TROPOS: COMUNICAÇÃO, SOCIEDADE E CULTURA

# THE SILENT RETURN OF THE SOUTH TO THE SOUTH: VERDONE'S PASQUALE AMETRANO AS A COUNTER-CHAPLIN[1]

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**ABSTRACT**
Carlo Verdone's 1981 film *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone* is counted among Italy's most loved comedy classics. The film contains the story of Pasquale Ametrano, a Southern Italian immigrant based in Munich who travels across Italy in order to vote in his hometown Matera. In this article we interrogate the figure of Pasquale in order to unveil the ways in which the film captures fundamental aspects of the experiences, identities and representations of diasporic subjects returning to Italy. In particular, we argue that Pasquale's journey from the North to the South of Italy is a metaphor of the ruthless plunder that characterises the violent annexation of the South during the Unification period. Furthermore, we discuss the obstinate silence of the character, reading it both as a metaphor for his imposed voicelessness and as a political act that utters indignation against those who marginalise him. Finally, we compare Pasquale's final rant with the last speech of Chaplin's tramp in *The Great Dictator*.
**KEYWORDS:**Carlo Verdone; Emigration; Southern Italy; Unified Italy; Comedy.

# O SILENCIOSO RETORNO DO SUL AO SUL: O PASQUALE AMETRANO DE VERDONE COMO CONTRA-CHAPLIN

**RESUMO**
O filme de Carlo Verdone, *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone*, de 1981, é considerado uma das comédias mais amadas da Itália. O filme contém a história de Pasquale Ametrano, um imigrante do Sul da Itália que mora em Munique, e que viaja do Norte ao Sul da Itália para votar em sua cidade natal, Matera. Neste artigo, interrogamos a figura de Pasquale, a fim de desenterrar as formas em que o filme captura aspectos fundamentais das experiências, identidades e representações de sujeitos diaspóricos que voltam à Itália. Em particular, argumentamos que a viagem de Pasquale do Norte para o Sul da Itália é uma metáfora da pilhagem cruel que caracterizou a violenta anexação do Sul durante o período da Unificação italiana. Além disso, discutimos o obstinado silêncio do personagem de Pasquale, interpretando-o por um lado como uma metáfora para a sua

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impotência imposta, e por outro como um ato político que exprime indignação contra aqueles que o marginalizam. Por fim, comparamos o discurso final de Pasquale com o último discurso do vagabundo de Chaplin em *O Grande Ditador*.
**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Carlo Verdone; Emigração; Sul da Itália; Itália Unificada; Comédia.

## INTRODUCTION[4]

Carlo Verdone's 1981 film *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone* (VERDONE, 1981) is counted among Italy's most loved comedy classics. As per one of Verdone's favourite mise-en-scéne formulas, the film contains three main storylines. With each of these storylines featuring one character played by Verdone himself, the same lead actor appears in three different roles in the same film. The three storylines revolve around the same general event, namely, the Italian national elections. Each of the three characters embark upon a road trip in order to reach the city of their respective polling station.

In line with our previous proposal of "South-verting Italian Studies" (PUGLIESE & MESSINA, 2017), we want to complicate common readings of *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone* as a national classic and "'Italian style' comedy" (DI CARMINE, 2013, p. 470) by focussing on the implicit critique of national unity contained in Verdone's interpretation of the character Pasquale Ametrano, a Southern Italian immigrant based in Munich. In order to vote, Pasquale needs to reach his hometown, Matera, Basilicata. The plot of the episode is well known. The action begins in Munich, where Pasquale bids his wife farewell. He briefly meets with his fellow Italian national friends before travelling to Italy. After entering Northern Italy at the Brenner Pass, Pasquale takes the motorway toward Matera. During the journey, he is repeatedly robbed of valuables and car parts. Having finally arrived in Matera in a state of physical and emotional disrepair, he heads straight to the polling station.

Importantly, for the entire duration of the film, up until his arrival at the polling station, Pasquale does not utter a single word. He only interacts with his interlocutors by gesticulating, nodding, laughing, whistling and grunting. It is only at the polling station, before dropping his vote in the ballot box, that he finally speaks. In a semi-incomprehensible language, he addresses the members of the polling station committee with a long rant about his disastrous journey through Italy. The rant ends with a clearly

[4] An earlier and shorter version of this paper was published in Italian (MESSINA & CAPOGRECO, 2017).

intelligible imperative expression that roughly translates as "up your arse you all!"[5] (VERDONE, 1981).

## A COMMENTARY ON EMIGRATION FROM SOUTHERN ITALY

After a brief road scene in which the context of the national election is diegetically announced by a radio programme, the film starts with Pasquale waking up in Munich. Immediately following his rant in the polling station, the film ends. Framing in this way the other two storylines, Pasquale's episode arguably functions as an interpretive key to the entire film, which, as it has been noted, contains implicit commentary on emigration from Southern Italy (ZACCAGNINI, 2009, p. 94).

Importantly, *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone* was produced by Sergio Leone, whose engagement with issues regarding the North/South racialised divide in Italy has been unearthed by Joseph Pugliese (2017). Pretty much as Pugliese South-verts common national narratives on Spaghetti Westerns, we want to interrogate the figure of Pasquale in order to unveil the ways in which the film captures fundamental aspects of the experiences, identities and representations of diasporic subjects returning to Italy.

Italian literature, culture and society are marked by a characteristic "failure to represent the actual communities and lives that migrants [have] established outside the Italian nation" (PUGLIESE, 2007a, p. 196). The oblivion of the diasporic Italian subject, together with Italy's silence on the myriad Italian communities, neighbourhoods and ghettos around the world past and present, is associated with two main cultural tendencies. The first tendency is a historical snobbery of the cultural elites, who traditionally marginalised the humble stories of the (mainly Southern) emigrants. (GRAMSCI *apud* MAGNANI, 2015, p. 262). The second tendency is a national desire to achieve (xenophobic) distance from immigrants settling in Italy over the past 30 years (ORSINI, 2009). In other words, the oblivion of the (e)migrant is a function of Italy's doubly-articulating racialised axis of national exclusion: the Southerner (*terrone/meridionale*) as incorporable Other; and the *sottoterrone/extracomunitario* as absolute Other (PUGLIESE, 2008). In this context, we might read the obstinate silence of Pasquale as metaphor for the voicelessness and oblivion of myriad stories of migration from/to Italy: he does not talk, but in reality, nobody wants to hear him.

[5] "Annate tutti a già nder culo!"

Importantly, Pasquale is as wordless with his Italian as with his German interlocutors, including his wife in Munich. While parked at a service area on the motorway, he hears a group of German tourists chatting and laughing about something involving spaghetti. He begins to laugh with them, but noticing Pasquale's attempt to establish empathetic contact with them, they stop laughing and turn their backs on him. In line with Sayad's concept of "double absence" (SAYAD, 2002), Pasquale is a stranger to both his native Italy, and his host country Germany:

> The immigrant, as a non-national, is excluded from political rights; the emigrant, absent from the national (or from the nation) is de facto excluded from the political. […] Thus, the double political exclusion that creates the immigrant and the emigrant – exclusion by law in the case of the immigrant and exclusion de facto in the case of the emigrant – corresponds to a rejection, and to a negation of the right to life, of what civic identity contains in itself: personal identity, which is one of its effects (SAYAD, 2013, pp. 70-71).[6]

It is worth noting that Pasquale's journey happens precisely to perform and fulfil a civic right/duty – that of voting – that is fundamental to the modern definition of citizenship. The more this journey unfolds as a total failure, the more Pasquale's civic/personal identity is reconsidered and destabilised.

By flagging and denouncing the double oblivion of the migrant in Italian culture we are by no means pretending to ignore the existence, prior to *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone*, of several films, books, songs and other productions on the subject: rather, we are simply stating that the many valid and convincing works on Italian migrants outside the national territory do not amount to a corpus that is quantitatively representative of the proportion of the phenomenon. We are grateful to the colleague who, in their anonymous review of a previous version of this work, pointed our attention to excellent films such as *Pane e cioccolata* (*Bread and Chocolate*, BRUSATI, 1973) and *Bello onesto emigrato Australia sposerebbe compaesana illibata* (*A Girl in Australia*, ZAMPA, 1971), that also address the lives and trajectories of Italian migrants abroad. However, for the sake of this particular work, we were and are not specifically interested in a comprehensive comparative approach on Verdone's film – Pasquale

[6] "L'immigrato, essendo non-nazionale, è escluso dal diritto politico; l'emigrato, in quanto assente dal nazionale (o dalla nazione) è escluso di fatto dal politico. [..] Così, la doppia esclusione politica che fa l'immigrato e l'emigrato – esclusione di diritto nel caso dell'immigrato e esclusione di fatto nel caso dell'emigrato – equivale ad un rifiuto, e ad una negazione del diritto alla vita, in ciò che l'identità civile (o civica) contiene in sé: l'identità personale che è uno dei suoi effetti".

Ametrano's silence is perfectly intelligible, even without erudite encyclopaedic reviews of Italian Cinema.

Pasquale's vow of silence is not just metaphor for his imposed voicelessness; it signals active and insistent protest, a political act uttering indignation against those who marginalise him. Drawing on Joseph Pugliese's caustic analyses of the protests of detainees in South Australia's Woomera Detention centre and in Guantánamo Bay's detention camp, we argue that Pasquale's silence is a "corporeal speech act of circumlocutionary refusal" (PUGLIESE, 2016, p. 117), that "challenges the nation to the edge of reason and language" (PUGLIESE, 2002a). The context of Pasquale's condition validates our unorthodox correlation of these instances of brutal state violence with a light-hearted comedy on a returning Southern Italian immigrant. Pasquale's positionality as a Southern Italian migrant is necessarily inscribed in a history of ruthless plunder of the South, marked by numerous episodes of violence against the local populations (PUGLIESE, 2008; MESSINA & DI SOMMA, 2017). These events served to establish and confirm Italy's North-centric national identity at crucial junctures such as the *Risorgimento* and the end of World War II.

Here we take another cue from the aforementioned anonymous reviewer, who protested about the fact that we had allegedly confused the concept of "Southern Italian" with that of "Italian expat". Due to the low word limit prescribed by the journal to which the previous version of this paper was submitted, we did not have space, on that occasion, to elucubrate on such a self-evident distinction. However, seen that we now have space for more words, we are happy to take up the challenge posed by the colleague, precisely by drawing on Zampa's film *Bello onesto emigrato Australia sposerebbe compaesana illibata* (1971).

At the beginning of the film, the protagonist Amedeo, interpreted by Alberto Sordi, is looking for a wife. Anglo-Celtic Australian women, for Amedeo's own admission, "are not into"[7] Italian immigrants (*apud* ZAMPA, 1971). Therefore, Amedeo attends ballroom Italian parties with other expats, at the Italian Club "Casa dell'Emigrante" ("Emigrant's House"): during these events, dozens diasporic Italian men queue to ask the same three Italian women to dance. The women punctually decline the offer, responding with their markedly Southern accents, only to go for their

[7] "Con noi le australiane non ce stanno".

actual dates, who are also lining at some point in the queue. Refused by all of the three women in the club, Amedeo comments: "is there only these women here? It's only three of them; they're hairy, and even fussy!"[8] (*apud* ZAMPA, 1971). Later on, visiting the place of his friend Giuseppe, Amedeo finds a naked blonde woman sleeping in the bed: astonished, but also full of admiration towards his friend, he asks whether she's "Australian"[9] (*apud* ZAMPA, 1971), and then wonders how Giuseppe manages to date Australian women, seen that they would not normally go out with Italians: "How is that Australian girls are not into us, but then you date a new one each week?" (*apud* ZAMPA, 1971).[10]

In Amedeo's judgement, the "hairy" Southern woman's refusal to dance is offensive and unacceptable, while the *australiana*'s social and racial snobbery towards Italian expats is totally inscribed in the natural order of things. In light of Amedeo's positionality as a man from Rome, his depreciation of Southern women exemplifies well the Central/Northern Italian expats' anxiety to distance and distinguish themselves from Southerners. Pugliese (2002b, p. 159) mentions the complicity of Northern Italians, together with the Italian State, in instructing immigration officials in foreign countries as to the alleged racial difference between Northerners and Southerners.

In his correspondence with Northern Italian expat Anthony Chiuminatto, acclaimed Piedmontese writer Cesare Pavese was keen to educate his interlocutor, upset about the poor reputations of Italians in the US, as to this difference between Northerners and Southerners:

> you must not forget that we Italians are two distinct nations, the North and the South, and that we are the Northern and the Chicagoans gunmen are the Southern and there is a deeper difference of race and history between us and them that nothing could repair (PAVESE *apud* PAVESE & CHIUMINATTO, 2007, p. 100).

This rather hateful statement literally functions as an epiphany for Chiuminatto, who, in his reply to Pavese, could now turn his depression for being a racialised Italian subject into hatred against Southern Italians, and, more precisely, against Sicilians:

> I'm all hot and bothered by these damn Sicilian gunmen who have never done a damn thing but ruin the reputation of Italy. They are

[8] "Ma le *women* so' tutte queste? Tre, pelose, e pure presuntuose!"
[9] "È australiana?"
[10] "Ma com'è che con noi le australiane non ce stanno e tu ne cambi una alla settimana?"

> pimps, procurers and brothel keepers; they are assassins, usurers, and muscle-men, which means that they use threatening means to an end; [...] It's all well and good for you to remind me that Italians are distinctly in two classes, the Northern and the Southern (CHIUMINATTO *apud* PAVESE & CHIUMINATTO, 2007, p. 104).

The exchange between Pavese and Chiuminatto is emblematic of the redemptive role that the violent depreciation, demonisation and racialisation of Southern Italians assumed in the context of the Italian expats' struggle to assimilate within Anglo/Euro/white societies. In other words, the Northern Italian expat who is preoccupied with their own reputation within their host country may often resort to a violent disavowal of Southern Italians in order to ascend to a state of better assimilation within the local population. Incidentally, we want to clarify that Pavese's professed anti-Southern hatred should not be understood as a contradiction to the antifascist militancy for which he is renowned and celebrated in Italy. In fact, as abundantly shown elsewhere, the Italian left has historically participated in the discursive and material marginalisation of the Italian South and its inhabitants (DINES, 2014; MESSINA, 2016).

In light of all this, we take on board the anonymous reviewer's suggestion as to flagging the difference between "Southern Italian" and "Italian expat": to a limited extent, the distinction between these two concepts assumes political relevance precisely on the ground of the tendency of a subgroup of Italian expats (i.e. Central/Northern Italians) to violently differentiate themselves from Southerners. Importantly, the way assumptions on race operate to legitimate the discrimination of Southern Italians is key to understand Italian society, both in internal and in diasporic contexts.

Now, the way in which Verdone constructs Pasquale's physical presence conveys his body as irremediably unassimilable to the context in which he is transiting. For example, Pasquale spends most of the film with his t-shirt rolled up to show his hairy belly and chest, and this visibly disgusts most of his interlocutors. Pasquale's bodily incompatibility, we contend, possesses clear racial overtones: he is a racial Other that crosses a foreign territory, Italy, mistaking it for his own. Taking advantage again of the anonymous reviewer's suggestions, we put Pasquale on a par with Nino in *Pane e cioccolata* (BRUSATI, 1973): both characters are irremediably unassimilable with their respective context of action. In *Pane e cioccolata*, Nino struggles against a state and a

society that obstinately and meticulously police his body, to the point that he receives an expulsion order for public indecency, after being photographed by passers-by while urinating in the street: "holy damn! Of all the amenities that are there in Switzerland, couldn't they think about anything else to photograph?" (*apud* BRUSATI, 1973).[11]

*Pane e cioccolata*, as it has already been argued (cf. MORAVIA, 1973), has the undeniable merit of exposing the operativity of race in the context of the relations between (Southern) Italian immigrants and the white Northern European population of the host country – Switzerland, in this case. As Alberto Moravia brilliantly put it, the key moment in this sense is a long, grotesque sequence where Nino ends up in a chicken coop, literally inhabited by (again, Southern) Italian illegal immigrants, who live and work there clandestinely in order to avoid deportation. At some point, the conversation between Nino and the chicken coop workers is interrupted by the arrival of "the boss's children, with their friends" (*apud* BRUSATI, 1973),[12] who get naked and take a bath in a nearby pond. From the wired netting of the chicken coop window, the workers admire the ethereal whiteness of these female and male bodies, with their long fair hairs and pale naked skins: "They're beautiful, aren't they? Beautiful!" (*apud* BRUSATI, 1973).[13] These white subjects perform territorial sovereignty over the postcardy land in which they exist, in contraposition to the workers who are literally (and visually, by means of the wired poultry netting) confined in a space that is normally for chickens. Moreover, these white subjects enjoy a much higher degree of bodily self-determination than their spectators, whose bodies are covered in feathers, and constricted into non-upright postures, due to the limited height of the chicken coop ceiling. Their naked bodies, importantly, are not even imaginable as being liable to prosecution for public indecency in the same way Nino is for urinating in the street: their whiteness is represented and constructed as conveying reason, order, rectitude and perfection.

This episode is followed by Nino's decision to dye his hair blonde, and this new look triggers a climax of successful assimilation with the local white population. At the end of this climax, however, Nino looks at his own reflected image and head-butts the mirror that stands in front of him, smashing it in pieces and getting wounded by the

[11] "Porco Giuda, con tutte le bellezze che ce stanno in Svizzera, non ci avevano artro da fotografa' questi?"
[12] "I figli del padrone, con gli amici".
[13] "Belli, eh? Belli!"

glass shards. This significant scene is an eloquent rendition of the violent and contradictory path to which the immigrant is subjected in order to achieve assimilation (cf. PUGLIESE, 1995). The broken mirror here is a clear metaphor of a fragmented identity, that conducts the subject to a state of perennial irreconcilability.

Back to *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone,* Pasquale Ametrano's vow of silence is readable as an extreme act of dissension that is directed precisely at the same narratives of assimilation that Nino destroys so eloquently in *Pane e cioccolata*. While the latter film explicitly visualises the haunting presence of whiteness and its constant normativity in the experience of the Mediterranean immigrant in Northern Europe, this is not shown as clearly in *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone*, where the failed (re)assimilation of the subject is universalised, to the point of deconstructing the professed unity of the nation. Pasquale's journey is no longer populated by the white blonde spectres that perturb, and at the same time orientate,[14] the bodies, lives and aspirations of Nino and his fellow expats: in *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone*, the spectres are mainly Pasquale's fellow Italians, who generally do not bear the same melanic traits as the Swiss in *Pane e cioccolata*.

Importantly, the absence of a visual commentary on melanic completion does hardly make race irrelevant to the vicissitudes of Pasquale, whose racial Otherness as a Southerner within the national Italian context is suggested by means of his bizarre appearance, of his incomprehensible vernacular, of his silent interaction with his surroundings, etc.

## RETURNING ELSEWHERE (AND BEING REPEATEDLY PLUNDERED)

Another fundamental difference that exists between Italian expats and Southern Italian expats is based on the fact that, when these two categories return to Italy, the latter group is almost always forced to return elsewhere. Long-haul international flight very seldom land in Southern airports (MAFFEO, 2011, p. 55), international maritime routes from/to Southern ports are also scarce (DI PAOLA, 2010), and international terrestrial connections, for obvious geographical reasons, can only happen across the Northern Alpine borders, as the rest of Italy is surrounded by the sea.

[14] On whiteness as orientation, see Ahmed (2007).

In *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone*, Pasquale's arrival in what he considers his homeland starts precisely after he crosses a mountain pass through the Alps, namely, at the Brenner Pass, a Northern Italian border that lies a thousand kilometres away from Matera. His enthusiastic, if wordless, interlocution with a Sicilian guard – another diasporic Southern Italian, as noted by Zaccagnini (2009, p. 94) – at the border passport control is only a momentary illusion, as he is robbed several times on his road trip through the North to reach the South. These repeated thefts restage and replicate the plunder and the violence inscribed in the collective Southern history individually incarnated by Pasquale. The nature of Pasquale's return to the south, which takes place elsewhere (through the North) bears as an allegory for the myth of the Italian nation. The returning Southerner is required, through literally traversing Northern coordinates of the nation, to internalise their own alterity in order for the myth of a territorially "integral Italy" to remain feasible (PANDOLFI, 1998, p. 285). Before returning to his effective homeland, Pasquale is pillaged to a point that literally leaves him emptied and naked at the end of the journey.

Whilst the majority of the robberies Pasquale endures take place in the North, however, the final and most violent episode unfolds in Caianiello, near Naples. After finding himself ripped off at a very expensive pizzeria and encountering a homeless man who sleeps amongst rubbish, Pasquale returns to his car to discover his driver's seat and windshield are stolen. Infuriated, he steals the hubcaps from a nearby car, only to be caught by four angry local residents who subject him to an aggravated beating. Whilst Verdone represents robbery as taking place across the national territory, this unmistakably malicious scene draws on stereotypical narratives which cast Naples as a violent and aberrant city (cf. DINES, 2013).

## THE *ITALIANO MEDIO* AS *TERRONE* IN POPULAR ITALIAN CULTURE

For Verdone's own admission, another salient component of *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone* is the representation of Pasquale as an *italiano medio* (average Italian), that is, a mediocre subject that embodies the vices and weaknesses of the nation (VERDONE *apud* MASTRANTONIO, 2013). The *italiano medio* is frequently represented as a Southern subject in popular Italian culture, as a brief and non-exhaustive survey of national audio-visual production can perhaps confirm.

A paradigmatic cinematic manifestation of this cliché is represented by two works by Maccio Capatonda, both titled *Italiano medio*: namely a mock movie trailer (CAPATONDA, 2011) and an actual feature film (CAPATONDA, 2015) that followed from the success of the trailer. In both works, a transformation of the protagonist from exemplary citizen into *italiano medio* corresponds to a change of accent, from "standard" pronunciation to marked Southern inflections. *L'italiano medio* is also the title of a record single by Milanese hip-hop band Articolo 31 (2004), whose lyrics describe the average Italian as a lazy, ignorant, dodgy simpleton: the protagonist of the song's video, who plays the role of the *italiano medio*, is Pasquale Catozzo, a Neapolitan character of the TV puppet show *I Munchies* (CUTRINO, 2003). Both in the music video and in the TV show, Catozzo is characterised as the typical racist stereotype of the Southern man: he wears a sleeveless white T-shirt, his beard is overgrown, and his manners are rude and impolite. In the TV show, Catozzo makes prank phone calls to real people and institutions, promoting to them, in a markedly Southern accent, illegal businesses (including pimping, bankruptcy and car insurance frauds). In a typical Northern Italian fashion, some of Catozzo's interlocutors tell him to go and learn proper Italian as a response.

Skiantos's song *Italiano, terrone che amo* ("Italian: a *terrone* whom I love") (SKIANTOS, 1992), draws on the same racist imagery that produced Pasquale Catozzo: in Skiantos's song, the typical Italian subject is profiled as a "chubby, short and dark"[15] *terrone*, and then described in terms of a set of flaws, such as clumsiness,[16] corruption,[17] bad personal care and poor personal hygiene, embodied by a "sleeveless T-shirt with a hole"[18] and a "sweaty T-shirt".[19] The song's refrain hatefully scorns Southerners: "I love you, *terrone*, I love you, with your golden necklace and your pasta with tomato sauce"[20] (SKIANTOS, 1992), and is abundantly used in derogatory manifestations, such as a hateful football chant that Hellas Verona's fans and manager sung against Salernitana in 2011 (LA REPUBBLICA, 2011).

[15] "Tondo, basso e moro"
[16] "Pasticcione"
[17] "Non gli togli la mazzetta" ("You can't dissuade him from bribery")
[18] "Canottiera bucata".
[19] "Maglietta sudata".
[20] "Ti amo terrone, ti amo, con la catena d'oro, la pasta al pomodoro".

Closely related to Skiantos due to the goliardic and humorous tenor of their music, Elio e le Storie Tese also draw abundantly on the characterisation of the average Italian as *terrone*. The song *La vendetta del fantasma formaggino* (BELISARI et al., 1992) focus on the character of "the Italian", who normally outwits the "Brit" and the "French" in Italian jokes. At the end of the song, the clever and dodgy Italian emerges as a subject with a marked Southern inflection, who yells about "pizza" and sings the classic Neapolitan song *I' te vurria vasà* (RUSSO & DI CAPUA, 1900) in order to invoke the "god of jokes"[21] (BELISARI et al., 1992). This last character is in turn interpreted by the notorious *terrunciello*, a stereotyped diasporic Southern character played by comedian Diego Abatantuono.[22] Another song by Elio e le Storie Tese, *Mio cuggino* (BELISARI et al., 1996), is about urban legends, and features a dialogue between the band's lead singer Elio, who tells stories imitating a Neapolitan accent, and comedian Aldo Baglio, who credulously voices astonishment at Elio's urban myths, by yelling in his characteristic Sicilian accent. Needless to say, both Abatantuono and Baglio, as well as a myriad of other comedians, abundantly base their sketches on the cliché of the mediocre and simple-minded *terrone*.

Overall, Italian culture abundantly depicts the *italiano medio* as a repulsive, unintelligent, uneducated and dodgy *terrone*. Importantly, the *italiano medio* as Southerner apparently seems to deny representations of the South as Other (DICKIE, 1994) or as negation of an imagined national norm (GRIBAUDI, 1997), but in reality reinforces them, by assigning mediocrity to Southerners and locating the Central/Northern Italian norm above this mediocrity. The *italiano medio*, in this sense, is saturated and demarcated with all the trappings of Southern Italianness as *terrone*.

Similarly, in *Bianco, Rosso e Verdone*, Pasquale Ametrano's personality, inclinations and aspirations emerge in terms of both *averageness* and *Southerness*. He contemplates affectionately his bedroom poster of 1970s/80s Juventus footballer Franco Causio, a Southern subject that at the time played for Italy's most loved (Northern) team, especially amongst diasporic Southerners. Moreover, he drives an Alfasud, an extremely popular car, built in Pomigliano D'Arco (Naples) by a branch of Lombard car company Alfa Romeo, which historically figures as a failed attempt to "transfer" the

[21] "Il re delle barzellette"

[22] On the trajectory of the *terrunciello*, interpreted by both Diego Abatantuono and Giorgio Porcaro, see Stornelli (1998, pp. 7-19)

benefits of Northern industrialisation to the South (BASILE & ESPOSITO, 2009, pp. 197-198).

Pasquale's personality, then, is engineered from the perspective of a dominant Italian sensibility that implicitly associates mediocrity with cultural markers evoking Southern aspiration for national recognition. Both Causio and the Alfasud embody a collective Southern struggle to conform to a Northern model, be it a model of industrial productivity or of sporting excellence. The North-centric white Italian nation normally imagines itself above this struggle, thus assigning mediocrity to the South, or, in the case of Pasquale, to the diasporic Southern subject. While sympathising with Pasquale by staging his silent protest, Verdone also mocks and belittles him by inviting the audience to laugh mercilessly at his constructed Southern mediocrity.

## PASQUALE AS A COUNTER-CHAPLIN

Verdone's performance conveys Pasquale to be quite a bizarre person. He is extremely childish for his age, to the point of buying teddy bears and envying a little girl that is eating a lollipop. Moreover, he is manifestly lacking social skills, as attested to by the aforementioned scene with the German tourists, and by the encounter that follows in which two hitchhikers on the motorway refuse his offer of a lift, disgusted by him. As abundantly discussed above, Pasquale's physical presence is also worth noting. He spends, as already noted, most of the film with his t-shirt rolled up to show his hairy belly and chest. What is more, Verdone embellishes this utterly awkward look by means of silly facial expressions, portraying Pasquale as a simpleton. All these elements construct Pasquale as irremediably Other: a Southern, expatriated, uncommunicative, awkward-looking and unintelligent subject whose persona is intentionally constructed as the subject of the audience's derision.

However, it is also significant that Verdone's performance of Pasquale draws abundantly on silent slapstick comedy, which normally relies on bizarreness, childishness and awkwardness alongside a lack of verbal communication. In this sense, Pasquale's vow of silence can be compared to Buster Keaton's refusal to smile in his films, or to the continual silence of Chaplin's tramp character, which lasted way beyond

the introduction of sound films at the end of the 1920s.[23] Like Verdone's Pasquale, Chaplin's tramp is an eternal outsider, reincarnating, from film to film, as a homeless man, an immigrant, an exploited worker and finally an imprisoned Jewish barber in 1940s Germany.[24] At the end of this trajectory, stretched out across numerous films, the tramp breaks his silence in the 1940 film *The Great Dictator*, to send a cathartic message of peace and unity to the whole of humanity: this famous speech marks also the tramp's last act in Chaplin's production.

Pasquale, similarly to the tramp, breaks his silence at the end of his journey, but only to declare and reinforce his non-conformity to the national communities he is supposed to be part of. Pasquale's *Lucano* language, incomprehensible to Italians (and to Germans), finds its meaning lost between the normative linguistic power of the two nations, while Chaplin's refined British English signifies as a lingua franca to be understood by the whole world. Before *The Great Dictator*, the tramp often used to walk "away into the distance", giving "no solution" to the plot (EISENSTEIN, 2010, p. 53).[25] Verdone seems to imitate and parody even this aspect of Chaplin's cinema, as after his rant Pasquale turns his back to the camera and walks away. Contrarily to many of Verdone's characters, Pasquale Ametrano does not appear in other films, and leaves his anti-cathartic rant as a testament: he is a counter-Chaplin who staunchly refuses – and is refused by – the national ground on which a conciliation with humankind is supposed to take place.

[23] Alberto Moravia described Nino Manfredi's performance of Nino in *Pane e cioccolata* as "Chaplinian" (MORAVIA, 1973).
[24] We refer respectively to: *The Immigrant* (CHAPLIN, 1917); *City Lights* (CHAPLIN, 1931); *Modern Times* (CHAPLIN, 1931); and *The Great Dictator* (CHAPLIN, 1940).
[25] Eisenstein probably refers to films like *Modern Times* (CHAPLIN, 1931), and *The Circus* (CHAPLIN, 1928).

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