations in the global South continued, with the flow of newcomers accelerating or decelerating at different points in the years that followed.

Thanks to the substantial growth of the immigrant population, both regular and irregular, the demographic makeup of Italy's cities had undergone a visible transformation ten years after the initial, unprecedented influx of migrants experienced during the immediate post–Cold War period. New spaces, structures, and institutions were emerging in urban centers and peripheries that reflected, on the one hand, the agency and vitality of Italy's new residents and, on the other, Italian attempts to contain or expel them. All of the country's urban centers presented visible signs of transnational flows and connections, evidenced,

for example, in the proliferation of international call centers and money-transfer offices, the emergence of ethnic markets, restaurants and new places of worship, and the presence of advertising aimed at migrants. These shifts in the visual landscape find expression in several Italian films produced from the early twenty-first century onward, where they sometimes feature prominently in the mise-en-scène and at other times function merely to convey a sense of contemporary urban life.

In this chapter, I examine three films made between 2004 and 2006 that unfold against urban and peripheral locations where the presence of new migrants was vividly perceptible by the turn of the twenty-first century. Highlighting the dilemmas and challenges of interethnic habitation, as well as the often conflicting needs of migrants and Italian residents, each film unfolds from the perspective of a young male character. The youth's growing awareness of the complex realities of Italy's migratory landscape and his own position within it prompts an ethical crisis in each narrative, leading him to take decisive action and embrace a sort of self-willed maturity. Invested in tropes of exclusion and belonging, the three films offer a reflection on male maturation in the global era while introducing viewers to situations, institutions, and settings previously unseen (or rarely seen) in Italian cinema.

Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti: Coming of Age in Multiethnic Italy

Marco Tullio Giordana is generally considered one of the heirs of the tradition of politically motivated filmmaking that flourished in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, as exemplified by the work of Francesco Rosi, Elio Petri, Gillo Pontecorvo, and the brothers Paolo and Vittorio Taviani. Generally, however, his films are set in the past, scrutinizing well-known and often controversial episodes of Italy's relatively recent history. His first film set in contemporary Italy, *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide), presents a story centered on contemporary migration, a topic he deemed too pressing to ignore. When presented at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005, however, it was received with rather less enthusiasm than his earlier, critically acclaimed features, *I cento passi* (*The Hundred Steps*, 2000) and *La meglio gioventù* (*The Best of Youth*, 2003). Produced by the major production company Cattleya in collaboration with Rai Cinema, *Quando sei nato* attracted solid audience attendance in Italy and traveled abroad to several festivals. It won both the Prix François Chalais and a Nastro d'Argento for Best Producer.

Significantly, *Quando sei nato* is one of the first Italian features to visualize the distinctive locations traversed or inhabited by migrants entering Italy and attempting to make their lives there. Among the spaces shown in the film are the small factories of northern Italy staffed almost exclusively by immigrant labor

(also glimpsed briefly in *Pummarò*), the precarious vessels transporting people to Italy from various parts of the Mediterranean, the overcrowded processing and holding centers (Centri di Permanenza Temporanea e Assistenza or CPT) for irregular arrivals, and the derelict urban structures appropriated for habitation by immigrants lacking access to legitimate employment and housing. Indeed the film makes a sustained effort to communicate the abject conditions of the physical spaces frequented by irregular migrants attempting to make a new life in Italy.

Scripted by Giordana in collaboration with Stefano Rulli and Sandro Petraglia, the film is at one level an adventure story, loosely inspired by the central premise of Rudyard Kipling's late nineteenth-century novel *Captains Courageous*, which tells the tale of a wealthy adolescent rescued at sea by a group of fishermen in an accident of fate that allows him to develop in ways that transcend the narrow perspectives of his privileged background.[2] Giordana's film takes its title, however, from a volume of investigative journalism by the Italian reporter Maria Pace Ottieri, which offers a compelling account of the experiences of recent immigrants who dwell in squatted spaces in Italy's urban centers and whose lives are marked by hardship as well as courage and resilience.[3]

Although Giordana's narrative is entirely a work of fiction, it shares with Ottieri's project a declared interest in the *popolo sommerso*, the "submerged" population whose unrecognized faces and unintelligible voices are routinely screened out, both literally and metaphorically, by the nation's dominant population. Believing that immigration was one of the most crucial social issues currently facing the country, the filmmaker chose to weave into the film's narrative several emblematic aspects of contemporary global mobilities, including the phenomenon of cross-border people smuggling, the trafficking of women and girls, the perilous conditions of irregular sea crossings, the detention of irregular migrants in crowded facilities, the establishing of deportation criteria through recourse to biometrics, and the divergent responses of Italian citizens to the demands placed on their society by rapid change. Rather than attempting to recount these circumstances through the perspective of an immigrant, however, Giordana chose to have his Italian protagonist, the well-to-do twelve-year-old named Sandro (Matteo Gadola), become an accidental witness to some of the devastating circumstances of irregular migration.

As occurs traditionally in Italian cinema, the male child is implicitly positioned as the future of the nation, and "sons" are automatically envisioned in a certain relation to the legacy of the past and to what the nation will bequeath to future generations. The figure of the child or adolescent as witness or moral conscience, which emerged in pronounced fashion in Italian films of the 1940s, has reappeared in a wide range of Italian films over the past twenty years.[4] It is therefore unsurprising that the events of *Quando sei nato* are experienced for

the most part from the boy's perspective. A native of Brescia, a prosperous city in northern Italy, Giordana's protagonist is very different from the children of neorealist cinema insofar as he is a wealthy, even worldly adolescent. As the only son of Bruno (Alessio Boni), a self-made man who built his wealth through the acquisition of a small manufacturing plant almost entirely staffed by migrant labor, Sandro enjoys a life of privilege. Yet the boy is not entirely comfortable with his privileged status, wincing in embarrassment when his father boasts jovially about buying a new Porsche in the presence of his immigrant employees.

The beginning of Sandro's journey toward maturity coincides with his attempt to decipher a phrase spoken by a stranger in an unknown language in the film's opening minutes, a phrase that is eventually translated for him and for the cinema audience much later in the narrative with the words of the film's title, "Once you're born you can no longer hide." In Giordana's decision to appropriate the title of Ottieri's book, we can discern a desire to intervene in the broader discussion about immigration and integration that had emerged among journalists, politicians, and intellectuals. Although the director's films are known to engage with political issues, *Quando sei nato* seems inspired by more broadly humanitarian concerns. Philosophically, the questions posed by the film resonate with the concept of hospitality or openness to the other theorized by Emmanuel Levinas and subsequently by Jacques Derrida.[5] Throughout most of *Quando sei nato*, the issue of openness to the other is the primary factor driving the young protagonist's journey toward maturity.

For Levinas, a Jewish Lithuanian exile writing in France in the postwar period, ethics precedes ontology, and the "I" is always already responsible for the other. Throughout his work, Levinas insists on the primordial importance of the other, identifying the other's being and claim on the self as constitutive of human subjecthood. He asserts, moreover, that the obligation to attend to the needs of the other by offering hospitality precedes any judgment or knowledge of the other's identity. Hospitality, therefore, is not a courtesy or a gift but simply an ethical duty demanding respect for the other's absolute alterity. Levinas describes this openness to the other as "an incessant alienation of the ego . . . by the guest entrusted to it . . . being torn from oneself for another in giving to the other the bread from one's mouth."[6] In other words, it is a form of hospitality that shatters the ego, does not demand reciprocity, and withholds nothing. Derrida, in turn, draws on Levinas's writings to assert that ethics is coextensive with hospitality, with the unconditional invitation infinitely open to anyone.[7] For Derrida, as for Levinas, despite the difficulty or impossibility of pure hospitality, the subject's openness to the needs of the other, of all others, should remain without limits or conditions.

Resonating with the question of ethical responsibility to the stranger, *Quando sei nato* asks, What does it mean to encounter the other? Or, what is the

ethical way to relate to the needs of those who exist outside one's own sphere of interest or sense of relatedness? That this film is about the encounter of the citizen with the abject other is made plain in an early scene where Sandro experiences a shattering of indifference of the kind described by Levinas in his unexpected encounter with the demands of an alien other.

In the film's opening moments, Sandro gets off a bus in the center of the city of Brescia in northern Italy. An African woman alights at the same time, signaling that this Italian city is already a multiethnic space. Stopping to admire a scooter on display in a store window, Sandro hears an agitated voice shouting a phrase in an unknown language and turns around to discover that a distressed African migrant is pounding on a public telephone. The boy approaches the stranger to tell him that the phone is out of order. As the African turns toward him, however, he continues to repeat his exasperated utterance, beating his chest in demented fashion and tearing off his clothes until he is interrupted by the arrival of two policemen who quickly put an end to the drama by carrying him away. Visibly troubled, Sandro memorizes the man's utterance—"Soki obotami okoki komi-bomba lisusu te"—and later tries unsuccessfully to have it translated into Italian by his African acquaintances. The persistence with which he pursues the task—and the mere fact that he has managed to memorize this complicated sequence of sounds—suggests that he has been profoundly troubled by his encounter with the stranger. When the meaning of the puzzling utterance is revealed to him as "once you're born you can no long hide," it seems to encapsulate the dilemma of the irregular migrant as an abject figure of bare life—that is, as an individual who has no discernible place in the structures of the nation-state but whose irreducible physical presence cannot be concealed or negated by a simple act of will.

The first ten minutes of the film establish the outlines of Sandro's everyday world, revealing that he is already accustomed to living in a multiethnic society and that his family (or at least his father) is keeping an eye on his evolving masculinity. One of his close friends at school is a black adolescent named Samuele who speaks Italian as fluently as Sandro. Samuele, however, is stronger, faster, and more motivated than Sandro at the swimming lessons the boys attend together, a point that the coach makes to Sandro's mother. The viewer also learns that Bruno, Sandro's father, is concerned about his son's apparent lack of drive and competitiveness. The boy's developing masculinity is thus flagged as a source of concern for the grown men in his life; his father, and later his father's friend Popi, continue to goad him about his presumed interest in girls, as though hoping to accelerate his maturation.

In another early scene that presages events to come, Sandro and his mother (Michela Cescon) are stopped at a traffic light, where he observes an Eastern European sex worker standing close by their car. Signaling discomfort, he asks his mother to close the car window as though to banish the woman from sight. As

Figure 4.1. Screen capture. Radu, Sandro, and Alina at sea. *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (2005)

the window goes up, however, the viewer sees the young woman's face reflected in the glass as she stares at the boy. Sandro is mature enough to understand the woman's circumstances at least to some extent since he later asks his father if he has ever had sex with prostitutes. The exchange between the pair is played as comedy, with the father vigorously denying that he—a handsome man—might ever have had the need to seek out the company of women since he was always besieged by excessive female interest. The scene establishes both the easy intimacy of the father-son relationship—a relationship that will be threatened as the boy begins to assert his own path—and Sandro's attempt to understand issues of sexuality, power, and gender relations, which will also become part of his coming to consciousness.

When Sandro falls overboard during a yachting trip off the coast of Greece a short time afterward, he is eventually rescued by a Romanian youth traveling on a crowded fishing trawler along with other migrants heading for Italy. The boy's protracted struggle in the sea and his gradual surrender to the possibility of drowning are accompanied by a musical passage composed by Michael Nyman previously heard in the scene of near drowning in Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1997), an intertextual clue signaling a threshold point that will lead to a process of personal transformation. Pulled aboard the migrant vessel while unconscious, Sandro awakens to find himself surrounded by people of multiple ethnicities speaking different languages. Like those huddled around him, he is now entirely at the mercy of the two unscrupulous southern Italian people smugglers at the helm. Savvy enough to fear extortion, he is reluctant to reveal to the men transporting the migrants that he is the son of a wealthy Italian industrialist. Thus, when questioned about his identity, he refuses to speak Italian, responding instead with the words pronounced by the deranged African in the streets of

Brescia, the meaning of which still eludes him. When pressed for further information, he accepts the prompting of his Romanian rescuer and claims a Kurdish identity. Here, as in several other films about migration, the trope of passing is crucially linked to the issue of survival.

The sequence on the migrant vessel signals an obvious intertextual link with Amelio's *Lamerica*. In both films, the Italian protagonist has been stripped of his possessions, passport, and clothing and finds himself sailing on a crowded boat toward Italy in the company of a large number of aspiring immigrants. In each case, the Italian is not somatically distinguishable from at least some of his traveling companions (in *Quando sei nato* the other travelers are both Eastern European and African, whereas in *Lamerica* they are exclusively Albanian), confounding any easy attribution of national belonging. Indeed in both cases the ability of the Italian to blend into the throng of dispossessed people facilitates his passage to some degree. *Lamerica*, however, comes to an end with the sea voyage. For Sandro, by contrast, the journey marks a new and important stage of his development.

When the foundering fishing trawler, long abandoned by the two Italian ferrymen, is finally intercepted by the Italian Coast Guard, Sandro chooses to reclaim his Italian identity. Responding to the officer who asks if anyone on board speaks Italian, Sandro replies, "Sono italiano" (I am Italian). This admission of identity, however, has none of the assertive swagger attached to Gino's multiple assertions of Italian belonging in *Lamerica*. Furthermore, it comes with a price as it will automatically separate Sandro from his newfound friends, Radu (Vlad Alexandru Toma), his rescuer, and the adolescent Alina (Ester Hazan), when they reach dry land.

Sandro's friendship with the two Romanians is cemented early in the voyage aboard the fishing trawler, during which Radu acts like a protective older brother, offering him comfort, advice, and assistance. But from the start, Sandro lacks the maturity to discern the deeper motivations of Radu's behavior or to comprehend the relationship between the pair, who claim to be siblings. The short scene depicting the sexual exploitation of the adolescent Alina by one of the two Italian ferrymen on board the trawler allows the viewers to grasp the elements that lie beyond Sandro's understanding.

Shot with day-for-night lighting effects suggestive of the horror genre, the scene unfolds in the engine room at night, where the skipper obliges the girl—who, unknown to Sandro, is being transported to Italy for sex work—to submit to sexual contact in exchange for water. Focalized through the boy's gaze as he unexpectedly disrupts the encounter, it evokes the Freudian primal scene, where the child witnesses a sexual encounter between adults and interprets it as an act of aggression. The hallucinatory quality of the sequence may suggest at first that Sandro—a northern Italian adolescent who is perhaps immune to the subtle

racism transmitted by adults in his environment—is displacing his fears about the potential violence of his own father, a self-made entrepreneur and employer of immigrant labor, onto that age-old scapegoat, the southern Italian male, traditionally characterized as violent, instinctive, or degenerate. His horrified reaction to the scene, however, is enough to discourage the skipper, who then angrily dismisses both adolescents. Even when Alina chides Sandro for interrupting the encounter and thus depriving the three of them of drinking water, the boy fails to realize that the exchange with the skipper had been anticipated by Alina and carried out at Radu's behest.

By the time Sandro disembarks in Italy, the bond he has established with the Romanians exerts a powerful hold, and the prospect of being separated from them fills him with anxiety. When the migrants emerge from the processing procedure (visualized in a striking montage sequence where each arriving migrant is photographed, fingerprinted, and identified by name, age, and national origin), he begs the Italian authorities to allow him to stay with his friends at the holding center. His request is partially granted by the gruff but apparently kindhearted priest who oversees the institution and allows Sandro—now identified as the Italian boy presumed dead at sea—to accompany his friends into the compound before insisting that the boy sleep alone in a separate space.

The fundamental ambivalence of *Quando sei nato* vis-à-vis the issue of irregular migration begins to surface in the scenes at the migrant holding center as it becomes clear that no one believes Radu when he claims to be seventeen years old (a circumstance that would allow him to remain legally in Italy as an unaccompanied minor). It is precisely at this juncture that the Romanian's behavior becomes volatile, contradictory, and difficult to read. The film's uncertainties about irregular migration, increasingly evident in the ongoing figuration of Radu, might indeed be understood as an unintended projection of the attitudes toward alterity that are manifest on a wider social level, often characterized by an outward display of acceptance that is undercut by a persistent distrust. This generalized attitude is implicit in the scenes where Sandro urges his parents to adopt the two Romanians he has befriended, while the lawyer interviewing the family, resistant to this request, attempts to justify the teenagers' ongoing detention in humanitarian terms, failing to address the actual conditions of their incarceration. Moreover, while the film attempts to demonstrate the harshness of the biopolitical apparatuses that serve to process and classify the aspiring immigrants, it also suggests the effectiveness of these same mechanisms as instruments of justice, for it is indirectly due to his enforced submission to a bone scan and other investigative procedures that Radu, Sandro's rescuer and presumed friend, is exposed as a liar and a criminal.

Although *Quando sei nato* appears at first to offer a sympathetic depiction of irregular migrants of different nationalities and ethnicities who are ferried

across the Mediterranean, apprehended by government patrols on Italy's southern coast, and detained indefinitely in overcrowded facilities, it subsequently undermines this initial impression. The Romanian youth who saved Sandro's life at sea and pledged his undying friendship eventually shows up at the family home in Brescia, only to plunder the house and run off into the night with Alina. Reacting to this event—which mirrors stereotypical fears about irregular immigrants—Bruno prohibits his son from engaging in further communication with the pair, an injunction that Sandro ultimately finds impossible to obey. It is, however, only in the film's final sequence that the boy realizes that Radu is not Alina's brother but rather her pimp, responsible for transporting her to Italy with the aim of producing pornographic videos. Indeed Sandro's final challenge in the narrative is not to help both of his young friends avoid deportation, as viewers might have expected, but rather to rescue the adolescent girl from the clutches of her devious Romanian companion.

The scene of Alina's rescue is set in a large, disused factory on the Milanese periphery to which Sandro has been summoned in a phone call from the frantic, needy girl. He travels there alone from Brescia, unknown to his parents, manages to find the building on the city's outskirts, scales the high fence intended to keep intruders at bay (in the film's only allusion to contemporary politics, the fence is covered with election posters promoting Berlusconi), and enters the compound. The entire building has been appropriated as living space by dozens, if not hundreds, of immigrants. Squatted spaces of this sort have, in fact, mushroomed in various locations around Italy since the late 1990s, providing temporary or long-term shelter to otherwise homeless individuals, as is described in the investigative project by Ottieri that gives its title to Giordana's film.

Sandro's entry into the structure is shot in sinister tones. Clearly intimidated, he observes people huddled around a makeshift fire or staring at him in an unsettling way. As he proceeds through the dimly lit space—following a trajectory reminiscent of a sequence in Rossellini's *Germania anno zero* (*Germany Year Zero*, 1948)—he hears the faint sounds of Alina's favorite pop song, the achingly sentimental "Un'emozione per sempre," by Eros Ramazzotti, and is guided acoustically to her room below ground. Coming face-to-face with the girl—barely recognizable in heavy makeup, cheap jewelry, and a precocious outfit—and observing a video camera in the corner of the room, he finally understands why she has called for his help, and he begins to weep for the first time in the film. Curiously, it is the girl he has come to rescue who then comforts him, presumably giving him the strength and resolve to remove her from her sordid surroundings and accompany her into the open, anonymous space of the city streets.

Despite the ambivalence toward irregular immigration that emerges in the course of the film, the final sequence reaffirms the kind of unconditional hospitality described in the writings of Levinas and Derrida. It is here, in fact, that

Figure 4.2. Screen capture. The scene of Alina's rescue. *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (2005)

Sandro fully embraces the ethical necessity of responding to the call of the other, regardless of the consequences for the self. While *Quando sei nato* makes clear that the undocumented migrant, the destitute, and the homeless, though undeniably victims, are not always innocent, it also suggests that this does not diminish the subject's responsibility to recognize their human needs.

Yet it is also significant that in this otherwise conventional *Bildung*, ultimate mastery is denied to its Italian bourgeois protagonist. In contrast to the tidier narrative conclusion constructed in the screenplay, which involved Alina's self-defensive killing of Radu, the final version of *Quando sei nato* ends instead with a sense of indeterminacy.[8] After rescuing Alina from the scene of her exploitation, Sandro takes her to a busy intersection, where they sit for a moment in the middle of a construction site. Darkness has already enveloped the city. The concluding shot frames the pair sitting side by side in this anonymous urban space, sharing a sandwich. When the camera finally pulls away from the figures and the image decomposes to a blur, the viewer realizes that they have no clear destination. Aware of his father's disapproval of any further attempt on his part to aid his migrant friends, Sandro has already refused to answer his mother's phone call. He has also denied his identity to a sandwich vendor who recognized him from televised reports about his dramatic adventure at sea. By ignoring his father's injunction, and effectively disavowing his father's name, he becomes—at least for the moment—a fugitive. His last gesture in the film, the sharing of bread in an anonymous urban space, has a radical simplicity, suggesting his intention to remain alongside the defenseless, fugitive girl while acknowledging his inability to incorporate her into the structures of Italian bourgeois life.

The most crucial element in the film's narrative development is clearly Sandro's coming to manhood—not in terms of physical endurance or heteronormative

sexual development as prescribed by the adult men in his life but rather through a series of moral choices and his ongoing embrace of the principle of openness to the other. His final act of rescue is the ultimate confirmation that this maturity has been achieved. Yet, in the scheme of the overarching narrative trajectory, the Romanian teenagers, like the two southern Italian ferrymen, function merely as a foil for the northern Italian boy's quest for self-determination. Alina's usefulness to the narrative lies in direct relation to the opportunity she offers Sandro to make his own ethical choices in defiance of his father. Yet Sandro's act of rescue, while signaling his moral courage and self-determination, will not save Alina in a meaningful way as there is apparently no place for her to go. *Quando sei nato* thus offers a particularly compelling example of the contradictory mechanisms through which Italian cinema attempts to conjure up a sympathetic response to the needs of Italy's new migrants, while at the same time falling prey to the processes of discursive abjection that separate the nationally desirable subject—white, middle-class, and properly European—from the outsiders, those not-quite-white-enough foreigners who cannot yet be absorbed into the social body of the European Union.

Saimir: Liminal Subjectivity

Saimir (Francesco Munzi, 2004) offers a compelling counterpoint to Giordana's *Quando sei nato*. At the narrative level they have several commonalities: both films configure crucial encounters between Italian citizens and immigrants who live at the margins of society and include a scene in which young Eastern European immigrants violate and plunder the domestic space of ordinary Italian citizens. Additionally, each of them features a decisive scenario in which the young male protagonist comes to the rescue of a distressed migrant girl in explicit defiance of his father, thus marking his passage to self-determined maturity. However, unlike the affluent Italian adolescent at the center of *Quando sei nato*, Saimir, the eponymous protagonist of Munzi's film, is an economically deprived Albanian teenager living with his father in a coastal suburb near Rome, whose contact with autochthonous Italians is sporadic at best. Thus, while both Giordana's and Munzi's characters defy a paternal injunction in order to aid a vulnerable migrant girl, they do so from contrasting positionalities, and their activities occur in radically different social contexts. Stylistically, the films also stand in sharp contrast to each other. *Quando sei nato* is an expensively made, stylishly photographed production, directed by an acclaimed filmmaker and featuring well-known Italian actors in the adult roles; *Saimir*, by contrast, is a low-budget film made by a then-unknown filmmaker that deploys a naturalistic, almost ethnographic approach and uses nonprofessional or little-known actors who speak their own languages more often than Italian.

Munzi's film charts the coming of age of the sixteen-year-old Albanian Saimir (Mishel Manoku), who assists his father, Edmond (Xhevet Feri), in transporting irregular migrants from a secluded landing point on the Adriatic coast to various destinations across the Italian peninsula. Since Saimir appears in almost every scene, the viewer is invited to identify closely with his point of view. The broader hermeneutic question that underpins the film is how Italy is experienced by those who are marked as outsiders by virtue of their poverty and limited proficiency in Italian and must attempt to survive without the benefit of legal residency, adequately remunerated work, or protection from violence and exploitation. While *Quando sei nato* introduced the viewer to locations seldom visualized previously in Italian cinema, *Saimir* also provides glimpses of rarely explored sites indicative of Italy's evolving social landscape, including a sizable Romani encampment, Rome's coastal neighborhoods populated by immigrants, and, more fleetingly, the small rural enterprises whose survival depends on undocumented migrant labor. *Saimir*'s Albanian protagonist, unlike the Italian Sandro in *Quando sei nato*, is depicted as part of this unfamiliar, morally ambivalent, and often squalid environment.

Immersing the viewer in Saimir's daily routine of assisting his father in his work, the opening sequence of the film has a subtly disorienting effect. As the two characters set out by truck across a wintry, mountainous terrain, it is clear that the teenager is accompanying his father on a prearranged assignment, but it is difficult to determine their location. The music on the car radio has a southeastern European or Turkish sound, raising the possibility that they are traveling through Albania or elsewhere in the Balkans. The subsequent sequence, however, reveals that Saimir and his father have arranged to meet a group of irregular migrants whom they will accompany to an inland destination. The enigma of the film's geographical setting is finally resolved for the viewer when one of the recently arrived migrants, a small boy from Kosovo, asks the protagonist in Albanian if Italy is still far off and is told, with mild amusement, that he has already arrived.

The geographical disorientation generated in this opening sequence thus serves a clear purpose. Defamiliarizing the Apennine landscape through the acoustic overlay of Albanian dialogue and music coded as exotic, the film introduces the viewer to the land of Italy entirely through the eyes of two non-Italians who are attempting to make this territory their home. When the Kosovar boy proceeds to ask Saimir, "What is Italy like?" his question is met with a telling silence, as if the teenager is hesitant to alarm the child with an account of his own experience. But the boy's curiosity encapsulates the question that the film itself will seek to answer as it explores what Italy might look like through an outsider's eyes. The protagonist's immersion in a marginalized world of poverty and petty crime effectively prompts the viewer to identify with the sense of alienation and

frustration that can challenge the efforts of irregular migrants to improve the quality of their lives. Though Saimir eventually finds a way to achieve what might appear to be a solution—the ability to stay legally in Italy—he does so at a painful price.

Unhappy with his father's resigned acceptance of his grueling job in the service of Albanian smugglers and with his decision to marry an Italian woman in order to regularize his immigrant status, Saimir fitfully attempts to carve out a social space of his own. Shortly after being initiated into sexual activity at a lurid nightclub managed by an Albanian cousin—a location similar to the environment frequented by the Albanian protagonist of *L'italiano*—he begins a romance with Michela, an Italian schoolgirl his own age. This brief idyll—which begins on the socially fluid, open space of the beach—finally brings him some happiness but abruptly comes to an end when he reveals to her the spoils of his adventures as a petty thief. Startled by his ignorance of the implications of these activities, Michela abruptly walks out of his life. In a subsequent scene, Saimir shows up at her school unannounced, bursting into the classroom to ask her loudly if she considers him inferior to her simply on the basis of his immigrant identity. Saimir's affect, appearance, and behavior are visibly out of line with the protocols of the school, and he is forcefully removed from the building. Eliciting empathy for the perplexed immigrant who cannot comprehend the Italian girl's rejection, the film conveys his growing frustration with his seemingly insurmountable marginalization.

The dramatic crux of the narrative occurs when Saimir discovers that a fifteen-year-old Russian girl—whom he helped to smuggle from the coast of Puglia to the suburbs of Rome—has been sequestered, brutalized, and raped by his father's employers. At great risk, he takes decisive action by reporting her whereabouts to the police, provoking the arrest of his own father in the process. The film ends as Saimir is led away from his home by uniformed *carabinieri* after a devastating encounter with his detained father. Although Saimir's fate is not explicitly explained in the diegesis, Italian audiences understand that, as an unaccompanied minor, he will remain a ward of the Italian state until he reaches the age of eighteen, at which point he may be conceded the possibility of staying in the country permanently.

Saimir, which is Munzi's first feature film, has a rigorous visual austerity. Though partly the result of budgetary limitations, this aesthetic is well suited to the harsh circumstances foregrounded in the diegesis, the shabby settings frequented by the characters, and the emotional isolation of the film's protagonist. The fact that Munzi came to feature films following some experience in documentary filmmaking is evident in his skillful deployment of locations, including the scene shot at a Romani campsite, and the casting of somatically diverse, non-Italian, nonprofessional actors who perform their roles in their own language.

Figure 4.3. Screen capture. Trafficked Russian teenager rescued by Saimir. *Saimir* (2004)

For the most part Albanian is the dominant language in *Saimir*, but minor characters are also heard speaking Romani and Russian, respectively. Most of the film was shot in winter on the coastal strip west of Rome, which, though a popular destination for city beachgoers in the summer, is inhabited in the offseason almost exclusively by residents of diverse national and ethnic origins.

One of the most striking sequences in the film shows Saimir's participation in a burglary at the villa of a wealthy Italian family. His companions are a handful of Romani teenagers with whom he has established a routine complicity. Far from depicting the event as a reprehensible crime, the film foregrounds the vitality and curiosity of the Romani boys, their sense of wonderment in the discovery of new surroundings, in contrast to Saimir's morose detachment. The mood of the entire sequence combines elements of lyricism and pathos with a pronounced note of comedy.

Saimir's companions initially approach the task of burglary with focused attention, tying up the Filipina maid in businesslike fashion and swiftly selecting objects they deem to have value as they move through the house. Their focus dissolves, however, when the temptation to play takes the upper hand. The delinquents are then suddenly transformed into children. One boy struts about in a fur coat, and another approaches the piano and plays haphazardly on the keyboard, while a third, captivated by the sight of the swimming pool, pulls off his clothes and dives in to enjoy an impromptu swim. Cutting back and forth among the various characters, the scene is presented as an interval of pure *jouissance*, highlighted on the soundtrack by the *Allegro non molto* movement from Vivaldi's "Summer" Concerto.[9] Only Saimir remains detached from the dominant

mood of uninhibited play as he continues to gather up valuable objects with an expression of mournful perplexity. Finally, opening the door to a bedroom, he catches sight of an emaciated old man lying in bed attached to a feeding tube. Though the audience's sympathies are now aligned with Saimir, the image of the terrified, speechless Italian, lying helplessly on his back, seems momentarily to dramatize Italians' worst fears about the dangers presented by immigration. But the Albanian stops short in his path. In a brief tableau where the citizen symbolically occupies the space of the disenfranchised other, Saimir stares mournfully at the old man and then quietly retreats. Though entirely wordless, this fleeting encounter signals Saimir's growing awareness of the consequences of his actions on others and prepares us for the film's dramatic resolution.

The peripheral locations in which the film is shot, the lawless, outsider status of its principal characters, and the choral effect achieved by the ragtag group of male adolescents befriended by the protagonist who have no hope of attaining the privileges enjoyed by the mainstream are reminiscent of the early films of Pier Paolo Pasolini, particularly *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962). Yet a different sensibility emerges in Munzi's work, along with a more ambivalent engagement with issues of belonging and exclusion. Clearly, the social context to which these films refer—the economically marginalized communities of the Roman periphery—has changed considerably since the 1960s as the representatives of Italy's underclass now seem to hail not from the South or the hinterland but from beyond the nation's borders. Unlike the idealization of the outsider witnessed in Pasolini's films, a more conservative ethos underpins *Saimir*, which narrates the dilemma of a teenager actively seeking to escape his father's influence and with it the material constraints and moral compromises of his marginalized existence. The film is ultimately less reminiscent of Pasolini's work than of *La Promesse* (1996), directed by the Belgian filmmaking duo Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, which recounts the ethical transformation of a working-class youth who initially collaborates with his father in exploiting irregular immigrants, only to repudiate these activities by the film's end. In fact, recurring shots of Saimir riding his moped through the streets of the urban periphery establish a striking intertextual link with the protagonist of *La Promesse*.

Saimir is one of a small number of Italian films to feature a male Eastern European migrant as protagonist. Munzi was well aware of the challenges posed by his decision to construct the film around the viewpoint of an irregular Albanian migrant, and he aimed self-consciously to avoid simplification, stereotypes, and facile binarisms.[10] The ethical problem of constructing the other, of speaking for the other, has indeed been the focus of theoretical discussion for several years, especially in feminist and postcolonial scholarship.[11] The challenge for artists representing those who are ethnically, racially, or economically "other" is marked by the need to observe, respect, and "translate" the other's differences

while avoiding the pitfalls of erasure, disavowal, or phantasmatic distortions. The major risk to be avoided—and one that is witnessed throughout the history of representational practices—lies in the mechanism of constructing the other simply in terms of the self: as the opposite of the self, a process that conflates the other with the self-same.

Munzi reports in the commentary that accompanies the DVD version of *Saimir* that his initial version of the screenplay was flawed by a surfeit of *buonismo* (a well-meaning but ultimately self-indulgent attitude of sympathy), noting that while the protagonist was constructed in a uniquely positive way, other characters had no redeeming features. The final version, which the filmmaker wrote in collaboration with Serena Brugnolo and Dino Gentili, avoids this binary model, particularly in its delicate portrayal of the tensions between father and son. The film's leading character is certainly far from idealized. He can be sympathetic, even admirable, but he is also often a rude, recalcitrant teenager. His father, Edmond, is similarly nuanced. Despite his moral cowardice, blinkered resignation to a life of illegal employment, and occasional bouts of anger, he clearly cares for his son. Munzi has attributed the balance achieved in the final version of the script to his experience, in the months intervening between the drafts, of preparing a documentary on a family living in a Romani encampment in the Roman suburbs. Living in close contact with this community for an extended period of time allowed him the opportunity to observe the complexities of a way of life very different from anything he had previously known. Although the documentary was never completed, Munzi includes a brief scene in a similar encampment in *Saimir*, where a Romani mother chides her wayward children (who, the viewers realize, have just burglarized the villa of a wealthy Italian family) for their bad behavior. In effect, the film's delineation of all non-Italian characters, including the Albanians and the Roma, demonstrates a degree of sensitivity to the complexity and ambivalence that imbue immigrant lives.

Saimir does not aim at offering a broad picture of the Albanian immigrant experience. The contours of the narrative certainly lack the broad historical resonances of Amelio's *Lamerica*. By focusing the dramatic weight of the film on the conflict between father and son, the filmmaker gives *Saimir* an intimate, familiar scope, calculated to appeal to a wide audience. In effect, the viewer is called on to identify with a young man engaged in the timeless struggle to shake off the yoke of paternal authority. Sympathy for this character is achieved at least in part through the deployment of a conventional oedipal narrative, where the youthful protagonist engages in an ultimately successful struggle to overturn the oppressive rule of the older man.

Saimir's ultimate triumph, however, is laced with ambiguity. The boy is not definitively rewarded for his conscientious action, for his attempt to shake off the taint of his problematical "Albanianness," despite the fact that his ability to

Figure 4.4. Screen capture. Saimir meets Michela. *Saimir* (2004)

remain in Italy at least for the moment seems assured. His access to the opportunity of legitimate residency has been achieved, in effect, by betraying his own father and his associates to the police. Furthermore, having alienated himself through this betrayal from his other relatives in the expatriate community who are similarly involved in the criminal underworld, he is implicitly exposed to the risk of reprisal. And even as he progresses toward the possibility of legitimate status on Italian soil, he has learned enough from his former Italian girlfriend, Michela, to grasp the unlikelihood of his being welcomed into the mainstream of Italian social life. In this way, the film dramatizes in a compelling fashion the sense of liminality, uncertainty, and risk shared by many irregular migrants living in Italy at present.

Despite the film's sympathetic construction of the Albanian teenager and its nuanced rendering of the boy's father as a victim of economic pressure and the threat of deportation, on a literal level, the narrative seems to confirm the commonplace equation of "Albanian" with "criminal," suggesting that it is in part thanks to the harsh lesson provided by his Italian girlfriend that the protagonist begins to question behavior that he might otherwise have taken for granted. In this scenario, the Italian girl functions as a catalyst to set in motion the oedipal dimension of Saimir's trajectory—that is, to defeat his father's power over him and pursue a path of his own making. In an even more spectacular way, the brutalized Russian girl he succeeds in rescuing from coerced prostitution becomes a vital instrument in his journey to maturity.

Though the protagonists of *Quando sei nato* and *Saimir* are from contrasting locations within Italy's contemporary social landscape, the narrative trajectories

of the privileged Italian adolescent and the marginalized Albanian migrant have some striking similarities. In each case, the passage to ethical responsibility and masculine maturity is marked by the boy's decision to rescue a young Eastern European girl from the scene of forced sex work. Little is revealed in either film about the motivations or experience of the trafficked girl as her subjectivity is overshadowed by the subjective focus on the young male hero. Ultimately, what we find in both narratives is variation on the classical oedipal paradigm critiqued by de Lauretis, who has shown how, in the traditional narrative structure, the girl or woman is merely of secondary interest to the hero's progress.[12] Thus in *Saimir* the Russian teenager's captivity ultimately functions as the ground on which the young protagonist must take action to defy his father's authority, becoming, in the process, a man in his own right.

Amoroso's *Cover Boy*: Shifting Margins

Cover boy: L'ultima rivoluzione (Cover Boy: The Last Revolution, Carmine Amoroso, 2006) differs from the two films discussed earlier in this chapter insofar as its protagonist is a young man rather than an adolescent or teenager. Yet this, too, is a story of male maturation and transnational encounter that unfolds in Italy's migratory landscape. As in *Saimir*, the leading character in *Cover boy* is from southeastern Europe, but in this case the imputed abjection of the southeastern European subject is radically called into question rather than implicitly confirmed.[13]

Directed by Carmine Amoroso, the film is clearly an ambitious project, though budgetary constraints resulted in a radical modification of the narrative originally envisioned in the screenplay. Layering different histories and geographies, it unfolds for the most part in contemporary Rome and Milan, with a substantial prologue set in Bucharest during the events leading to the overthrow of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu. Opening with a montage of highlights from the history of the Cold War, the film introduces its protagonist, Ioan, as a six-year-old boy during the uprising that convulsed Bucharest and killed his father in December 1989. The main body of the film unfolds in Italy, however, beginning at the moment when the twenty-two-year-old Romanian Ioan (Eduard Gabia) arrives alone at Termini Station in Rome, after Bogdan, his Romanian friend and fellow traveler, was detained by the police during a passport check. The film thus establishes itself as Ioan's story, though some subsequent scenes unfold through the perspective of an Italian named Michele, whom Ioan befriends upon arrival in Rome. The mise-en-scène of Ioan's arrival at Termini Station—itself an iconic location in Italian cinema since the 1940s—is emblematic. In a long shot he is seen standing, perplexed and unkempt, in the middle of the station's crowded atrium, dwarfed by the large-scale advertisements for Emporio Armani

displayed on the wall above him. As fashion images become an important trope later in the film, their visibility at this moment of arrival and their contrast with the abject figure of the penniless migrant are not accidental.

Ioan soon meets Michele (Luca Lionello), a forty-year-old Italian who is working temporarily as a janitor at the station. Hostile at first, Michele eventually offers to share his apartment with Ioan for a modest sum. Though he makes clear that he feels superior to the Romanian by virtue of his status as an Italian, he tells Ioan that he originally came to Rome as a student from the Abruzzo region. Hence he, too, is a migrant and is marked as a southerner in the capital. Precariously employed, he struggles desperately to achieve a level of economic security that is perpetually beyond his grasp. Describing himself as *uno straniero in patria* (a foreigner in his own land), Michele is scarcely less marginalized or lacking in resources than his migrant friend. A closeted gay man, he is drawn to Ioan sexually but struggles to hide his feelings. Although the Romanian does not show any awareness of this attraction, the film continues to suggest the erotic potential of their relationship, often showing them in close proximity with each other and, in the film's happiest moment, frolicking together naked in the sea.

After Michele is suddenly dismissed from his job as a janitor, he searches for casual employment alongside Ioan. In a scene marked by elements of farce, the Italian poses as Romanian in order to get a job washing cars with Ioan. This venture proves to be a failure as Michele is unable to withstand the abuse meted out to him by Italian clients who presume he is an immigrant. Soon afterward, Ioan happens to meet his old friend Bogdan, who has just arrived in Rome and offers him the possibility of making easy money in an undisclosed line of work. Accompanying Bogdan to his presumed workplace, Ioan discovers, to his apparent horror, that his friend makes a living providing sexual services to wealthy male clients. Finally understanding that the lucrative work he was promised before his departure from Romania was in fact male prostitution, he rejects Bogdan's proposal and returns to the streets to try washing windshields for money.

Ioan has now realized that he and Michele share a similar status of economic precariousness. Their common circumstances are highlighted in the tag line with which the film was initially advertised: "Love and Rage of a Precarious Generation." A tentative solidarity evolves between the immigrant without a work permit (significantly, the film is set just before the accession of Romania to the European Union) and the sporadically employed Michele, thanks to the shared fragility of their material existence. In the course of a conversation between Michele and a clerk at an employment agency, the film reveals that the Italian has always had to make a living through temporary work, facing intermittent periods of unemployment.[14]

Cover boy diverges from almost all other Italian films featuring immigrant characters by showing that despite the xenophobia and racism directed at

migrants, many Italians share with them a sense of economic precariousness and a desire to secure a better life. Amoroso's film neither idealizes the status of the outsider nor asserts the importance of the center. Rather, it subverts conventional beliefs about how citizens and migrants are fundamentally different from each other. Struggling perpetually to pay the rent, Ioan and Michele live in a shabby apartment on the outskirts of Rome, in the area once frequented by the ragtag characters of Pasolini's early films. Their landlady (Luciana Littizzetto) is an out-of-work actress who, though struggling to make ends meet, is contemptuous of her impoverished tenants. The film thus suggests that marginalized people create their own borders, distancing themselves from those they perceive to occupy lower rungs of the social ladder. As Étienne Balibar has argued, borders "are no longer entirely situated at the outer limit of territories; they are dispersed a little everywhere."[15]

Writing about contemporary European cinemas, Temenuga Trifonova observes that recent films about migration and diaspora no longer focus solely on the most visible conflicts between center and periphery, between foreigners and nationals, but have instead begun to depict conflicts at the periphery itself. She argues that migration films "deterritorialize nationality by deterritorializing the notion of the border, not by opening up borders but by redrawing them along transnational, social, class, gender, political and generational lines."[16] On a number of occasions, *Cover boy* dramatizes the deterritorialization of the borders within the European city. For example, shortly after his arrival in Rome, Ioan is obliged to relinquish his sleeping space along the external wall of Termini Station because other homeless individuals have created their own boundaries by laying claim to the public space he attempts to occupy.

Similarly, when he tries to sleep on the grass near the Coliseum, a man dressed as a Roman gladiator (presumably involved in precarious work at the margins of the tourist industry) wakes him up, telling him that he is not allowed to sleep there—that is, in the public space over which the Italian feels he has jurisdiction. In another scene, Ioan's efforts to make money by washing windshields at a busy intersection are thwarted by a Romani youth, also a migrant. Claiming the intersection as his own working area, the young man expels Ioan from of the territory he has appropriated. In this way, Amoroso's film reveals the perpetually shifting configurations of public space in the contemporary metropolis.

In addition to illuminating these shifting territorial configurations, *Cover boy* also refers to issues of racial boundaries and racial passing. It suggests, in effect, that racial distinctions in the contemporary Italian setting are not organized around a simple opposition between white and nonwhite. In one scene, Michele worries whether he will be able to pass as a Romanian migrant in order to keep a job at a car-washing service, the sort of poorly paid labor generally available to migrants. Although he has previously worked as a janitor, he is unused to

the kind of humiliating manual labor that he is now desperately obliged to seek. The implication is that although Michele has a visibly darker complexion and hair than Ioan, he perceives himself ideologically as whiter, and he is now afraid that his whiteness will be recognized, curtailing his chances of being hired.

Although Michele is destined to remain trapped in the cycle of unemployment and poverty, an important shift occurs in Ioan's fortunes when he encounters Laura, a fashion photographer who is apparently captivated by his innocent, unspoiled look when she spots him in the streets of Rome and begins spontaneously to photograph him. She then takes him to Milan, transforms him into a fashion model, regularizes his immigration status, and eventually becomes his lover. Ioan's life thus changes dramatically overnight. He becomes a survivor, successfully rescued as if he were a character in a fairytale.

Ioan appears at first to be rather passive, immature, and out of touch. When he is first reunited by chance with Bogdan in Rome's Piazza della Repubblica, his friend tells him to wake up and come to terms with the fact that, as an impoverished immigrant, he will always be considered a worthless piece of meat. He reminds Ioan that only money counts in Italy. Without it, he claims, an immigrant is considered the equivalent of a floor cloth. Unlike Bogdan, who has learned to smile and hone his social skills to survive, Ioan remains relatively sullen throughout the film, refusing to make any special effort to promote himself or to please those around him.

Despite Bogdan's explicit warning about the particularly abject status of foreigners, at several moments *Cover boy* blurs or overturns the conventionally imagined roles of the (foreign) victim and the (native) victimizer. In the relationship between Michele and Ioan, it is the immigrant Ioan who remains calm and decisive in the face of difficulties, while Michele is more vulnerable, constantly on the verge of rage or tears. In a reversal of the usual scenario, the Italian begins to dream of going abroad to Romania in the hope of remaking himself as a businessman in a foreign land and in this way escaping destitution in Italy.

Problematizing the conventionally depicted trajectory in which Eastern Europeans go West looking for employment, Amoroso shows the less frequently explored path of Westerners traveling to the former Eastern Europe to exploit its resources in the shifting global economy. As already suggested, *Cover boy* deterritorializes the simple notion of border crossing. Although Eastern Europeans in Italian cinema are usually coded as trapped in a space from which they wish to escape, Amoroso's film shows that Italians can experience a similar sense of entrapment and a similar desire to leave for a better place. In this case, however, the desired place is no longer empirically better; it is instead a fantasy space, an abstraction. The yearning expressed by Ioan and Michele to move to the Danube Delta is not based on the tangible qualities of this location since neither of them has actually seen it. Rather, they long to move there because Ioan reports that his

own father had said just before his death that it was "the most beautiful place on earth."

When *Cover boy* rescues Ioan from destitution through Laura's intervention, his departure proves devastating for Michele. Unable to secure further work as a janitor and now bereft of the only friendship that holds any meaning for him, he becomes increasingly desperate. A striking image of his outstretched hand attempting to sell religious medals to tourists visiting the Vatican from the global South underscores his desperation and humiliation. This is but one instance in which the film places Michele in the same position as the hapless foreigner, a trope that clearly sets it apart from other films structured around stories of Italian immigration.

The contrast between Michele's previously assumed superiority as an Italian and the realization that he is powerless and without prospects eventually provokes him to hang himself. The catalyst occurs as he listens to the televised speech given by Berlusconi at a conference hosted by Confindustria (the umbrella organization representing Italy's manufacturing and service companies) in March 2006. Sharply denying evidence of financial mismanagement, Prime Minister Berlusconi is heard accusing the Left of falsely promoting a discourse of economic crisis.

The scenes charting Michele's final days alive are crosscut with scenes in which Ioan pursues new opportunities in Milan, becoming immersed in Laura's glamorous world while seeming to forget his friendship with Michele. Spectacle and image manipulation are the tropes mobilized in the Milan scenes, which take place against the backdrop of the global fashion industry. Though Laura assumes that Ioan has no memory of the violence that briefly convulsed his city during his childhood, there are hints in the film that reminders of the past can surface at any moment, triggered by unexpected cues.

The most emblematic image in *Cover boy* is a large-scale black-and-white photograph that appears at a crucial point near the end of the Milan sequence. Created through Laura's editing skills, the photograph is presented as a large publicity poster for Exile (presumably a clothing line), which Ioan observes as he enters a bar with Laura at the conclusion of a fashion show. Inscribed with the words "Wear the Revolution," the scene depicted in the photograph ostensibly invokes the events that unfolded in Bucharest in December 1989, showing a soldier in the uniform of the Romanian Army pointing his weapon at a naked youth, whose arms are raised in surrender as he faces the viewer. The nude figure in the picture is Ioan, originally photographed by Laura as he stretched his arms above his head on rising one morning from her bed. Unbeknownst to him, she has superimposed his image onto a documentary photograph glimpsed in an earlier scene, showing the same Romanian soldier pointing his gun at a defenseless civilian.

Figure 4.5. Screen capture. Ioan's manipulated image on a fashion poster. *Cover boy* (2006)

Though Laura assumes that her young lover does not remember the events of the Romanian uprising, she is mistaken. The manipulated photograph functions as a site of uncanny spectrality, which allows for a juxtaposition of Ioan's traumatic experience of history in the Romanian context and the effects of memory in the present. Upon viewing the digitally altered photograph for the first time and recognizing his own body within it, the young man experiences a dramatic revisiting of the moment in which he witnessed the shooting of his own father in December 1989. As he remembers this, the event itself, which was partially revealed in the film's prologue, unfolds in full in an extended flashback. It then becomes clear that Ioan experiences the image depicted on the poster as a violent betrayal by the woman who had become his mentor and lover, only to exploit his body in a way that he did not foresee. His reaction is not unlike his earlier rejection of the opportunity to make money through sex work; once again he refuses to be commodified and consumed as an attractive, white, foreign body. Turning toward Laura in anger, he utters, "Shame on you!" and walks out of her life for good, abandoning the life of privilege she had offered him. The moment marks his decisive coming to maturity.

The complex imagery of the poster placed in the mise-en-scène of *Cover boy* invites multiple visual associations. It appears to reference the controversial advertising campaign created by photographer Oliviero Toscani for United Colors of Benetton, which was distributed around the world in the late 1980s and 1990s. The Toscani posters often depicted shocking scenes of human suffering or hardship (showing, for example, a dying AIDs patient in one case and, in another, the Vlora packed with Albanians at the moment of arrival in Italy) or offered provocative juxtapositions of diverse human types. Voided of historicity,

detached from their social context, and clearly unrelated to the product they were supposedly advertising, these images functioned as free-floating signifiers.

In the large-scale photograph placed in the mise-en-scène of *Cover boy*, the gestural dimension of the young man's raised arms has a stark visual effect that transcends commercial associations, rendering the nude body at the center of the image not as an erotic object but as an uncanny spectral presence. The most obvious association that emerges from the poster's figural composition is the iconic image of the anonymous child usually referred to as "the Warsaw Boy," which was taken in the Warsaw Ghetto as Jewish families were being rounded up by the Gestapo. In fact, two key figures are central to both images: a defenseless young male, his upraised arms indicating surrender, and an armed soldier pointing a gun in his direction. The film thus communicates the complex significance of its title and subtitle, which point to the tendency of the contemporary image industries to appropriate images of human bodies, private experiences, and traumatic histories for purely commercial purposes.

Ioan's discovery of Laura's appropriation of his image becomes the trigger that enables him to remember his connection with Michele and to abandon Milan for good. Within the moral order constructed by the narrative, Michele now represents a more appealing point of reference for him than the illusory world of spectacle in which he had become embroiled. After failing to reach his friend by telephone, Ioan begins the long drive to Rome in a mood of happy anticipation. His nighttime journey is intercut with the scene of the landlady's discovery of Michele's body in his Rome apartment, an event that is represented in such oblique terms that the viewer might miss its significance upon the first viewing. In the scene that follows, Ioan is still at the wheel of his car but now appears to be driving through the Romanian countryside in daylight. In a subsequent cut, Michele is seated next to him, chatting about their plans for the restaurant in the Danube Delta. The reappearance of the Italian thus serves to reassure the viewer that Ioan's friend is alive and well and that they are happily on their way to the Danube. A subsequent shot confirms this as both men are seen standing on a wharf, looking out over a broad expanse of the river. When, in the final shot, it becomes clear that Ioan is in fact alone, the viewer understands the spectral status of the entire sequence. Michele is indeed deceased but refuses to be fully dead and insists on coming back.

These final images link *Cover boy* to a growing body of European films that disrupt the conventional chronology of realist fiction by withholding the markers that usually designate diegetic shifts. What this entails for the spectators is a provisional suspension of the ability to distinguish between what is supposedly real and what is merely imagined or to tell the difference between past, present, and future. Thomas Elsaesser has described such films as "post-mortem" since

they convey a sense of haunting and raise issues of memory, history, and identity through a nonrealistic configuration of temporality.[17]

By definition, films that employ the trope of haunting have an ambivalent, asynchronous temporality. In contemporary post-mortem films, time seems to freeze, making it unclear whether it is the past that haunts the present or the future that haunts the past. The shifts in temporality remain unmarked, and the continuity editing characteristic of realist narratives is fractured, posing hermeneutic challenges to the spectator and character alike. As Elsaesser points out, post-mortem films fail to register the difference between actual characters and imagined ones, between those who know about their post-mortem status and those who do not. Thus, in *Cover boy*'s final scenes, the usual techniques such as flashback, fade-in, or superimposition, which typically designate transitions from the supposedly real to the imagined, are absent.

Elsaesser's reflection on how cinema can address the problematics of living together in a new Europe resonates with Derrida's reflections on temporal disjunctures in his volume *Specters of Marx*, a text inspired by the question of how to live in a rapidly changing world.[18] Written after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the imputed reunification of Europe, and the founding of the European Union, it attempts to articulate a social critique adequate to an altered political landscape. In an era that Derrida considers to be bereft of ethics or politics, he outlines a critique of the globalizing world while calling for a fundamental break with the present.

In the face of widespread claims that Marx and Marxism are defunct, *Specters of Marx* argues against the triumphal claims of neoliberalism and asserts that an adequate critique of late capitalism must appropriate Marx while simultaneously criticizing him. Rejecting as inadequate the predominantly political and economic considerations that tend to characterize critical approaches to globalization, Derrida builds his critique from the standpoint of a politics based on the nonpresentist temporality of spectrality, a standpoint that rejects any understanding of the present as presence.

For Derrida, the question of learning to live entails coming to terms with death—that is, with the spectral. He sees the specter, the revenant, in terms of untimeliness and anachronism. In his reading of Marx's reflections on Shakespeare, he observes that learning to live requires transcending Hamlet's opposition of being and not being, of life and death.[19] As an entity that both is and is not, the specter represents temporalities that cannot be grasped in terms of present time. Such temporalities include a past that has not ended and a future that breaks with the present. Spectrality thus expresses that which does not exist solely in the "chain of presents."[20]

Derrida's critique of the present as presence is undertaken from the standpoint of a politics based on the nonidentical, nonpresentist temporality of

spectrality. He characterizes this politics as one of responsibility to the past, to the dead—victims of war, violence, and oppression—and to the future, those not yet born.[21] Derrida coins the French word *hantologie* (hauntology) as a substitute for its near-homonym, *ontologie* (ontology), thus replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost—a figure that is neither presence nor absence, neither dead nor alive.[22] To learn to live, he argues, an individual must acknowledge death because it is only through the other and by death that individuals come into configuration as themselves. People must learn how to live with ghosts, in their company, and above all to learn how to talk to them and enable them in turn to speak again.

Despite its uneven development, due largely to production problems, *Cover boy* offers a more complex commentary on Italy's human and economic landscape than the films discussed previously in this chapter. It is perhaps unique in the overall panorama of Italian films about migration insofar as it self-consciously rejects the simple binary of victim and abuser/exploiter mapped onto the figures of migrant and citizen. Most importantly, through its deployment of the trope of spectrality, this film also suggests that violence and oppression are not limited to the present but should be considered in terms of broader temporalities, paying attention to the weight of history and to the ghosts of those whose lives are truncated by abuses of power.

Conclusion

Quando sei nato non puoi piú nasconderti, *Saimir*, and *Cover boy: L'ultima rivoluzione* bear a discernible relation to Italy's tradition of *cinema d'impegno* and seem committed, at least on the surface, to probing the tensions and dilemmas presented by the phenomenon of Italian immigration. Though they offer a familiar *Bildung* of male maturation, the circumstances prompting their protagonists' transformation are distinctive to Italy's global present. Notably, all three films narrate the deployment of a young, white, Eastern European body as a fetishized commodity in Italy's migratory landscape.

Quando sei nato and *Saimir* are structured in linear fashion in the style of traditional coming-of-age narratives, and in each film the young protagonist's assumption of masculine maturity is triggered by the encounter with an underage Eastern European girl transported to Italy for sexual exploitation. Yet, whereas the adolescent in *Quando sei nato* is an Italian citizen, the young protagonist of *Saimir* is himself an immigrant, making this the first coming-of-age film centered on a migrant character to emerge in Italian cinema. *Cover boy* is similarly focused on a migrant youth. Although he is no longer a teenager, he, too, undergoes a process of maturation upon observing the sexual or visual exploitation of migrant bodies in the Italian context. Finally, however, he rescues himself from

such exploitation, proving to be more adept at survival than his Italian counterpart, who is unable to overcome his economic misfortunes. The three films thus articulate male maturation in diverse ways, presenting Italians and foreigners, insiders and outsiders in varying configurations, yet always through the prism of a distinctively masculine subjectivity.

Linking these three narratives is the messiness—and the potential fruitfulness—of transcultural encounters in Italy's changing urban geographies and migratory trajectories, which present new challenges for ethical discernment. These landscapes become the ground for their respective protagonists' attainment of maturity, thanks to their growing consciousness of migrant exploitation. While each of the films articulates either an explicit or implicit critique of the exploitation of the Eastern European body for sexual pleasure, in each case the protagonist's stark rejection of this practice becomes the catalyst in his final gesture of self-determination. Crucially, *Cover boy* extends its interest in the exploitation of migrant bodies to embrace the discourse of precarious lives more generally understood, including the disenfranchised of the host society.

Notes

1. Among the most important changes were immigrant quotas, mandatory employment contracts, and sterner deportation measures.

2. Victor Fleming directed an adaptation of *Captains Courageous* in 1939, which is perhaps more widely known than Kipling's 1899 novel.

3. Maria Pace Ottieri, *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti: Viaggio nel popolo sommerso* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004). In the film's credits the book is inaccurately described as a novel.

4. In this group I include several films directed by Francesca Archibugi as well as Carlo Carlei's *La corsa dell'innocente (The Flight of the Innocent,* 1993), Gabriele Salvatores's *Non ho paura* (*I'm Not Scared,* 2002), and Kim Rossi Stuart's *Anche libero va bene* (*Along the Ridge*, 2006).

5. Relevant works by Levinas include *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981); *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969); and *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). I have previously elaborated on the significance of the work of Levinas and Derrida for an analysis of *Quando sei nato* in Áine O'Healy, "Hospitality, Humanity and the Detention Camp," *International Journal of the Humanities* 4, no. 3 (2006): 68–77.

6. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 79.

7. Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). See also Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (New York: Routledge, 1999), 65–83.

8. The published version of the screenplay reflects the conclusion originally planned by the screenwriters, which indicates that Alina shoots Radu to death. See Marco T. Giordana, Sandro Petraglia, and Stefano Rulli, *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (Venice: Marsilio, 2006).

9. The use of classical music as background for this scene of youthful delinquency is reminiscent of Pasolini's use of classical music in both *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962).

10. This information is found in an interview with Munzi in the extras included in the DVD version of *Saimir*.

11. See, for example, E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Nancy N. Chen and Trinh Minh-ha, "'Speaking Nearby': A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha," *Visual Anthropology Review* 8, no.1 (1992): 82–91; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

12. De Lauretis, "Desire in Narrative," *Alice Doesn't*, 103–57.

13. This section develops a portion of a previously published article: Alice Bardan and Áine O'Healy, "Transnational Mobility and Precarious Labor in Post–Cold War Europe: The Spectral Disruptions of Carmine Amoroso's Cover Boy," in Schrader and Winkler, *Cinemas of Italian Migration*, 69–90. I am grateful to my coauthor, Alice Bardan, for permission to incorporate some of this work into the present project. Published with the permission of Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

14. *Cover boy* is one of many relatively recent films produced in Italy, and in Europe more generally, that offer an implicit critique of precarious employment practices characteristic of the neoliberal economy. For an astute analysis of this phenomenon, see Alice Bardan, "The New European Cinema of Precarity: A Transnational Perspective," in *Work in Cinema: Labor and the Human Condition*, ed. Ewa Mazierska (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 69–90.

15. Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

16. Temenuga Trifanova, "*Code Unknown*: European Identity in Cinema," *Scope* 8 (2007): 4–5, http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2007/may-2007/trifonova.pdf.

17. Thomas Elsaesser, "Real Location, Fantasy Space, Performative Place: Double Occupancy and Mutual Interference in European Cinema," in *European Film Theory*, ed. Temenuga Trifanova (New York: Routledge, 2009), 58. For Elsaesser, such films include *Abre los ojos* (*Open Your Eyes*, Alejandro Amenábar, 1997), *The Others* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001), and *Gegen die Wand* (*Head On*, Fatih Akın, 2004). To his list one could add several Italian titles, including *Non ti muovere* (*Don't Move*, Sergio Castellitto, 2004), *La doppia ora* (*The Double Hour*, Giuseppe Capotondi, 2009), *Good Morning Aman* (Claudio Noce, 2009), and the previously discussed *La sconosciuta* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 2006).

18. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx, the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

19. Derrida, 2–20.

20. Derrida, 3.

21. Derrida, xviii–xix.

22. Derrida, 5–10.