

CROSSING BORDERS: MIGRATION, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY IN ITALIAN CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

Migration is not just a journey across physical borders; it is a deeply transformative process that reshapes identity, belonging, and memory. For migrant women, this experience is uniquely multifaceted, requiring them to navigate the challenges of displacement while preserving their cultural heritage and fulfilling societal expectations. Italian cinema, with its profound exploration of human emotions and cultural dynamics, provides a compelling lens through which to examine these themes. Films that focus on Italian migration artfully depict the tension between nostalgia for the homeland and the necessity of adapting to a new reality, offering universal insights into resilience, loss, and transformation. Italian migration films are infused with nostalgia—a yearning for the landscapes, traditions, and relationships left behind. For migrant women, this nostalgia is a vital link to their roots, shaping their sense of self and grounding them in their past.

Films like *Nuovomondo* (*Golden Door*, 2006) and *Amarcord* (1973) vividly portray this longing, creating cinematic spaces where personal memory intersects with collective history. In *Nuovomondo*, the journey of a Sicilian family to the United States mirrors the broader history of Italian emigration, while its intimate focus on familial bonds resonates with the personal experiences of many migrant women. Similarly, *Amarcord*, though not explicitly about migration, offers a nostalgic view of small-town life that evokes the warmth and community many migrants long to recreate in foreign lands. At the same time, these films explore the alienation and adaptation inherent in migration. Works such as *Pane e Cioccolata* (1974) and *La Terra Trema* (1948) delve into the psychological and cultural dislocation faced by migrants in unfamiliar environments.

For migrant women, this sense of dislocation is compounded by the dual pressures of survival in a new culture and the responsibility to preserve familial and cultural traditions. The

comedic struggles of integration in *Pane e Cioccolata* and the stark socio-economic precarity in *La Terra Trema* highlight the universal challenges of navigating cultural boundaries while maintaining a sense of self. Italian cinema also offers profound reflections on the evolving nature of identity. Migration necessitates adaptation but also demands continuity, creating a delicate interplay between change and tradition. Films like *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli* (1960) and *Io Sono Li* (2011) capture this tension, portraying characters whose journeys of self-discovery mirror the broader complexities of migration.

For migrant women, these narratives emphasize the resilience and creativity required to forge new identities while honoring their roots. Beyond individual stories, Italian migration cinema serves as a bridge between past and present, preserving cultural narratives and fostering intergenerational understanding. Documentaries like *Italianamerican* (1974) and *Un Paese di Calabria* (2016) enrich this perspective by blending personal histories with broader social contexts, celebrating the transformative power of migration to shape communities and identities. Together, these films offer a nuanced exploration of memory, identity, and belonging, affirming the universal human experience of migration while highlighting the distinct contributions of migrant women as cultural custodians and agents of transformation.

KEYWORDS: Adaptation, Alienation, Identity, Migration, Nostalgia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Migration is a journey of transformation, often marked by profound changes in identity, belonging, and memory. For a migrant woman, this experience becomes even more layered, as she navigates not only the challenges of leaving her homeland but also the expectations and roles that society places upon her. Italian cinema, with its rich tradition of exploring human emotions and cultural dynamics, offers a poignant lens through which to examine these experiences. Films about Italian migration capture the intricate balance between nostalgia for the homeland and the struggle to adapt to a new reality, reflecting the universal truths of displacement and resilience.

Viewing these stories through the eyes of a migrant woman reveals a deeply personal connection to themes of memory, identity, and cultural preservation. Italian migration films are imbued with nostalgia, a longing for the familiar landscapes, traditions, and relationships left behind. For a

migrant woman, this nostalgia is not merely sentimental but also a powerful link to her roots, shaping her identity and grounding her in her past. Films such as *Nuovomondo (Golden Door)* (2006) and *Amarcord* (1973) beautifully depict this yearning, creating cinematic spaces where the personal and the collective intersect. In *Nuovomondo*, the journey of a Sicilian family to the United States mirrors the broader history of Italian emigration, yet its intimate portrayal of the characters' emotions resonates with the migrant woman's personal experience.

Similarly, *Amarcord*, while not explicitly about migration, offers a nostalgic view of small-town life, evoking the warmth and community that many migrants long to recreate in foreign lands. At the same time, migration is a story of alienation and adaptation, themes explored in films like *Pane e Cioccolata* (1974) and *La Terra Trema* (1948). These works delve into the psychological and cultural dislocation faced by migrants as they attempt to navigate unfamiliar environments. For a migrant woman, this dislocation often carries an additional burden: balancing the demands of survival in a new country with the responsibility of preserving her cultural heritage. *Pane e Cioccolata* highlights the challenges of integration and the pressures of assimilation, reflecting the universal struggles of migrants striving to belong while grappling with the loss of their cultural identity. The evolving nature of identity is another central theme in Italian migration films, resonating deeply with the migrant woman's experience. Migration necessitates change, yet it also demands continuity, a delicate dance between adapting to a new life and holding on to one's roots.

Films like *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli* (1960) and *Io Sono Li* (2011) explore this tension, portraying characters whose journeys of self-discovery mirror the broader challenges of migration. For a migrant woman, these stories underscore the resilience required to forge a new identity while staying true to her origins. They also highlight the role of women as cultural bearers, preserving traditions and memories in the face of disruption. Italian cinema offers not only stories of migration but also a means of cultural preservation and reflection. For a migrant woman, these films serve as a bridge between the past and the present, connecting her to the stories of those who came before and providing a framework for understanding her own journey.

Documentaries such as *Italianamerican* (1974) and *Un Paese di Calabria* (2016) further enrich this perspective, offering real-life accounts of migration and its enduring impact on identity and community.

II. CUSTODIANS OF MEMORY: NOSTALGIA AND IDENTITY IN ITALIAN MIGRATION FILMS

Films such as *Nuovomondo* (*Golden Door*, 2006) and *Amarcord* (1973) intricately explore the connection between the homeland and identity, emphasizing the enduring significance of cultural traditions and memories in the construction of the self. These cinematic works highlight the pivotal role of women as custodians of cultural heritage and tradition, showcasing their essential contributions to preserving identity amidst the upheavals of displacement and migration. Directed by Emanuele Crialesi, *Nuovomondo* offers a poignant depiction of the migration experience, centering on a Sicilian family's journey to the United States during the early 20th century. While the film vividly portrays the physical and emotional challenges of leaving one's homeland, its true resonance lies in its depiction of intimate moments of longing and memory.

The matriarch, Fortunata, emerges as the emotional and cultural anchor of the family, embodying a deep connection to the land and a steadfast adherence to Sicilian traditions. Her role underscores the capacity of women to act as keepers of cultural memory, ensuring that even in the face of uncertainty and geographical dislocation, the essence of home and identity remains intact. Fortunata's rituals, beliefs, and inner strength exemplify how women often function as intergenerational bridges, transmitting the intangible yet profound heritage of their homeland to new contexts. Her resilience and dedication to preserving tradition are not only acts of cultural preservation but also forms of resistance against the potential erasure of identity in a foreign environment.

For a migrant woman engaging with *Nuovomondo*, these scenes resonate deeply, reflecting the dual experience of pride in maintaining one's heritage and the sorrow of navigating life in an unfamiliar world. In contrast to the physical journey depicted in *Nuovomondo*, Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* offers a more introspective examination of nostalgia. Set in a small Italian town during the 1930s, the film is a vivid tapestry of Fellini's memories, blending humor, warmth, and melancholy. Although *Amarcord* does not directly address migration, it profoundly resonates with migrant women by portraying a community deeply rooted in familial bonds, cultural traditions, and shared experiences.

The film's title, translating to "I remember," encapsulates the essence of nostalgia, invoking a time and place that feels both deeply personal and universally relatable. In *Amarcord*, women are portrayed as central figures in sustaining the social and cultural fabric of the community. From mothers who manage the rhythms of domestic life to elder women who serve as the repositories

of communal wisdom and history, these characters symbolize continuity and resilience. For migrant women, these depictions mirror their own lived experiences of carrying the cultural memory of their homeland, ensuring that traditions and values endure despite the disruptions of migration. The film's dreamlike quality, interspersed with vivid, almost surreal details of community life, reflects the way memories are revisited in the migrant experience—at once deeply authentic yet tinged with the embellishments of longing and imagination.

Both *Nuovomondo* and *Amarcord* underscore the profound influence of nostalgia in shaping identity and preserving cultural heritage. For a migrant woman, these films serve as a reflective space to engage with her own memories, drawing strength and solace from the enduring traditions and values that connect her to her homeland. Furthermore, they highlight the critical role of women as cultural stewards, illustrating that cultural memory is not static but a dynamic and evolving force that ensures identity's survival amidst the flux of migration. Through their rich storytelling and evocative imagery, these films remind us that the homeland is more than a geographical space; it is an emotional, cultural, and spiritual repository that continues to inform and shape the migrant journey.

III. ALIENATION AND ADAPTATION IN THE NEW WORLD

Migration is not merely a geographical relocation; it is a profound emotional and cultural upheaval that reshapes identity and belonging. For a migrant woman, this transition is especially complex, as she navigates her role as both a bearer of tradition and an active participant in a new cultural context. Italian films such as *Pane e Cioccolata* (1974) and *La Terra Trema* (1948) poignantly depict the struggles of adaptation and the pervasive sense of alienation faced by migrants in unfamiliar environments. Through these works, the tension between the desire for acceptance and the need to preserve cultural identity is explored, shedding light on the unique challenges that women face as they balance familial, social, and cultural roles. *Pane e Cioccolata*, directed by Franco Brusati, follows the story of Nino, an Italian migrant working in Switzerland, as he struggles to integrate into a society that views him with suspicion and prejudice.

While Nino's experience is shaped by his gender, the themes of alienation and cultural isolation resonate deeply with the experiences of migrant women. For women, these struggles are compounded by the expectations of caretaking and the emotional labor required sustaining familial and cultural bonds in the face of adversity. The film's portrayal of Nino's oscillation between assimilation and rejection mirrors the migrant woman's internal conflict: how to adapt to a new

culture without erasing her own identity. The comedic yet poignant narrative reflects the absurdity and pain of cultural displacement, a sentiment that echoes the migrant woman's dual burden of survival and cultural preservation. In contrast, Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema* delves into the socio-economic roots of migration and the enduring impact of displacement on identity.

Set in a Sicilian fishing village, the film captures the precarity of rural life, which forces individuals to seek opportunities elsewhere. For women in such communities, the decision to migrate often entails the responsibility of maintaining familial cohesion while adapting to unfamiliar social structures. Although the film focuses on the male members of the fishing family, the unseen yet palpable presence of women underscores their critical role in sustaining the family unit amidst hardship. The mother, a silent yet resilient figure, embodies the sacrifices and emotional labor inherent to the migrant experience, particularly for women who act as cultural bridges between the past and the future. For a migrant woman, *La Terra Trema* reflects the enduring weight of economic and social struggles, while *Pane e Cioccolata* offers a lens into the personal and cultural disorientation that accompanies migration. In both films, the characters' attempts to find belonging in a foreign environment reveal the deep-seated tensions between adapting to a new world and retaining one's identity. Women, in particular, must navigate these challenges while serving as custodians of tradition and caregivers for their families, roles that amplify the emotional complexity of migration.

IV. IDENTITY IN TRANSITION

Migration is not merely a physical journey; it is an ongoing process of transformation that reshapes both personal and collective identity. For a migrant woman, this transformation is particularly nuanced, as she balances the preservation of her cultural heritage with the need to adapt to a new societal framework. Italian films such as *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli* (1960) and *Io Sono Li* (2011) offer profound explorations of this evolving nature of identity, portraying characters whose struggles and resilience mirror the complexities of the migrant experience. These films highlight the migrant woman's critical role as an agent of change, a figure who bridges cultures and redefines what it means to belong. Luchino Visconti's *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli* examine the disintegration and reinvention of identity through the story of a family that migrates from Southern Italy to Milan in search of a better life. The film portrays the tension between tradition and modernity, as each family member navigates their own path in a rapidly changing urban environment. Although the narrative centers on the brothers, the role of women, particularly in familial contexts, serves as a

subtle yet powerful commentary on resilience and adaptability. Women in the film, like the matriarch Rosaria, represent the unyielding connection to cultural roots, even as they face the pressures of change and assimilation. For a migrant woman, Rosaria's character embodies the emotional labor required to hold a family together while navigating the dissonance of a new cultural landscape.

Her insistence on maintaining traditional values amidst the chaos of urban life reflects the challenge of preserving identity in a world that demands conformity. Yet, the film also acknowledges the inevitability of transformation, suggesting that identity is not static but a fluid interplay between past and present. This tension resonates deeply with migrant women, who often find them negotiating the boundaries of whom they are and who they are becoming. In contrast, *Io Sono Li*, directed by Andrea Segre, offers a more intimate portrayal of identity in transition through the eyes of Shun Li, a Chinese immigrant working in a small Italian fishing village. Shun Li's story unfolds as she forms an unlikely bond with Bepi, an elderly fisherman of Slavic origin, highlighting the shared experiences of displacement and longing across different migrant communities.

For Shun Li, the act of migration is not only a search for economic stability but also a redefinition of her sense of self in a culture that is both foreign and familiar. The film portrays Shun Li's quiet strength and resilience as she navigates her dual roles: as a worker adapting to her new environment and as a cultural bridge between her past and present. Her interactions with the local community reflect the intricate dynamics of integration, where identity is both contested and reshaped. For a migrant woman, Shun Li's journey underscores the necessity of embracing change while staying rooted in one's origins, a balancing act that defines the migrant experience. Both *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli* and *Io Sono Li* illustrate the complexity of identity as it evolves through migration. These films capture the dual forces of continuity and change, emphasizing that identity is not a singular or fixed entity but a living process shaped by cultural, social, and personal factors. For migrant women, this transition often comes with the added responsibility of acting as agents of cultural preservation and adaptation, ensuring that traditions are carried forward even as new ones are formed.

V. CINEMA AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

Cinema possesses a unique ability to transcend time, acting as a bridge between the past and the future while offering profound insight into the human experience. For migrant communities, this

capacity is particularly significant; films do not merely narrate migration stories but serve as powerful tools for cultural preservation and intergenerational understanding. They navigate the intricacies of displacement, longing, and adaptation, while safeguarding the traditions and identities that define a people's heritage. By documenting and dramatizing the migrant experience, films offer a reflective space where memory, identity, and belonging converge, creating a dialogue that connects generations and provides insight into the shared human journey of migration.

Documentaries such as *Italianamerican* (1974) by Martin Scorsese and *Un Paese di Calabria* (2016) by Shu Aiello and Catherine Catella epitomize this dual role. These films weave together personal and communal histories, transforming migration into a shared narrative that bridges diverse cultural and temporal landscapes. In *Italianamerican*, Scorsese turns the lens on his own parents, Catherine and Charles, whose lives as Italian immigrants in New York provide a deeply personal yet universally resonant story. Through anecdotes, family recipes, and reflections on their journey, the documentary becomes more than a recounting of history—it emerges as a living archive of cultural memory. Catherine's humorous and nostalgic stories illuminate the role of women as custodians of tradition, their resilience and adaptability embodying the essence of immigrant identity.

For migrant women, *Italianamerican* resonates profoundly, reflecting their dual role as cultural preservers and active participants in creating a new identity in unfamiliar environments. The film validates their struggles and triumphs, ensuring their experiences remain a vital part of collective memory. Conversely, *Un Paese di Calabria* presents migration from a broader communal perspective, focusing on the town of Riace, a declining Calabrian village revitalized by the arrival of migrants and refugees. The film demonstrates the transformative potential of migration, portraying a dynamic exchange of cultures and traditions that breathe new life into the community.

This narrative challenges stereotypes, celebrating the richness of diversity while revealing how migration can bridge the old and the new. For migrant women, *Un Paese di Calabria* is especially compelling, highlighting their pivotal roles as educators, caretakers, and cultural mediators. These women act as the link between their heritage and their adopted cultures, fostering mutual enrichment and ensuring the survival and evolution of traditions for future generations. The documentary encapsulates the power of migration to preserve cultural roots while simultaneously reshaping them to fit a changing world. These cinematic explorations of migration find a compelling counterpart in Martin Scorsese's reflections on the immigrant experience, shared in an

NPR interview about *Golden Door* (*Nuovomondo*). Scorsese discusses the universal appeal of migration stories, their blend of epic scope and personal drama resonating with audiences across generations.

His personal ties to these narratives, rooted in his family's journey from Italy to America, enrich his perspective. Films like *Gangs of New York* and his documentary *Italian-American* demonstrate how immigration shapes individual lives and national identities, portraying both the struggles and contributions of migrant communities. Scorsese's observation that America remains an ongoing "experiment" in cultural assimilation underscores the enduring tension between progress and resistance in the immigrant narrative, a theme that resonates deeply in the cinematic portrayal of migration. *Golden Door* exemplifies the innovative ways filmmakers approach the migrant experience, avoiding clichés like the iconic Statue of Liberty shot to present a fresh perspective. The film's fantastical elements, such as visions of giant carrots and money trees, reflect the dreams and aspirations of its Sicilian characters, illustrating the blend of hope and hardship that defines migration.

Scorsese's appreciation for this film highlights his broader belief in the power of cinema to delve into the complexities of migration with authenticity and emotional depth. Together, these works—*Italianamerican*, *Un Paese di Calabria*, *Golden Door*, and others—construct a vivid tapestry of migration, exploring it as more than a physical journey. They reveal migration as a navigation of cultural, temporal, and emotional spaces, shaping identities and communities in profound ways. By documenting the migrant experience, cinema captures the intricate balance between continuity and change, offering a platform for stories that might otherwise be marginalized. For migrant women in particular, these films resonate deeply. They affirm their role as cultural custodians and agents of transformation, responsible for preserving traditions while adapting to new realities. Women's narratives within these stories emphasize their resilience and creativity, showing them as vital contributors to both their homeland's legacy and their adopted country's identity. Through evocative storytelling and powerful imagery, cinema validates the experiences of migrant women, connecting the memories of the homeland with the realities of the present and the aspirations of the future. By bridging the past and the future, these films not only celebrate the migrant journey but also remind us of its universal significance in shaping who we are and who we can become.

VI. A TIMELESS TALE OF MIGRATION AND RESILIENCE

The 1971 film, directed by Luigi Zampa and featuring Alberto Sordi and Claudia Cardinale, remains a compelling blend of comedy and drama that delves into themes of immigration, loneliness, and the quest for a better life. Its unconventional love story resonates across decades, offering profound insights into human connection and the migrant experience. Set in the early 1970s, the narrative follows Amedeo Battipaglia, an Italian immigrant in Australia who lives in solitude and longs for a companion. Through the help of a local priest, he begins corresponding with Carmela, a young woman from Calabria residing in Rome. Both characters disguise their true identities: Amedeo claims to be a prosperous stationmaster, while Carmela conceals her work as a sex worker, portraying herself as a factory employee. Carmela's eventual journey to Australia sparks a series of challenges and revelations, forcing the characters to confront their vulnerabilities and reshaping their perceptions of each other.

The journey through the Australian landscape becomes a crucible of growth, as the pair face obstacles such as car breakdowns, illness, and moral reckonings.

Their relationship evolves amidst these trials, culminating in a bittersweet resolution where acceptance and love emerge despite their imperfections. A migrant woman in Germany today might find this story deeply relatable, recognizing in Carmela's journey the courage required to leave behind familiar hardships and seek renewal in an unfamiliar world. The film captures the universal tensions of survival and dignity while emphasizing the importance of community among those who share the migrant experience. Amedeo's isolation might echo the loneliness faced by many migrants, while the portrayal of solidarity within the Italian emigrant community highlights the necessity of support networks, even in the face of cultural and personal conflicts. This film transcends its era, reminding viewers of the shared dreams, struggles, and emotions that connect migrants across time and space. Its heartfelt performances and poignant exploration of resilience and human connection ensure its lasting impact as a reflection on the challenges and hopes of migration.

For a modern audience, it offers both a mirror and a source of solace, underscoring the enduring universality of the migrant experience.

VII. A PHILOSOPHICAL LENS ON MIGRATION IN ITALIAN CINEMA

Italian cinema has long served as a powerful medium for exploring the complex human experiences of migration, identity, and belonging. From the vivid nostalgia of *Amarcord* to the harsh realities of *La Terra Trema* and the intimate personal narratives of *Italianamerican*, these films offer profound insights into the struggles and resilience of migrant communities. Through evocative storytelling and rich imagery, Italian filmmakers have captured the dual forces of continuity and transformation that define the migrant journey, particularly for women who navigate the intricate balance between cultural preservation and adaptation. This paragraph examines key Italian migration films through a philosophical lens, connecting their narratives and themes to the ideas of thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas, Simone de Beauvoir, and Antonio Gramsci. Each film reveals a unique dimension of the migrant experience, from the existential dislocation portrayed in *Pane e Cioccolata* to the ethical encounters in *Io Sono Li* and the hybrid cultural spaces of *Un Paese di Calabria*. These cinematic works not only document the tangible realities of migration but also explain its metaphysical and existential aspects, offering universal meditations on memory, identity, and the human condition.

Central to these films is the figure of the migrant woman, often depicted as a cultural anchor and agent of transformation. Her stories reflect the dual burdens of preserving heritage and fostering integration, highlighting the resilience and creativity required to navigate displacement. Philosophical concepts such as Levinas' ethics of the Other, Butler's performative identity, and Gramsci's subalternity deepen our understanding of these narratives, illuminating the social, ethical, and personal dimensions of migration. By situating these films within broader philosophical frameworks, this essay seeks to uncover the universal truths embedded in their stories. Migration, as portrayed in Italian cinema, emerges not just as a journey of loss and dislocation but also as one of resilience, renewal, and connection. Through this exploration, we gain a richer appreciation of how cinema serves as both a mirror to migrant experiences and a bridge between past and future, offering timeless reflections on what it means to belong, adapt, and endure in an ever-changing world.

A. *Nuovomondo* (Golden Door) (2006, Emanuele Crialese)

Bergson, in *Matter and Memory*, distinguishes between two forms of memory: one tied to action and survival, and another that preserves the pure essence of the past. Fortunately, the

matriarch of the family, epitomizes this dynamic. Her steadfast adherence to rituals, beliefs, and traditions anchors the family's cultural identity amidst the uncertainty of migration. Her memories are not passive but active—they guide her decisions and give her strength, embodying Bergson's notion that memory is a living force. The fantastical elements of *Nuovomondo*, such as visions of giant carrots or rivers of milk, represent the aspirational dreams of migrants. Yet, these images also highlight the tension between reality and expectation, suggesting that memory and imagination intertwines to shape the migrant's perception of the future. Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* offers another lens through which to view *Nuovomondo*. Benjamin emphasizes the potential of cinema to democratize stories and make them universally resonant. Crialesè's avoidance of clichés, such as omitting the Statue of Liberty, underscores this philosophy. Instead, he uses surreal imagery and intimate character moments to convey the universal human experience of migration. Through this, the film moves beyond the particularities of one family's story to address broader themes of displacement, resilience, and hope.

Benjamin's ideas also highlight the role of cinema in preserving cultural memory. By capturing the rituals, dialects, and emotional struggles of the Sicilian family, *Nuovomondo* ensures that the migrant experience is not forgotten but transformed into a lasting cultural narrative. Fortunata's role as a custodian of memory and identity also intersects with feminist philosophy, particularly Simone de Beauvoir's reflections in *The Second Sex*. Fortunata's resilience and cultural preservation showcase the often-unseen labor of women in maintaining familial and cultural coherence during times of upheaval. Her character illustrates how women are not only victims of migration's challenges but also active agents in navigating and transforming their families' destinies. Ultimately, *Nuovomondo* underscores that migration is not just a physical journey but an existential and philosophical one. The film's blend of surrealism and realism reflects the dual nature of the migrant's experience: grounded in tangible struggles yet propelled by intangible hopes. It challenges the audience to empathize with the dislocation, resilience, and transformation that define the migrant journey, offering a deeply humanistic perspective on identity, belonging, and the meaning of home.

B. *Amarcord* (1973, Federico Fellini)

Ricoeur argues that memory is fundamentally narrative; it is shaped by storytelling and deeply intertwined with identity. In *Amarcord*, the town's characters, rituals, and seasons are

presented not as objective truths but as reconstructed memories. The film's title, which translates to "I remember," signals this subjective framing. Fellini's use of surrealism and exaggerated imagery reflects the embellishments and distortions inherent in memory. For migrant audiences, this resonates powerfully. The longing for a homeland is rarely tied to its exact reality but rather to an idealized version shaped by personal and communal stories. Ricoeur's insights highlight how *Amarcord* becomes a space where memory and identity converge, offering viewers a means to connect with their own pasts through the film's nostalgic lens.

Roland Barthes' idea of the *punctum*—the emotional detail within an image that pierces the viewer—further illuminates *Amarcord*'s impact. Fellini's richly detailed scenes, from the puffing of spring blossoms to the communal bonfires of celebration, create moments of visceral connection. These images evoke a sensory nostalgia, drawing viewers into a shared experience of warmth and belonging. For migrant women, such depictions may reflect their own fragmented memories of home, where specific details—a scent, a sound, a gesture—becomes carriers of profound emotional significance. Women in *Amarcord* play pivotal roles as symbols of continuity and resilience, embodying the cultural fabric of the community. From the matriarchal figures who anchor families to the elder women who embody communal wisdom, these characters mirror Simone de Beauvoir's reflections on women as custodians of tradition.

Migrant women, like those depicted in *Amarcord*, often find themselves tasked with preserving cultural practices and memories, ensuring that the past remains a vital part of their identity in foreign lands. Moreover, *Amarcord*'s dreamlike quality offers a reflection on the interplay between memory and imagination. Fellini's hyperbolic scenes remind viewers that memory is not a static repository but a living, evolving process. For migrants, this interplay often defines their relationship with their homeland. The embellished memories of home, shaped by distance and time, provide both solace and a sense of loss, reflecting the duality of nostalgia. Ultimately, *Amarcord* transcends its specific setting to become a universal meditation on memory, identity, and community. Through its evocative storytelling and philosophical depth, the film invites viewers to reflect on their own connections to the past. For migrants, especially women, *Amarcord* serves as a mirror and a balm, affirming the importance of cultural memory while acknowledging its fluid and transformative nature.

C. *Pane e Cioccolata* (1974, Franco Brusati)

Heidegger's *Unheimlichkeit* describes the sense of being “not at home” in the world, a condition that disrupts one's sense of self and belonging. In *Pane e Cioccolata*, Nino's attempts to assimilate into Swiss society underscore this existential dislocation. From dyeing his hair blond to adopting the cultural habits of the Swiss, his efforts reflect a desire to escape his “Italian-ness” and become part of the dominant culture. Yet, these attempts only amplify his estrangement, as he fails to find acceptance or authenticity in his new role. Heidegger's insights help us understand Nino's plight as a reflection of the migrant's broader existential condition—torn between the need to belong and the impossibility of fully erasing one's origins. Levinas' philosophy emphasizes the ethical responsibility to recognize and embrace the Other, a principle starkly absent in Nino's experiences. The film portrays the Swiss community as viewing Nino with suspicion, reducing him to stereotypes of the “dirty” and “uncultured” foreigner.

Levinas' call for ethical encounters that affirm the humanity of the other stands in stark contrast to the indifference and prejudice Nino faces. For migrant audiences, this depiction may resonate deeply, reflecting their struggles to find recognition and dignity in environments that marginalize them. While Nino's story centers on a male perspective, the themes of alienation and cultural preservation resonate equally with migrant women. For women, the added burden of maintaining familial and cultural traditions in a foreign land heightens their sense of dislocation. *Pane e Cioccolata's* exploration of survival and adaptation mirrors their dual struggle: to navigate the challenges of assimilation while preserving their identities for future generations. The film's blend of comedy and tragedy also invites reflection on the absurdities of cultural displacement. Nino's interactions with the Swiss, from his failures to master local customs to his eventual ostracization, reveal the painful contradictions of assimilation. These moments underscore the absurdity of trying to erase one's cultural roots to fit into a rigid mold of “acceptability.” This tension reflects Judith Butler's view in *Gender Trouble* that identity is inherently performative, shaped by external expectations and internal resistance.

D. *La Terra Trema* (1948, Luchino Visconti)

Philosophically, *La Terra Trema* resonates with Antonio Gramsci's theories on cultural hegemony and subalternity, as well as Hannah Arendt's reflections on displacement and the

fragility of human belonging. Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, from his *Prison Notebooks*, is a key lens through which to understand *La Terra Trema*. The fishermen are subjected to exploitative economic systems that dictate their lives, rendering them powerless to challenge the dominance of the wholesalers who control their labor and livelihood. This dynamic mirrors Gramsci's idea of the subaltern class—those marginalized within a hegemonic order who struggle to find agency and voice. The fishermen's failed rebellion against these oppressive forces reflects the systemic barriers faced by migrants, who often leave similar conditions of exploitation in search of better opportunities abroad. For viewers, this narrative highlights the cyclical nature of displacement, where economic precarity pushes individuals and communities into migration as a desperate escape.

Hannah Arendt's reflections in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* on statelessness and the loss of a "place in the world" also illuminate *La Terra Trema*. While the film is set in the fishermen's homeland, their socio-economic conditions render them metaphorically stateless, lacking agency and security within their own community. This condition parallels the experiences of migrants, particularly women, who often bear the emotional and cultural labor of preserving family cohesion amidst such upheaval. The silent, resilient presence of women in the film underscores their role as cultural anchors, even as their lives are shaped by the instability and sacrifices demanded by migration. The film's neorealist style, with its non-professional actors and stark visual portrayal of the Sicilian landscape, further emphasizes the material realities of the characters' lives. Yet, it is also deeply philosophical, exploring existential questions of belonging and identity.

Heidegger's concept of *Unheimlichkeit* (uncanniness) resonates here, as the characters' struggles reveal their estrangement not only from the economic system but also from their own sense of self and place. This tension between home as a physical space and home as a secure, meaningful existence is central to the migrant experience, making the film a profound meditation on the human condition. For migrant women, *La Terra Trema* reflects the dual burden of economic survival and cultural preservation. The mothers and daughters in the film, while largely silent, embody the strength required to maintain family unity and identity in the face of overwhelming adversity.

Their labor, often unseen, ensures the continuity of cultural traditions even as the forces of

displacement threaten to erode them.

E. *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli* (1960, Luchino Visconti)

Philosophically, the film aligns with Simone de Beauvoir’s reflections on gender and resilience in *The Second Sex* and Judith Butler’s theory of performative identity from *Gender Trouble*. At the heart of *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli* is the character of Rosaria, the family matriarch, who embodies Simone de Beauvoir’s conception of women’s dual role as preservers of tradition and mediators of change. Rosaria’s fierce commitment to Southern Italian values—family unity, honor, and cultural customs—becomes the emotional and moral compass for her sons. Yet, her rigidity also exposes the limitations of these values in a rapidly modernizing and urbanized Milan. Beauvoir’s insights into the societal constraints placed on women resonate here, as Rosaria’s attempts to anchor her family in tradition highlight the sacrifices and burdens shouldered by women in preserving cultural identity amidst displacement.

The sons’ divergent paths—Rocco’s moral idealism, Simone’s destructive ambition, and Ciro’s pragmatic adaptation—reflect the complex interplay between tradition and modernity. Judith Butler’s concept of identity as performative, shaped by context and social interactions, illuminates their struggles. Rocco’s unwavering adherence to familial and moral values, even at great personal cost, mirrors the tension between a fixed identity rooted in tradition and the fluid, evolving identity demanded by modern life. Meanwhile, Simone’s descent into violence and alienation illustrates the psychological toll of failing to reconcile these competing forces. Visconti’s depiction of the urban landscape further underscores this tension.

Milan, with its cold, industrial modernity, becomes a character in itself, representing the alienation and dislocation experienced by the family. Heidegger’s concept of *Unheimlichkeit* (uncanniness) is evident in the way the characters navigate this new environment. Despite being physically present in Milan, they remain spiritually and emotionally unmoored, struggling to find a sense of belonging. This existential displacement is a universal theme in migration narratives, resonating deeply with viewers who have experienced the loss of a “home” that is both physical and cultural. For migrant women, *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli* speaks to the often-unseen labor of maintaining familial and cultural cohesion in the face of disintegration. Rosaria’s character highlights the resilience required to preserve

traditions while navigating the pressures of assimilation. Her role as a cultural anchor ensures continuity but also reveals the cost of such labor, particularly in a world that demands constant adaptation.

F. *Io Sono Li* (2011, Andrea Segre)

Levinas' philosophy, particularly in *Totality and Infinity*, emphasizes the ethical responsibility to recognize and embrace the Other. In *Io Sono Li*, this is embodied in the evolving bond between Shun Li and Bepi. Despite their differences in language, culture, and age, their relationship transcends these barriers, highlighting Levinas' belief in the transformative power of human connection. Their friendship becomes a microcosm of the broader challenges and potential of intercultural relationships, reflecting the possibility of building bridges across divides. For Shun Li, Bepi represents a sense of belonging in an otherwise isolating environment, while for Bepi, Shun Li's presence rekindles a connection to his own migrant past. Judith Butler's theory of precarity, particularly from *Precarious Life*, offers another lens through which to view Shun Li's journey.

Butler argues that precariousness is a shared human condition, but it is disproportionately experienced by marginalized individuals. Shun Li's precarious existence—as a migrant, a single mother, and a woman—highlights the systemic vulnerabilities faced by those living on the fringes of society. Her quiet strength and resilience underscore the agency required to navigate these challenges, even as her circumstances remain defined by economic and social precarity. The film also engages with the idea of identity as fluid and relational, a theme central to Butler's work in *Gender Trouble*. Shun Li's identity evolves as she negotiates her place within the fishing village, balancing her cultural heritage with the demands of integration.

Her struggle to retain her Chinese roots while adapting to Italian society mirrors the broader migrant experience of living between worlds. This tension is not presented as a binary conflict but as a dynamic and ongoing negotiation, reflecting Butler's view of identity as performative and context-dependent. The fishing village itself serves as a metaphor for the liminal space occupied by migrants. Its quiet beauty and insular nature create a backdrop where the past and present coexist, mirroring Shun Li's inner journey. The presence of the sea, a recurring motif in the film, symbolizes both separation and connection—a reminder of the

distances crossed by migrants and the relationships forged in new lands.

G. Italianamerican (1974, Martin Scorsese)

Gramsci's concept of subalternity, as outlined in his *Prison Notebooks*, emphasizes the struggles of marginalized groups to maintain their cultural identity within a dominant hegemonic framework. In *Italianamerican*, Catherine and Charles embody this struggle, preserving their Italian heritage through language, recipes, and traditions while navigating life in America. Their anecdotes about their upbringing, migration, and community reflect the strategies employed by subaltern groups to resist cultural erasure. For Gramsci, the act of storytelling itself becomes a form of resistance, enabling marginalized voices to assert their identity and maintain their cultural legacies. Catherine's humorous and vivid recollections highlight the richness of this subaltern culture, transforming everyday experiences into a tapestry of resilience and pride.

Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations* provides another lens through which to view *Italianamerican*. Benjamin underscores the importance of storytelling in preserving cultural memory, particularly in the face of modernity's eroding effects. The documentary, through its informal and conversational style, becomes a living archive of the immigrant experience. Catherine's detailed descriptions of family recipes, for example, serve as more than culinary instructions—they are acts of cultural preservation, anchoring the family's identity in a tangible, enduring tradition. For migrant audiences, these moments resonate as affirmations of the power of seemingly mundane acts to sustain cultural heritage.

The film also explores the intergenerational dynamics of migration, particularly the tension between retaining one's roots and adapting to a new cultural context. Catherine and Charles' narratives reflect the complexities of maintaining a dual identity—simultaneously Italian and American. This duality aligns with Hannah Arendt's reflections in *The Human Condition* on the challenges of navigating plural identities in modern society. The film suggests that this negotiation is not a process of losing one identity for another but of creating a hybrid cultural space where both coexist.

H. Un Paese di Calabria (2016, Shu Aiello and Catherine Catella)

Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*, emphasizes the

loss of a “place in the world” experienced by displaced peoples. Arendt’s concept of statelessness, marked by the absence of rights and recognition, provides a lens through which to view the experiences of migrants arriving in Riace. Yet, in stark contrast to the dehumanization often associated with migration narratives, *Un Paese di Calabria* presents a story of inclusion and empowerment. By integrating migrants into the social and economic fabric of the village, Riace becomes a site of restoration—not only for those displaced but also for the local community struggling with depopulation. The film suggests that creating spaces of belonging for migrants can simultaneously address the existential disconnection faced by host communities. Levinas’ philosophy of the other, particularly in *Totality and Infinity*, deepens this narrative.

Levinas argues that ethical responsibility begins with the face-to-face encounter with the Other, recognizing their humanity and individuality. In *Un Paese di Calabria*, this ethical engagement is evident in the relationships between the townspeople and the migrants. The villagers, led by progressive leaders like the former mayor Domenico Lucano, extend hospitality not as a charity but as an acknowledgment of shared humanity. For Levinas, such encounters dismantle the barriers of prejudice and fear, fostering a sense of solidarity and interdependence.

The film also explores the role of women in bridging cultural divides and sustaining community life. Migrant women, in particular, are portrayed as active agents of transformation, contributing their skills, traditions, and labor to the village’s revival. This aligns with Simone de Beauvoir’s reflections in *The Second Sex* on the role of women as creators and preservers of cultural meaning. In Riace, women from diverse backgrounds collaborate to weave new narratives of belonging, blending traditions from their homelands with the local customs of Calabria.

Moreover, *Un Paese di Calabria* challenges stereotypes of migration by emphasizing its reciprocal benefits. The arrival of migrants breathes new life into the village’s economy, education, and cultural landscape, while the villagers offer migrants a chance to rebuild their lives with dignity. This dynamic reflects Antonio Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, where marginalized groups—both migrants and rural villagers—subvert dominant narratives to create alternative spaces of power and agency.

I. Bello, Onesto, Emigrato Australia Sposerebbe Compaesana Illibata (1971, Luigi Zampa)

Kierkegaard's notion of authenticity, particularly as discussed in *Either/Or* and *Fear and Trembling*, provides a lens to examine the characters' journey. Both Amedeo and Carmela begin their relationship under false pretenses, masking their true identities to present idealized versions of themselves. Amedeo, a lonely station worker, pretends to be a wealthy stationmaster, while Carmela hides her past as a sex worker, portraying herself as a respectable factory employee. Kierkegaard's idea that authenticity requires confronting one's vulnerabilities and embracing truth resonates in the film's arc, as both characters are eventually forced to reveal their real selves. Their acceptance of each other's imperfections becomes a testament to Kierkegaard's belief in the redemptive power of genuine human connection. Heidegger's concept of *Mitsein* (Being-with) from *Being and Time* also illuminates the dynamics between Amedeo and Carmela. Heidegger argues that human existence is inherently relational, shaped by our interactions with others. For migrants like Amedeo and Carmela, this relationality is intensified by the isolation and alienation of living in a foreign land. Their journey across the Australian landscape, marked by car breakdowns, illnesses, and mutual frustrations, becomes a metaphor for the existential challenge of forging meaningful connections in an unfamiliar world.

The film suggests that the process of overcoming these obstacles—both literal and emotional—is what ultimately fosters a deeper sense of belonging and companionship. The Australian landscape itself plays a significant role in the narrative, symbolizing both the vastness of opportunity and the loneliness of migration. Its wide, barren expanses reflect the existential solitude of Amedeo and Carmela, underscoring Heidegger's idea of *Unheimlichkeit* (uncanniness) as they navigate a world that feels alien and unfamiliar. Yet, their shared struggles within this landscape create a bond that transcends their individual insecurities, illustrating Heidegger's belief in the transformative potential of *Being-with-others*. For migrant women, the character of Carmela resonates deeply. Her courage in leaving behind her hardships in Calabria to seek a new life in Australia reflects the resilience and determination required of migrant women in overcoming societal stigmas and personal vulnerabilities. Her eventual honesty and acceptance of Amedeo suggest that authenticity and self-respect can serve as foundations for navigating displacement and forging meaningful relationships.

J. Conclusion: Migration as Resilience and Transformation

Italian cinema provides a unique and profound lens through which to explore the multifaceted experiences of migration. From the nostalgic reflections in *Amarcord* to the gritty realism of *La Terra Trema* and the poignant personal narratives of *Italianamerican*, these films document the interplay between memory, identity, and belonging. They delve into the challenges and triumphs faced by migrants, especially women, whose roles as custodians of tradition and agents of cultural adaptation are central to their journeys. Migration is portrayed not simply as a physical displacement but as a deeply existential process, reshaping identities and forging connections between past and present.

Philosophical perspectives, such as Levinas' ethics of the Other, Butler's performative identity, and Arendt's reflections on displacement, deepen our understanding of these cinematic narratives, offering universal insights into the migrant experience. Through their evocative storytelling and rich imagery, these films affirm that migration is as much about resilience and hope as it is about loss and longing. For migrant women, Italian cinema provides a mirror and a voice, validating their struggles while celebrating their pivotal role in shaping cultural and familial continuity. By bridging the past and the future, these stories illuminate the universal significance of migration in defining what it means to belong, adapt, and endure in an ever-changing world. Through this, Italian migration films transcend their specific contexts to offer timeless meditations on the resilience and creativity that define the human spirit.

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