

【Film Criticism】

Migration, Gender and Multicultural Identity in Laura Bispuri's *Vergine Giurata*

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ラウラ・ビスプリ『処女の誓い』における
移民・ジェンダー・多元的アイデンティティー

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ABSTRACT

Laura Bispuri's debut feature *Vergine giurata* (Sworn Virgin, 2015) is a powerful reflection on diversity at many levels, as well as on the process of migration as a means to reclaim one's own identity. Loosely based on Elvira Dones's novel of the same title (2007), the film tells the story of Hana/Mark, a young woman living in the Northern mountains of Albania, who chooses to become a *virgineshë*, or sworn virgin. According to the Kanun, a set of laws that rules rural life in the area, some women can, through a vow of chastity, renounce their female identity and start living as men, enjoying the privileges given by that status. A migration to nearby Italy and the encounter with different social settings, however, will make her question her own identity.

By tracing Hana's and the other characters' transitions, this paper will analyse how issues of gender, sexuality, migration and identity are represented in the film, and how these categories are intertwined with each other. In doing so, the paper will reflect on the ethogenic function (Gianturco & Peruzzi 2015) of migration films – their power to recognise social inequalities and promote processes of positive socialization, in particular toward the socially marginalized, in order to facilitate social change.

KEYWORDS

Sworn Virgin, Migration Films, Multicultural Identity,
Gender

要 旨

2007年のエルヴィラ・ドネスの同名小説に想を得たラウラ・ビスプリア監督の長編デビュー『処女の誓い』(『Vergine giurata』、直訳「宣誓処女」2015年)は、アルバニアの北山に住んでいて、宣誓処女(virgineshë)になったハナ/マークの物語である。山奥での生活を支配する法律「カヌン」によって純潔を誓うことで、女性のハナがマークという男性へと変わることができ、男性の特権を得ることができる。しかし、イタリアの都市的社會へ移住することによって、ハナ/マークは自らのアイデンティティーを疑い、本来の自己同一性を取り戻すプロセスを考察する。本稿では、ハナと他の人物の移動をたどることによって、この映画が描かれる移民、アイデンティティー、ジェンダー、セクシュアリティというカテゴリーに注目しながら、移民映画のエソジェニックな役割(ジャントウルコ&ペルッツィ 2015)、つまり社會の不平等を認めた上、寛容度の高い社會を創造する力と重要性について考察を加えたい。

キーワード

宣誓処女、移民映画、多元的アイデンティティー、ジェンダー

Introduction

Poetic and gruff at the same time, Laura Bispuri's debut feature *Vergine giurata* (*Sworn Virgin*, 2015) is a powerful, important reflection on diversity at many levels, as well as on the process of migration as a means to reclaim one's own identity¹. Loosely based on Albanian writer Elvira Dones's novel of the same title (2007), the film tells the story of Hana (Alba Rohrwacher), a young woman living in the Northern mountains of Albania, in the majestic, wild scenery of the Dinaric Alps, not far from the border with Kosovo. Moved by a sense of gratitude towards an old uncle who saved her as an orphan, and by a sense of oppression arising from the limited space and rights given to women in such a rural segment of society, Hana decides, once adult, to become a *virgineshë*, or sworn virgin. With a simple ritual performed in front of other men, she makes a vow of long-life chastity, has her hair cut and starts dressing and behaving as a male. This is made possible by a passage in the Kanun, a set of oral laws orally transmitted for centuries and first transcribed at the beginning of the twentieth century. These laws rule rural life in the area, giving directions on religion, property, work, honour, family and marriage issues. According to this code, in families who lack male progenies, or have lost their males to blood-feuds, some women can renounce their female identity

1 An Italy-Germany-Switzerland-Albania-Kosovo production, the film was produced by Vivo Film in co-production with Colorado Film, Bord Cadre Films, Match Factory Production, Era Film, Rai Cinema and RSI Televisione Svizzera.

and start living as men, enjoying the privileges given by that status.

However, with the migration of her beloved adopted sister Lila (Flonja Kodheli) to Italy and the loss of the other members of the family, Hana/Mark remains alone with her troubled identity. He/she decides, then, to reach Lila in an unspecified city of Italy. Hana/Mark's encounter with her, Lila's family and a different culture and social context, will make her rethink her own identity.

Vergine giurata is composed by a binary structure; the first narrative line follows Mark's last days in Albania and his journey to Italy, focusing in particular on the process of settlement in the new country and the crisis this generates; the other, told through eight flashbacks that systematically alternate the first line, tracks Mark's past as Hana, a little girl who loses her parents in an indefinite incident, and is rescued and adopted by Gjergj (Bruno Shllaku), an old uncle. This track informs the audience of the sworn virgin tradition, opening a window on an ancestral, archaic society that, while well studied by ethnologists and anthropologists, has been rarely documented by fictional films².

Premiering at the 65th Berlin International Film Festival, *Vergine giurata* has gained considerable critical acclaim for a debut film. The film has so far received a nomination for Best New Director at David di Donatello Awards, the Nora Ephron Prize at the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival and the Firebird Award - Young Cinema at the Hong Kong Film Festival 2015. Director Laura Bispuri, holding a degree in Cinema at "La Sapienza" University of Rome, had already built her reputation in the short films world. Her *Passing Time* was awarded the David di Donatello Award for Best Short Film in 2010, in addition to being selected as one of the eight best short films in the world at the "Short Film Golden Night", organized by the Académie des César in Paris. *Biondina* (2011), her other short film, was awarded the Nastro d'Argento as Best New Director only one year later.

This paper will firstly try to briefly outline the cultural context portrayed in the film, illustrating how scholars of ethnology, ethnography, anthropology and social studies have documented it so far and how the film positions itself toward it.

Secondly, by tracing Hana's and the other characters' transitions, I will analyse how the migration process influences issues of gender, sexuality, and identity, and how these interactions are represented in the film.

Finally, special attention will be given to how *Vergine giurata*, with its kaleidoscope of languages and characters in transition, portrays multiculturalism. In doing so, the paper will reflect on what Giovanna Gianturco and Gaia Peruzzi define as the ethogenic function of migration films (Gianturco & Peruzzi 2015) – their power to recognise social inequalities and promote processes of positive socialization, in particular, towards socially marginalized categories of individuals, in order to facilitate social change.

2 The most well-known and critically acclaimed film on the topic is probably Srđan Karanović's *Virgina* (Virdžina, 1992). For a discussion of the movie, see Moss 2005.

Elegy of the ancestral: screening the *virgjineshë*'s world

Referred to with expressions as diverse as *virgjineshë*, *virgjin*, *burrneshë*, *vajza* or *betuar*³, sworn virgins have been widely documented starting from the mid-Nineteenth century. Cases of this peculiar celibacy were attested not only in the mountainous regions of Northern Albania, but also in the territories nowadays divided among nearby Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, despite its significance in the past, this traditional gender role change considerably decreased, and as Antonia Young notes, it is likely to disappear within a generation or two (Young 1998).

The *virgjineshë* phenomenon finds an explanation in the status that women have in this “patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal society where the social pressure of the *fis* (tribe) asserts a major influence” (Young 1998). Women’s inferior condition is ratified by the Kanun, a set of customary laws regulating life in rural environments of the area. Orally transmitted for centuries, these codes, existing in several variations according to different regions, found written form only in the twentieth century. The best known version is the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini (Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit), thought to have originated in the fifteenth century, but collected and formulated by the Franciscan Shtjefën Konstantin Gjeçovi-Kryeziu (1874-1929) only a few centuries later. Scholars agree that this ancient unwritten law has been formed through centuries and that it cannot be empirically determined that Lekë Dukagjini promulgated it.

Some articles of the Kanun properly summarize the status recognized to women in such a rural society. Articles XXIX, for example, states that “a woman is known as a sack made to endure as long as she lives in her husband’s house”.

It is in this context that Hana and Lila were born and bred, and it is primarily this primitive, ancestral universe that the film tries to bring to the screen. The main source for the film is *Vergine giurata*, a novel written by Albanian writer Elvira Dones out of interviews with some of the few remaining sworn virgins. It is certainly from the novel that the film takes a certain drive in investigating the condition of women. Indeed, both in her works and in her media appearances, Elvira Dones proved to be very concerned with such issues. In a well-known letter to Italian newspaper *la Repubblica*, she furiously criticised former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi for a bad joke of

3 The term used in the movie, however, is *burrneshë*. This word refers more generally to a woman with a man-like strong and brave personality, and can be applied to any woman; *vajza* or *betuar*, more recent, are not found in the literature on the topic written in the earliest part of the twentieth century; other terms include *tobelija* in Bosnia, *tombelija* in Montenegro, and *tybeli* in Kosovo’s Albanian, meaning “person bound by a vow”. Thus, Albanian terms refer to the virginal state of these women, while Montenegrin, Kosovar and Bosnian ones focus on the bond deriving from a vow (Martucci 2014).

his on human trafficking between Italy and Albania not really being a crime if the smuggled girls were pretty (Dones 2010).

In the novel, Hana Doda becomes a sworn virgin in order to escape her beloved uncle's threat to marry her off to someone she has never met. The target country that helps with the recovery of the self, however, is the United States, not Italy. This narrative expedient is not employed in the movie, and the reasons why Hana decides to become a sworn virgin remain basically unexplained.

Traditionally, there were many possible reasons that would bring a woman to such a radical decision. Sometimes, as in Dones' novel, the vow was seen as the only possible way to avoid an arranged marriage. Also, the violent bloodfeuds regularly occurring in the area had caused an increase in the deaths of boys in the family. As a result, a high value was put on male descendants. Not infrequently, then, a family would designate a daughter henceforth to become a son. In addition, and not secondarily, by swearing perpetual virginity, a *virgjineshë* was able to inherit the family holdings, provided that there were no adult males in the family.

The film opens with a glimpse of Mark's everyday mountain life; hand-held shots follow him playing with a goat in the snowy scenery of the Dinaric Alps, in company of other men, probably local shepherds. This act seems to emphasize his masculine nature. Despite his ephebic face, Mark is dressed as a man, his short hair pulled back over his forehead and wearing a green and grey fleece and some faded light blue jeans. While the camera focuses on him embracing a goat, a man that seems to be urinating against a tree can be seen in the background. The *mise-en-scène* here oscillates between ethnological accuracy and a necessity to be narratively modern. Most of earlier records (Cozzi 1912; Durham 1928; Valentini 1944) on the phenomenon pointed out that female-to-male cross-dressing among *virgjineshë* was in fact very rare. Much more common was a man-like short hair-cut, and garments such as *ksula*, a traditional white closely fitting felt "skull cap", and occasionally *xhurdi*, a black wool short-sleeve waistcoat, usually wore by men. The real virgins' custom to associate with men and regularly engage in men activities, like what is shown in the scene, has been instead commonly documented.

The following sequence shots portray other fragments of Mark's days in his desolate *kullë*; a scenic wide shot reveals him motionless on the right part of the screen, while the snowy Alps dominate the scene with their breath-taking, harsh beauty. In this striking postcard pose, Mark appears perfectly in harmony with the natural environment, the roughness of his style perfectly matching those of the wild, rock-strewn mountains. The camera follows him then smoking out of the entrance of his abode, looking at the sweep of snow in front of him; he consumes a meagre meal and drinks from a small cup what seems to be liquor, probably *raki* – an anise-flavoured alcoholic drink very popular in Turkic and Balkan countries. *Kulla* are tower houses typically made out of stone, square or rectangular in shape. Used both for military defence and as civilian residences, they often

had small windows and narrow shooting holes, for positioning guns for shooting in the event of a bloodfeud. The scene also portrays apparently insignificant acts such as smoking and drinking alcohol, that are in fact important achievements deriving from the vow, attested in several interviews with sworn virgins (Young 2000; Šarčević 2004).

In this rural society, gender disparity finds its worst representation in the episodes of violence women are subject to. In the second flashback, we find Hana and Lila in their infancy, played by the Selimaj sisters, Drenka and Dajana respectively, two amateur actresses and sisters even in real life, that the director spotted during location hunting. Hana and Lila decide to change direction to a regular day in their *kullë* by going to play outside. They want to reach a boy who, despite his early age, is happily riding a white horse up and down the vast field in front of their *kullë*. They run towards him, and eventually reach him, asking if he can lend his horse to them. The boy abruptly refuses, saying that females are not allowed to engage in such activities. Heedless, the two girls start running together, this time without a specific goal, in an outburst of freedom that looks like a symbolic escape from their harsh condition. Their run, however, is destined to an end. Their father, Gjergj, will catch them and brusquely take them home, where he will slap and scold them, and give a death threat to Hana, because, in his words, playing outside is not a matter for females.

Violence towards women, although common, was accepted only on certain conditions. Within the family, for example, a man could scold, tie, beat and cudgel his wife, but not to the extent of killing her (Martucci 2014). According to Kanun article XXVIII, a man could buy his bride's work and cohabitation, but not her life. If he killed her, the bride's family had the right to confront him. A notable exception to this rule is portrayed in the fifth flashback. Lila and Hana grew up, and Gjergj shows Lila a bullet. The bullet is a reminder that Lila's marriageable age has come, and his father has decided to whom she will be married off. The cartridge will be part of her dowry. This way her bridegroom is authorised to shoot it against her in case she does not properly behave or if she betrays him.

The oppressive dynamics of wedding are further documented in the third flashback, where Lila and Hana accompany their mother Katrina (Ilire Celaj) along a dirt track. Both the girls and the woman carry heavy white sacks, testifying to the heavy manual work women are expected to perform. They are passed by a white-dressed bride, brought on a donkey by a group of men, her face completely covered by a thick white veil. When one of the girls asks why the bride has her face covered, their mother explains that it is because she is not allowed to see the route to her new house, so she will not be able to escape. The scene efficiently describes the loss of identity to which the bride is subject when marrying. The new bride takes the name of *nuse* (new bride), and will be known by that name until another son marries. She will become the most subordinate person in her husband's family's home and be expected to uninterruptedly serve all their needs. The only ways to gain status

is giving birth to a son (Young 1998).

The submissive role to which women are relegated is further remarked on in the following scene where, once at home, the young Hana and Lila are taught some basic rules they have to respect as women. These, in Katrina's voice, include: not drinking before a man drinks; not smoking; never touching a rifle; never speaking before a man does; never going alone in the woods; not choosing by oneself her husband; not performing a man's duties; never looking at a man thinking he is not right; never choosing before a man does.

The depiction of women's daily ordeals in such a society comes sometimes with not a few ambiguities. In the fifth flashback, for example, a grown-up Hana is grazing a flock of goats in the snow, shouldering a rifle. All of a sudden, she is assaulted by a group of men who try to rape her. Gjergj imminently shows up and deflects the group with a whistle. This description of violence against women in an open space seems to be in contrast with what studies reveal. Apparently, despite violence being habitual within the family, a woman could not be a participant in a feud. This allowed her to go around by herself without any fear of being killed or assaulted. Women enjoyed a certain degree of untouchability, and, in case of assault, could defend themselves by killing their assailant. The killing would be considered an honour for herself and for her family (Martucci 2014).

In tracing the path that takes Hana to chose to become a sworn virgin, Bispuri deftly conveys the severity of the social customs in those remote mountains, with a particular emphasis on the deprivations women are subject to. However, the staging of this ancestral primitiveness is rendered with harmony and a certain touch of poetry, with a desire to highlight the dignity hidden in those places and their characters. A choice that the director explained in an interview for film webzine *mymovies.it*: "I did not want to give a too negative connotation of that world. I tried the best I could to work on harmony and conveys a melancholy towards those abandoned places."

Gendering migration: journey as a search for the self

The vow, as we have seen, serves Hana as a way to escape a condition where women experience daily vexations. It is not clear what makes Hana/Mark embark in a journey to Italy that will coincide with the start of a new life in a new country. The day before the journey is spent in solitude, and we see Mark turning around in his bed as if in the grip of an inner torment. The journey itself, often one of the key motifs in the narrative structure of migration films, is rather vague and resolved in a very few sequences. In addition, *Vergine giurata* seems to refuse any politicization of the migration process. With particular reference to Gianni Amelio's *L'America* (1994) or Ennio De Dominicis's *L'Italiano* (2001), Derek Duncan notes that in the 1990s, movies ostensibly dealing with migration from Albania to Italy, employed "migration as a means of exploring the nation's past

history of colonial expansion and emigration rather than documenting a current socio-cultural phenomenon” (Duncan 2007). While “the avowed humanitarian intentions of these films are compromised by their insistence on the impermeability of Italian identity” (ibid.), Bispuri’s work spurns this hackneyed dichotomy.

Mark, in his own words, comes from Rragam, a small village overlooking the Drin river, not far from the Montenegro border and Shkodër, one of the cultural capitals of Northern Albania, of which the municipality became part after a 2015 local government reform. We see him embarking on a ferry, and then getting off from a bus in an undefined urban space. A feminine voice at the bus station, in Italian, alerts that “the 17:30 bus has arrived from Tirana to the platform number four, despite what was previously announced” (“Il pullman delle ore 17:30 è arrivato da Tirana alla piattaforma numero quattro, contrariamente a quanto precedentemente annunciato”), suggesting that Mark arrived from Tirana, the capital of Albania, by bus. Right before the same voice had informed the audience that another bus “bound for Rome will leave from platform number eight” (“l’autobus diretto a Roma partirà dalla piattaforma numero otto”), clarifying that Rome is not the place that Mark reached. This anonymous depiction of the city confused some reviewers of the film, even in Italy, bringing them to identify this urban space with Milan or, quite surprisingly, even Rome⁴. In fact, the city where Lila lives and where Hana is going to settle in, although never mentioned in the film, is Bolzano, the capital city of the province of South Tyrol.

The journey is a fundamental part of the migration experience; it is often through chronicles documenting migration journeys ended up in tragedies that we find ourselves vis-à-vis with the cruellest side of the migration issue itself. Rather than insist on the pathemic dimension of the journey however, *Vergine Giurata* reflects on how the migration process and the encounter with a new, different social setting can influence the perception of the self in terms of one’s gender and sexuality.

The hosting Italian society, with its modern emphasis on femininity and women’s freedom, provides an incentive for Mark to face his real identity. The first scene where this trouble starts to manifest takes place at a big department store where Mark, Lila and her daughter Jonida went shopping. While passing by an underwear shop window, Mark remains enchanted by the mannequin’s garments and allure. He stops by the window and stares at the mannequin for a few seconds, despite Jonida complaining that she will be late to her daily swimming training. The mannequin wears a black leather jacket that, positioned on its arms as if about to be taken off, shows a black balconette bra and seductive panties; the makeup is marked, but a black rubber cap covering its head neutralises its gender. Androgynous and feminine at the same time, the white mannequin

4 In addition to a number of smaller online film magazines and webzines, especially in English, even Andrea Chimento for *Il sole 24 ORE* mistook the city with Milan. Michael Snyder for *The Film Stage* opted, surprisingly, for Rome.

seems to function as a metaphor of Hana/Mark's troubled gender identity.

Moreover, three characters particularly act as agents for questioning Mark's gender identity and sexuality: Lila, Jonida and Bernhard. Among them, Lila is the only person aware of Mark's past as Hana, and the affectionate sister who, with her unconditioned love and understanding, will help Mark's state of mind in the process of repossessing his/her gender identity. Jonida, Lila's teenage daughter, with her naïveté and straightforward questions, contributes to accelerating this process. Bernhard (Lars Eidinger) is a tall, white brawny immigrant of unclear origins who works as a lifeguard and janitor in the local pool where Jonida trains weekly. With his physical approach, he contributes to Hana/Mark's rediscovery of his/her sexuality.

Lila represents for Mark his safe haven. During Mark's first visit to Lila's place, Lila has no hesitation in welcoming Mark to her place and in giving him shelter. However, in a conversation on the very same night, she underlines that she never went back to Albania because looking at Mark was too painful; this was not because he had become a man, but because he was an "unhappy man". These words are only one of the first inputs that encourage Mark to interrogate his identity. Mark is so at ease with his sister that, in a similar fashion, one day he finds the courage to ask her about how sex is. Using an interesting metaphor, Lila asks that the first time is like drinking *raki*; it burns and you feel confused, but when it works it is a very rewarding experience.

Born in Italy from two Albanian immigrants, Jonida represents that category generally referred to as second generation. In addition, being a teenager, she is particularly sensitive to gender classifications. Initially, Jonida reacts to Mark's diversity with contrasting feelings. The first time Mark shows up to Lila's place, Jonida grumbles because she is forced to cede her room to the sudden guest, and go to sleep on the sofa instead. Again, in another scene, Mark waits for Jonida to finish her training and come out from the pool, in order to take her back. Jonida, instead, inveighs against him, telling that she feels uncomfortable to be seen around with him ("Che ci fai ancora qui? Mi da fastidio che vieni, mi vergogno"). As gender is, as Judith Butler noted, "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being", Jonida's aversion towards Mark comes from a difficulty in recognising his gender and sexual orientation. In other words, Jonida's attitude symbolises the tendency to necessarily align biological sex, gender and sexual orientation according to hetero-normative logics.

This attitude is more explicit in another scene where Mark comes back home from work at night. Jonida is still awake, doing a breath exercise that consists in blowing a piece of paper against the window. She invites Mark to join her, but he proves to have not enough stamina to keep the paper attached against the window. Her reaction is an irreverent "Are you a fag? Then you are a transvestite lesbian" ("Ma sei frocio? Allora sei una lesbica travestita"). Mark timidly declines both options, but

Jonida insists: “You are not a man” (“Tu non sei un uomo”). Jonida’s remarks are moved by what Marjorie Garber defines as the hegemonic cultural imaginary’s desire to tell the difference between male and female, between gay and straight, “to guard against a difference that might otherwise put the identity of one’s own position in question” (Garber 1993). Facing Mark’s silences, Jonida observes that he probably did not move to Italy simply to get a “dorky job” (“Tu non sei venuto qui per quel lavoro sfigato”), and insists on asking what Mark is looking for (“E allora cosa cerchi, Zio Mark?”).

The answer gradually becomes clear to the young girl as well. In another scene later in the movie, Jonida will tempt Mark to wear a couple of her bras. While Mark chooses a simple pale blue one, Jonida incites him to choose a more sensual black one. The performance is interrupted by the arrival of Stjefen, Lila’s husband, who looks vexed by those gestures. Stjefen represents an obstacle to Mark’s struggle to repossess his/her identity. Knowing Hana’s real self, he symbolizes the past, the contradictory attitude that recognize sworn virgins as men in society. As a signifier of the primitive society ruled by the Kanun, he refuses any change of mind that Mark might have about his celibacy vow.

If Jonida plays an important role in the quest of Mark’s gender identity, Bernhard’s function is to disclose Mark’s sexuality. The first time they meet at the local pool, Bernhard addresses Mark as a man (“signore”), scolding him for staying on the diving board with his dresses and shoes on. Since Mark ignores him and keeps staring at the water, Bernhard grabs his arm and there he probably realises the nature of Mark’s biological sex. Later in the movie, Mark goes to the pool toilet and finds Bernhard urinating. Bernhard provocatively asks him if he wants to touch his penis, and Mark, intrigued, cedes to his invitation and starts to masturbate him. Bernhard invites him to perform fellatio on him (“Vuoi farlo con la bocca?”), but Mark refuses. It is only around the end of the film, after some scenes that show Mark/Hana’s gradually rediscovered femininity, that she will have intercourse with him in the pool backroom.

Staging diversity: towards a multicultural synergistic society

Vergine giurata, however, is not only an investigation of the impact migration has on gender and sexuality. With its timid, sober happy end, the film provides a positive model of a society ruled by multicultural synergy, where individuals from different cultures exist and interact, even while maintaining a distinctiveness that makes them unique and valuable (Adler 1980). Among the many factors that contribute this stage of diversity, there is the film’s multilinguality. In his discussion of “accented cinema”, Hamid Naficy highlights the importance of the experience of migration or diaspora made by the director and/or the team, because this may lead to a “double consciousness” of

the participants (Naficy 2001). This “double consciousness” in turn can become the requirement for certain aesthetic procedures, such as the representation of multilinguality. However, as Sabine Schrader and Daniel Winkler pointed out, the concept of “accented cinema”, although paying tribute to exiled filmmakers, is also problematic for the classification of films via their directors’ biographies (Schrader & Winkler 2013).

In contrast to this, and despite the director’s Italian origins (she is a native of Rome), Bispuri’s film succeeds in being multicultural. The novel on which the film is based, *Vergine giurata*, is the first Elvira Dones wrote in Italian. Interestingly, the screenplay co-written by Laura Bispuri herself with screenwriter Francesca Manieri was firstly penned in Italian, dialogues included. Afterwards, it was translated in Albanian, and three days were dedicated to readapt dialogues in Gheg dialects with the help of local people (Il Kino 2015).

Gheg dialects, Albanian and Italian mix as in a salad bowl, and create an effect of linguistic diversity and cultural plurality that enriches the viewing experience. Hana/Mark speaks only Gheg dialect. She does not speak Italian, but she understands it. Similarly, Stjefen, Lila’s husband, although probably speaking Italian, is basically portrayed speaking only Albanian. On the contrary, Lila’s daughter, Jonida, speaks Italian most of the time and only in one scene she speaks Albanian. Lila herself cunningly switches between the two languages according to the situation. Bernhard, the pool janitor whose nationality is not specified speaks in a foreign-accented Italian.

Linguistic and cultural differences interact, creating a certain tension in the narrative rhythm. The scene where Mark arrives to Lila’s place for the first time is particularly emblematic of this tension. At dinner, Stjefen is asking Mark in Albanian how was his travel. Jonida bursts into the conversation and asks in Italian where Mark is from (“Da dov’è che vieni?”). Mark, in Albanian, answers that he is from Rragam, and asks Lila if she knows where the place is. Jonida, bluntly replies that she knows nothing about Albania, apart from its capital being Tirana. (“Io dell’Albania non so niente. So solo la capitale. Tirana, giusto?”).

Jonida has a pivotal role in the stage of multiculturalism. She is what sociologists tend to define a “second generation immigrant”. The term, however, as Bjørn Thomassen pointed out, is problematic for many reasons. First, it “creates the false illusion of temporal simultaneity, shared identity and shared challenges across time and space”. Secondly, it labels “people who are not immigrants as immigrants”, showing a “tendency to ‘freeze’ a whole category of people into a position that identifies them with their parents”. Thomassen recognizes this attitude as “part of a larger trend in Italian society and its dealing with ‘foreigners’” (Thomassen 2010). Other studies pointed out, instead, that individuals born from immigrant parents do not differ particularly from those born by autochthonous Italians. With particular reference to the second generation born from Albanian immigrants in Tuscany, Zana Vathi suggested that what second-generation immigrants identify as

problems are more or less exactly the same as the problems identified by young Italians (survey data quoted in Clough Marinaro & Walston 2010). Thus, the choice of autochthonous Italian Emily Ferratello for the role of Jonida, the only second-generation immigrant in the film, can be read as an attempt to emphasise this concept. At her acting debut, Ferratello, who is only fifteen years old, is an autochthonous professional swimmer on the local swim team Bolzano Nuoto.

Another important element defining characters' social identity in the movie is their occupation. Coming from a rural, mountainous society, and with his story of gender metamorphosis, Mark is accustomed to both men and women's manual labour. However, he does not speak Italian at all, although he appears to understand it. In one scene, Stjefen and Mark are talking in front of a kiosk, at night. Stjefen says that he found a job for Mark, because a man is nothing without a job. Stjefen does not say much about his own employment, nor does the movie insist on the question. He wears an orange high-visibility uniform used when working near moving vehicles or in dark areas; thus, he is probably a railroad, airport or highway worker. The employment he finds for Mark is as a watcher in a garage. Lila's main occupation, instead, is unclear. Nevertheless, at some point in the film, Jonida alludes to her mother's preference for "cleaning strangers' asses" ("Per te è sempre più facile pulire il culo agli sconosciuti che occuparti delle persone che ti stanno accanto"), suggesting that she probably works as a caregiver. However, one of the last scenes reveals that she also regularly performs as a singer, albeit probably as a hobby. Therefore, the main adult characters in the film are basically immigrants working as labourers. This representation confirms recent statistical data stating that more than 70% of immigrant workers in Italy are employed as labourers (Direzione Generale dell'immigrazione e delle politiche di integrazione 2015). The movie, however, does not stress the difficulties that immigrants may have in finding employment without knowing the language, nor the obstacles faced by people with a troubled gender identity.

Even the location contributes to this positive picture of a multicultural society. The site choice was probably not fortuitous: Bolzano, the capital city of the province of South Tyrol, is also one of the most multilingual and multicultural Italian cities, and figures among the top twenty cities with the highest populations of foreigners. Statistics reveal that up to 1 January 2016, 46,454 foreigners were registered as residents in the city, representing the 8.9% of the total population. Interestingly enough, the most populous community is the Albanian one (11.8% of the foreigner population), followed by Germans (9.2%) and Moroccans (7.7%).

Despite its anonymity in the film, Bolzano serves as an emblem of modernity. Its anthropised, urban nature where everyone can enjoy a certain degree of freedom, regardless of his/her gender, ethnicity or nationality, is counterposed to the archaic rigidity of the Dinaric Alps, with their strict, obsolete codes of moral and social behaviour. However, as Gianni Canova noted, the stylistic choices adopted by Bisपुरi and director of photography Vladan Radovic in screening these two different

environments, do not emphasize contrasts, rather they harmonise them. Be it Albania or Italy, past or present, chromatic and light tones are the same: green, grey or brown, not a trace of red or some other gaudy colour. Only at the pool is light used in a different way (Canova 2015), with the pool being the place of Hana's rebirth. Here Hana rediscovers her femininity; here the quiver of her body becomes irrepressible.

The scenes at the pool offer also a sequence that celebrates an apotheosis of diversity. Right before Hana decides to have intercourse for the first time, the camera, accompanied by Nando Di Cosimo's harmonious and beguiling background music, indulges itself on the most heterogeneous group of individuals ever. Male, female, undefined; White, Latino, Black or Asian; old, middle-aged or young; of blond, brown or red hair, streaked with grey or bald, short or long, curly or straight; muscular or skinny, fit or pudgy; hirsute or smooth; with glasses or without; wearing a swimsuit or with the body shyly covered by a bathrobe or a t-shirt; with pool shoes or bare feet, the skin sometimes decorated with tattoos: they interact in a friendly manner, chatting and smiling at each other, in what seems a tribute to a multicultural society where difference is finally portrayed in a positive sense.

With its delicate and positive approach, *Vergine giurata* seems to remind us of the social importance of migration cinema in the moral future of civilization. As Roger Silverstone pointed out, the media have a profound impact on the way in which the world is understood by its citizens. Global media represent a mediapolis, a single space of political and social communication, in which the basis for the relationships between neighbours and strangers can be either constructed or destroyed (Silverston 2006). Given that compared to other mediatic forms, cinema offers the opportunity to tell the migrants perspectives, to narrate the inner side of the Other, it is probably correct to recognise that migration films, and *Vergine giurata* as well, have what Giovanna Gianturco and Gaia Peruzzi efficiently defined as an "ethogenic function" (Gianturco & Peruzzi 2015) – a power to recognise social inequalities and promote processes of positive socialization, in particular towards the socially marginalized, in order to facilitate social change. A power that, with its full of allure and persuasivity, if properly understood and used in all its potential, will hopefully make an important contribution to the construction of synergetic bonds between different cultures within the same social framework.

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