
Albinati and Veronesi's 1989 fictions and 2018 non-fictions. Italians-migrants thirty years later

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Abstract

In contemporary Italian literature Edoardo Albinati and Sandro Veronesi share the primacy in having proposed a changed representation of migrants by offering insights into the living conditions of two migrant communities in Italy at the end of the 1980s, the Filipino community in Veronesi's *Gli sfiorati* and the Polish community in Albinati's *Il polacco lavatore di vetri*. A closer analysis, however, may note that on the migrants' topic the two writers are further united in non-fiction. In 1989, they gave voice to foreigners who corroborated the historical change of the Italian republic from a country of emigration to a country of immigration. Thirty years later, in 2018, with a common and different reaction they addressed a watershed in the history of foreign migration in Italy, that is the 'Aquarius case', the NGO ship and the 629 shipwrecked migrants who, in June 2018, were denied disembarkation in Sicily. An emotional reaction, on Albinati's part, to highlight the cynicism of the institutions, as he writes in the political pamphlet *Cronistoria di un pensiero infame*. Embodiment reaction by Veronesi, to underline the border with the inhuman, as he writes in the political pamphlet *Canì d'estate*. Four books of different genres, two novels and two political pamphlets, which nonetheless are united by the same Italians-migrants binomial and whose publications delimit a thirty-year journey with respect to the alterity.

Key words: Italy, migration, European Union, Edoardo Albinati, Sandro Veronesi

1. Introduction

Edoardo Albinati (born 1956) and Sandro Veronesi (born 1959) share a connection that extends beyond their generational commonality, personal relationships, or both having been recipients of the *Premio Strega*¹. A further common point is having written about migrants at two key moments in the history of foreign migration in Italy, in 1989 and 2018. In the 1970s, Italy has achieved the economic convergence with the then most industrialised nations by participation in the first exclusive summit of what, in the following decade (1986), would be formalised as the G7, the forum attended by the countries considered leaders at a macro-economic level. During the 1980s, a

¹ University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy.

¹ Albinati is currently the partner of the actress, writer and director Francesca D'Aloja, met at a dinner organised by Veronesi (Morvillo). The *Premio Strega* is the major Italian literary award, Albinati won it with *La scuola cattolica* in 2016 while Veronesi has even been awarded twice, with *Caos Calmo* in 2006 and with *Il colibrì* in 2020.

consequence of the new economic status has been the reversal of migratory flows, that is, rediscovering the Italian Peninsula from a country of emigration to a nation of immigration. The literary debuts of Albinati and Veronesi occurred at the end of the 1980s, almost concomitantly. Veronesi made his debut in 1988 by publishing the novel *Per dove parte questo allegro treno* and in 1989 he dealt with the migrants' topic in his second novel *Gli sfiorati*. The same year, Albinati made his debut by immediately dealing with the migrants' topic in his novel *Il polacco lavatore di vetri*. Thirty years later, the publishing paths of the two authors, who in the meantime have gained reputation on the Italian literary scene, crossed again on the format of non-fiction, and on what in the meantime has become a divisive issue, the foreign migration to Italy. In 2018 Albinati published *Cronistoria di un pensiero infame* and Veronesi published *Cani d'estate*. Two political pamphlets in response and opposition to the Italian government led by the *Lega* and *Movimento 5 stelle* political parties, which in that year's summer rejected NGO ships to dock to Italian coasts (Sapienza 7). Four books, diverse in genre yet united by the same Italians-migrants binomial. Four publications that delimit the starting and ending points of a thirty-year Italian journey with respect to alterity. These editorial coincidences, as well as other similarities that are analysed, form the basis of my research questions: how did these writers narrate the Italian-migrant binomial yesterday? How did they capture it today? What is the social, institutional or political perception of Italians and Italy per se and within the EU? In order to answer these research questions, this article presents two brief digressions, on historical and literary contexts, followed by paragraphs on the analyses and the conclusion of the research.

2. Historical context

In their first works of fiction, Albinati and Veronesi dealt with the migration's topic to coincide with what is called 'la svolta' (the turning point) in the foreign immigration in Italy by the historian Michele Colucci (79). It is placed between 1989 and 1992 and several factors contribute to the existence of that watershed. A first one concerns the constantly increasing volumes of migration in those years: in the decade 1981-1991, the average annual rate of foreign immigration was 5.4% and the foreign population was just 0.6% of the total population. In the following decade, 1991-2001, the average annual rate almost tripled, reaching 14.2%, and in 2001 the foreign population rose to 2.3% of the total population. In the decade 2001-2011, the annual rate decreased to 11.7%, while the foreign population reached 7.5% of the total population². The systematic nature of the phenomenon is confirmed by the continuous increase in the foreign population even to 2021, with a growth at 8.7%³ of the total population, a growth that was mainly curtailed by the

2 <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/39726>.

3 <https://noi-italia.istat.it/pagina.php?L=0&categoria=4&dove=ITALIA>.

previous year's pandemic. A second factor is the collective imaginary. Until the early 1990s, migration to Italy was instinctively associated with outskirts of the Global South (Africa, Asia and South America), but since 1991 the image of migrants has assumed the connotations of Central, Balkan and Eastern Europe. The end of the communist bloc led to the movement of many migrants from former Warsaw Pact and Yugoslavia nations to Italy. On 9th August, 1991, the Albanian merchant ship *Vlora* on the coast of Puglia marked the national memory (Dal Lago). From 1992, migrants from former Yugoslavia began to move *en masse* because of the war and, throughout the 1990s, the migration came from Ukraine, Romania, and Moldova (Colucci 136). A third factor is the increasingly presence of the topic in the public debate and in semantic associations that have distinguished until now part of Italian political discourse. The birth of the political party *Lega nord*, juxtaposed to the already existing *Movimento sociale italiano* before and to the political formations that would follow them, has started to semantically connote the security issues with the migration ones in the political discourse of the Italian right (for instance, in the electoral campaign that preceded the last general elections in Italy in September 2022). A fourth factor concerns some important new laws passed since 1990 and that have reflected the direction of the Italian migration policies. The main laws include the *Legge Martelli* of 1990 (Einaudi), the new citizenship law of 1992 (Colucci 101), the *Legge Turco-Napolitano* of 1998 (119), and the *Legge Bossi-Fini* of 2002 (141, 155)⁴ still today in force. Without entering into the merit of these specific legislative acts, more generally, they all present the common denominator of the amnesty (190), an expedient to manage the migrant flows that denotes a permanent emergency approach. A final factor is the European cooperation on the legal and illegal migration flows. Italy signed the Schengen agreement in 1990 and, along with Greece, Malta, and Spain, has become one of the European community's frontier countries in terms of migration, the redistribution of which is still a divisive issue in the EU. Over the years, European disagreements have created the need to sign bilateral agreements with countries in the Mediterranean area. When these agreements have faltered, often due to internal crises within those countries, they have increased the frequency and severity of new humanitarian crises on Italian coasts (as happened, for instance, with those signed with Libya).

3. Literary context

The literary context has been reflecting the epochal change of Italy into a destination for migration since 1989. Moreover, the fields reflecting that epochal change become twofold, the Italian literature as well as the new literature written in the Italian language that is directly born from the foreign migration. According to Daniele Comberiati, in 1989 the first books

⁴ See also Colombo 2012, where it is stated that amnesties and regularizations have been fundamental both in Italy and in Europe's migration policies.

differentiate themselves from the previous literary production by proposing a changed representation of migrants (21): “le riflessioni dei singoli autori non si riferivano più, come accadeva in opere pubblicate in precedenza [...] a personali suggestioni o a ipotesi future; al contrario essi fornivano una visione di una realtà esistente e facilmente riscontrabile” (21)⁵. From the 1990s onward, the presence of migrants in Italian writers has experienced growth in proportion to the foreign migration’s demographic increase, particularly in the case of crime fiction genre writers, such as Lucarelli, Carlotto, and Camilleri. Crime fiction is a literary genre that has often proposed racial stereotypes and the recurring association between foreigner and delinquent (24).

According to Brigitte Le Gouez, even authors of the new literature written in the Italian language are not entirely exempt from proposing such stereotypes. Traditionally, this new field has appeared with the first books published in Italy in 1990 by the African-born Pap Khouma, Salah Methnani, and Mohamed Bouchane. Le Gouez notes that even if these authors “consentono di cogliere il senso delle loro aspirazioni, non sono, di certo, quelli che permettono di smentire i cliché: vi si affollano marchette tunisine, spacciatori marocchini e nigeriane che battono...” (76)⁶. Two further examples of such stereotypes are in Younis Tawfik, awarded with the Cavour Prize in 2000, and in Igiaba Scego, among the most famous and widely read writers. Tawfik’s *La straniera*, published in 2001, re-proposes the image of the Moroccan migrant portrayed as a junkie and dealer who mistreats and abandons his wife, she then becomes a prostitute and dies anonymously in a hospital. Scego’s novel *Rhoda*, published in 2004, also lapsed into the same stereotype, although the protagonist is not the junkie’s wife, but a university student. The outcome, however, remains the same:

Che razza di carriera potrà fare una nigeriana in Italia? Non spontaneamente ce la immaginiamo studentessa o avvocatessa o notaio. Il testo letterario fa spazio a queste figure di prostitute extracomunitarie [...]. Nella donna africana, si vedeva allora, per natura, la “sciarmuta” ossia la prostituta (voce che si riscontra più o meno identica nelle lingue eritree, etiopiche e somale). E non a caso la parola somala irrompe più volte nel testo italiano della Scego [...]. Il lascito postcoloniale si tramanda nelle generazioni, anche quand’esse non hanno conosciuto in prima persona il giogo coloniale (75)⁷.

5 “Individual authors no longer referred to personal suggestions or future hypotheses, but rather provided a vision of an existing and easily verifiable reality”. Translations are done by article’s author.

6 “Allow us to grasp the sense of their aspirations, they are certainly not the ones that allow us to disprove the clichés: they are crowded with Tunisian prostitutes, Moroccan dealers and Nigerian women who walk the streets...”.

7 “What kind of career will a Nigerian woman have in Italy? We do not spontaneously imagine her as a student or a lawyer or a notary. The literary text makes room for these figures of non-EU prostitutes [...]. In the African woman, one then saw, by nature, the ‘sciarmuta’ or prostitute (a voice found more or less identically in the Eritrean, Ethiopian

4. Albinati and Veronesi's 1989 fictions

The two novels *Il polacco lavatore di vetri*, *Gli sfiorati*, and the communities represented, the Filipino community in Veronesi and the Polish community in Albinati, have some common points with respect to the topic of foreign migration in Italy.

The choice of the two communities demonstrates the historical fringe of transition from the image of migrants coming from the Global South to the image coming from Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, both authors choose migrant communities whose Catholic religion distinguishes them and makes them minorities within their respective geographical areas of origin⁸. The Catholic religious background of the migrant communities chosen, accordingly, should make them similar to the Italian religious context, precisely to the Christian religion in its variant of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church. It is interesting to note that both the writers decided to represent groups that, on a cultural and religious level, did not give rise to frictions and clashes already felt by the then societies, for instance in East Timor, and theorised by Samuel Phillips Huntington a few years later (1993, 1996).

Both communities are represented in Rome and the figure of the Pope is central to them. In Veronesi's novel *Dani Eleccion*, the Filipino character in the foreground, "ha stretto la mano del Papa, un mercoledì" (1989 12)⁹. To the hypothesis of an abortion for Dani's wife because of certain malformations of the future unborn child, he initially advances the irreconcilability precisely linked to faith, and to Pope's figure: "«Non fatelo nascere» tremò la voce di Mète. «Oh, no, signore, no...». Dani indietreggiò «Ho baciato la mano del Papa, questo no...»" (351)¹⁰. The figure of the Pope is also particularly preeminent for the Polish community, as Karol Józef Wojtyła was the then Roman Pontiff: "Erano venuti in Italia, a Roma, perché lì c'era il papa polacco, che tante volte, affacciandosi dal balcone di San Pietro su un'ondeggiante folla di bandierine e foulard annodati e mantelli neri, aveva invitato la folla a pregare per il suo infelice paese" (Albinati 1989 10)¹¹. Both the communities, moreover, have experienced martial law in their home countries at different times, the Philippines with Marcos between 1972 and

and Somali languages). It is no coincidence that the Somali word bursts into Scego's Italian text several times [...]. The post-colonial legacy is passed down through the generations, even when they have not experienced the colonial yoke first-hand".

8 In Central and Eastern Europe the preeminent religion is the Eastern Christian-Orthodox one while in Asia the preeminent religions are the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist ones.

9 "Shook the Pope's hand, one Wednesday".

10 "«Don't give birth to him» trembled Mète's voice. «Oh, no, sir, no...». Dani stepped back «I kissed the Pope's hand, not this one...»".

11 "They had come to Italy, to Rome, because the Polish Pope was there, who so many times, looking out from the balcony of St. Peter's onto a swaying crowd of flags and knotted headscarves and black cloaks, invited the crowd to pray for his unhappy country".

1981 and Poland with Jaruzelski between 1981 and 1983. These experiences are reflected in the novels, for instance, with the aforementioned Dani trying to convince his compatriots “a non rimpiangere Marcos o, addirittura, come fanno ancora alcuni, a non inviare parte del denaro risparmiato ai guerriglieri rimasti fedeli al dittatore” (Veronesi 1989 12-13)¹². Or as the character Jan Pawel Krol reminds to the younger Szymon: “«Non siamo mica signorine al ballo, noialtri. Siamo una banda di espatriati a suon di calci e pronti a tutto»” (Albinati 1989 119)¹³. According to Combierati, in Albinati’s novel the difficulties in assimilating the new culture, the image of the Italian as detached and without ideals, and the desire to repatriate sooner or later emerge on the part of the migrants while in Veronesi’s novel the astonishment of a period when knowledge of alterity was in its infancy emerge on the part of the Italians (Combierati 22).

A careful reading evidences how both books fail to avoid the stereotypical representation of the two groups, whether it refers to physical or character/value traits, that is the representation of the physical prowess and almost extreme religiosity of the Poles, and the representation of the physical petite and docile servitude of the Filipinos. Thus, at the physical level “c’è una cosa curiosa da osservare su quei polacchi: erano tutti uomini molto belli. Alti, grandi, proporzionati, di carnagione bionda o rossa, però di un rosso armonico e maturo” (Albinati 1989 9)¹⁴. At the value level, according to Olga Płaszczewskai, in Albinati’s novel “il polacco vuole essere credente e innocente come lo immaginano gli italiani (questo è il caso di Zygmunt), e per diventare simile allo stereotipo, finisce con l’inginocchiarsi davanti alla Vergine per fare voto di castità e aspettare la grazia divina” (205)¹⁵. This stereotype, actually, has a generational discrimination in Albinati’s novel. Adult Poles are often connoted as extremely devoted while the younger ones act without moral inhibitions. Zygmunt’s brother Joachim, head of the family who have moved to Italy, is not exempt from this belief system. It is not without reason that Joachim “si sentiva a disagio a Roma [...], gli pareva un enorme magazzino di merci e automobili [...]. A Roma erano tutti occupati a comprare, espandere, sostituire, gettare via – quasi nessuno discuteva o pregava” (Albinati 1989 16)¹⁶. In that warehouse of goods, depicting the

12 “Not to regret Marcos, or even, as some still do, not to send some of the money saved to the guerrillas who remained loyal to the dictator”.

13 “«We’re not young ladies at the ball, the rest of us. We’re a band of kicking expatriates ready for anything»”.

14 “There is a curious thing to observe about those Poles: they were all very handsome men. Tall, big, well-proportioned, with a blond or red complexion, but a harmonious and mature red”.

15 “The Pole wants to be a believer and innocent as the Italians imagine him to be (this is the case with Zygmunt), and to become similar to the stereotype, he ends up kneeling before the Virgin to take a vow of chastity and wait for divine grace”.

16 “Feels uncomfortable in Rome [...], it seemed to him an enormous warehouse of goods and cars [...]. In Rome everyone was busy buying, expanding, replacing, throwing away - hardly anyone was discussing or praying”.

widespread economic well-being and consumerism prevailing in Italy at the end of the 1980s, Joachim saw “qualcosa di funesto in quel benessere, come se fosse originato da un cumulo di malefatte che prima o poi bisognava pagare: anche se tutti facevano finta di ignorarlo [...]. Joachim leggeva questo nelle facce della gente: nessuno credeva a niente, né a Dio né al diavolo” (18)¹⁷. A further example should be father Witold, the spiritual guide of this Polish community transplanted in a Roman basement from which, after a long and macabre sermon on the persecutions inflicted on the Polish people, he warns his compatriots with these words:

Non abbassiamo la guardia fratelli, non lasciamoci distrarre dalla curiosità o frustrare dalla delusione, o stordire dall'entusiasmo. Ancora non conosciamo le grotte labirintiche, gli abissi oscuri che sia aprono sotto la crosta di marmo di questa città, questa città, come dice un suo antico scrittore, dove i responsabili dei peggiori crimini si raccolgono come in una sentina; dove tutte le atrocità e le vergogne confluiscono da ogni parte del mondo (84)¹⁸.

In Albinati's novel, as mentioned above, an image of Poles differentiated by age is given: the more adult ones respond to the stereotypes about their strong religious component while the younger ones mock this characteristic. Thus, at the beginning of the novel, Jan Pawel Krol mocks the spiritual candour of young Szymon, one of Joachim's sons, about the dangers of being misled that lurk in the sacred city: “«questa città sacra mi pare piena di tentazioni e pericoli per noi agnelli bianchi polacchi»” (24)¹⁹. Szymon's sister Nina is a blonde baby-sitter as expected and with regard to that city she “era stupita da una sola cosa, l'abbondanza di scritte luminose in quella città così antica, anzi decrepita” (28)²⁰. Nina takes care of her equal in age Matilde, the much devoted Squera family's daughter (36) and accepts the sexual *advances*

17 “Something funereal in that well-being, as if it originated from a heap of wrongdoings that sooner or later had to be paid for: even if everyone pretended to ignore it [...]. Joachim read this in people's faces: nobody believed in anything, neither God nor the devil”.

18 “Let's not drop our guard, brothers, let's not be distracted by curiosity, or frustrated by disappointment, or stunned by enthusiasm. We still don't know the labyrinthine caves, the dark abysses that open beneath the marble crust of this city, this city, as one of its ancient writers says, where the perpetrators of the worst crimes gather as in a bilge; where all atrocities and shames flow in from all parts of the world”.

A mistake made by Albinati when writing the novel with regard to the character of Father Witold should be noted. The personal name, clearly of Polish origin, is referred within the novel as an “old Ukrainian priest” (23). This mistake that stands out since at the end of the text the author encloses a list of characters where Father Witold is “a Polish priest in Rome” (157).

19 “«This sacred city seems to me to be full of temptations and dangers for us Polish white lambs»”. Krol's speech will prove to be a test of young Szymon's willingness to commit a theft.

20 “Was astonished by only one thing, the abundance of illuminated signs in that town so old, indeed decrepit”.

of Matilde's parents in a *menage a trois* (35). At the end of the novel the progeny of the deceased Joachim fully yields to the temptations deprecated by the parent: Nina even has a sexual relationship with Matilde herself (146-148) and her brother Szymon takes part in a robbery organised by Jan Pawel Krol with a group of 'borgatari'²¹ (133).

Veronesi's novel is not lacking in stereotypes either about the Filipino community and, more generally, about the other communities in Rome. Dani is a short-statured person as expected and this physical 'inferiority' is emphasised with an interracial comparison: "Dani, proprio lui, in punta di piedi sotto una colonna, nel vano tentativo di elevare i propri occhietti sopra le spalle degli europei che lo sovrastano" (Veronesi 1989 29)²². He has obtained a degree in psychology from the University of Manila, but he works as domestic helper. Moreover, his professionalism is, inevitably, enhanced with an ironic reference to a centuries-old origin of Oriental servitude (to Western masters?): "nella più antica tradizione dei servi orientali, Dani è colto e raffinato, più dei suoi padroni" (12)²³. Notwithstanding the ironic note, this characteristic is reiterated whenever the occasion to denote it arises, for instance when Dani makes the bed of his master's son, he does so "con minuziosa grazia orientale" (90)²⁴. It should be remembered that in 1980s and 1990s, in the Italian language, the expression 'un lavoro da filippina' (a Filipino woman's job) had indeed become synonymous with nanny and domestic worker (Le Gouez 68).

In Albinati's novel, Poles feel defamed but tolerated: "Oggi, i polacchi sono spesso diffamati. A mezzo bocca, e talvolta apertamente, dicono di noi che siamo un popolo di accattoni e scioperati, che le nostre donne hanno facili costumi [...]. In fondo, in Italia, siamo tollerati, senza astio" (Albinati 1989 82-83)²⁵. Albinati reiterates the discriminations against otherness by resorting to the characters of the 'borgatari'. They discriminate against the same Poles with whom engage in illegal actions, do not spare other migrant communities nor are exempt from homophobia: "«George Michel non è frocio», «È frocio come due» [...]. «Questa è la mia città [...] e non mi va di vederla riempita di morti di fame, di suore e di negri»" (42-43)²⁶. But both Albinati and Veronesi, notwithstanding the stereotypes seen, also include notes of compassion in their novels. Albinati, for instance, resorts to Matilde

21 'Borgatario' means, in Rome, person who lives on the poor outskirts.

22 "Dani, that's him, tiptoeing under a column, in a vain attempt to raise his little eyes above the shoulders of the Europeans above him".

23 "In the oldest tradition of Oriental servants, Dani is cultured and refined, more than his masters".

24 "With meticulous Oriental grace".

25 "Today, Poles are often defamed. Behind our's back, and sometimes openly, they say of us that we are a people of beggars and strikers, that our women are of easy virtue [...]. After all, in Italy, we are tolerated, without rancour".

26 "«George Michel is not a faggot», «He is two times faggot» [...]. «This is my city [...] and I don't want to see it filled with starving people, nuns, and niggers»".

character and the remarks she makes to her mother: “«là... soffrono per ragioni diverse. Soffrono per delle ragioni vere... non come noi. Hanno paura delle botte, del carcere, del freddo, di non trovare nei negozi il pane o il latte»” (Albinati 2018 112)²⁷. Veronesi recognises the not decent living conditions to which Filipinos are forced by their employers:

Sparì nel bugigattolo che, con un tramezzo di legno stranamente modanato, era stato ricavato su un lato del salone, dentro al quale i filippini avevano il permesso di tenere le loro cose e di dormire il sabato notte. C’era una quantità impressionante di oggetti, in quello stanzino, e Mète si stupiva che assieme a tutta quella roba riuscissero a entrarci anche Dani e Mila. Gli pareva una cosa vagamente barbara recluderli in un simile buco quando c’era una casa così grande e vuota a disposizione, e invece i filippini ne erano entusiasti, poiché per loro quel buco rappresentava una specie di casa delle vacanze, dove potevano condurre una loro vita indipendente nei periodi di libertà (Veronesi 1989 88)²⁸.

Moreover, it should be noted, Veronesi traces a plot that, in the novel’s final pages, overturns expectations and roles. Dani and his wife Mila free themselves from religious precepts and finally accept abortion rather than giving birth to a child with deformities, while Mète, the novel’s Italian protagonist, after an incestuous relationship with his step-sister, leaves for the Philippines to atone for the guilt arising from his religious upbringing. In conclusion, the religion seems to be an element of possible cohesion, encounter and closeness between the Italians and the migrant communities, but there are social elements that make the divergent experiences represented in the books clash. Social elements that relate both the reactions of intolerance towards the first emergence of the immigration phenomenon in Italy and the widespread economic well-being and consumerism prevailing in Italy in the late 1980s. The economic inequality gives rise to the glaring social disparities between migrants and Italians highlighted and contrasted in the two novels: the Poles with their basements and the Filipinos with their hovels as opposed to the luxurious villas in which they work and the Italian middle and upper middle class, which is ultimately the Italian character in the foreground in both books. This is the image that remains of such juxtapositions between Italians and migrants: more or less superficial,

27 “«There... they suffer for different reasons. They suffer for real reasons... not like us. They are afraid of beatings, of prison, of the cold, of not finding bread or milk in the shops»”.

28 “He disappeared into the cubbyhole that, with a strangely moulded wooden partition, had been carved out on one side of the living room, inside which the Filipinos were allowed to keep their things and sleep on Saturday nights. There was an impressive amount of stuff in that small room, and Mète was amazed that along with all that stuff, Dani and Mila could fit in there. It seemed vaguely barbaric to him to confine them in such a hole when there was such a large and empty house available, but the Filipinos were delighted, because for them the hole was a kind of holiday home, where they could lead their own independent lives during their periods of freedom”.

sincere and profound contacts with the newcomers whose backgrounds are the bored, consumerist and distracted Italians' lives and the uprooted, oscillating and evolving migrants' lives.

5. Albinati and Veronesi's 2018 non-fictions

In the political pamphlets published in 2018, it is also possible to trace common points given by the same *causa scribendi*: *Aquarius*. It is the name of a former oceanographic ship deployed by the NGO *Sos Méditerranée* in collaboration with *Médecins sans frontières* to rescue migrants trying to cross the Strait of Sicily. Between 9 and 10 June 2018, in six operations all coordinated by the Italian Coast Guard, the *Aquarius* rescued 629 migrants and shipwrecked migrants, including 113 unaccompanied minors, 11 children and 7 pregnant women. On June 10th, the ship was denied docking and disembarkation in Sicily. After a shift of responsibility between Italy and Malta, the ship lands in Spain, in Valencia, a week later, on June 17, 2018. This is an event that certainly marks a turning point with respect to the migration policies that have alternated over the years in Italy:

Il 2018, poi, sembra aver segnato una cesura rispetto alle logiche che avevano caratterizzato le scelte politiche del Governo italiano nei confronti della crisi migratoria nel Mediterraneo. Alcune opzioni del 2017, come l'approvazione del codice Minniti, avevano dunque già lasciato intravedere un cambio di strategia, ma indubbiamente alcuni eventi del 2018 danno la sensazione netta che qualcosa sta cambiando (Sapienza 7) ²⁹.

Other events of that summer refer, for instance, to the 'Diciotti case', that is the Italian coast guard ship *Ubaldo Diciotti* which rescued 190 migrants, including 37 minors and 10 pregnant women on 9th August, 2018, and after yet another blame-shifting with Malta arrived at the port of Catania on 20th August. Disembarkation, in this case, was authorised on 26th August, a waiting period of six days for which the then Interior Minister Matteo Salvini was investigated for kidnapping (Casiello & Venditti). It is the figure of the then Interior Minister and, by metonymy, the role of institutions in relation to the migrants' issue that the two authors focus on, albeit with different procedures.

In Albinati's book, Senator Matteo Salvini is referred to as the 'Ministro di Polizia' (Minister of Police) 17 times in 106 pages, and the decision not to grant disembarkation to the *Aquarius* is referred to reasons of political consensus: "lì gli ostaggi del governo italiano erano più di seicento, tenuti a mollo mentre il ministro di Polizia giocava il suo poker con

29 "2018, then, seems to have marked a break with respect to the logics that had characterised the Italian government's political choices towards the migration crisis in the Mediterranean. Some options in 2017, such as the approval of the Minniti code, had therefore already hinted at a change in strategy, but undoubtedly some events in 2018 give the distinct impression that something is changing".

un occhio ai sondaggi elettorali. Alzava la posta per guadagnare consenso. I naufraghi usati come *fiches*” (Albinati 2018 19)³⁰. The political pamphlet follows, and tries to contextualise, the reaction and statement expressed by his author on 12th June during the presentation of a report he made in Niger: “sapete, sono arrivato a desiderare che morisse qualcuno, su quella nave. Ho desiderato che morisse un bambino sull’*Aquarius*” (12)³¹. Cynicism is not an emotion; rather, it represents a lack of consideration for moral and ethical principles or the exploitation of other’s emotions for personal gain. It is this latter aspect upon which both the author’s statement and the book are based. The cynical response, which involves a desire for a death that would undermine the political exploitation of the situation, as repeatedly elucidated in Albinati’s pamphlet, originated to underscore the cynicism inherent in the institutions themselves: “D’accordo, il mio cinismo può essere ripugnante quanto si vuole ma è impotente, il cinismo di un ministro o di un governo è invece fattivo, produce conseguenze, produce vita e morte, benessere e malessere, produce giustizia e ingiustizia” (45)³². The statement and the book’s writing, therefore, follow the characteristics of the sovereignist right-winger’s propaganda, which employs an emotive view of reality, rather than an objective view of reality. Albinati’s aim is to highlight, and at the same time to accuse, this procedure employed to obtain political consensus: “ora io non avevo fatto che applicare quella stessa logica spietata in piccola scala (la mia privata mente) invece che in grande scala (l’azione pubblica di un governo occidentale), e quindi confessarla. Rivelarla” (66-67)³³. Matteo Salvini justified his political actions of the summer of 2018 by associating them with his own task of defending national borders. Such emotive procedure was designed to create a perceived danger, that of the siege of national borders and which Albinati emphasises as oxymoronic with respect to both present and past roles of Salvini. With respect to the present role of the Interior Minister because “è curioso come chi dovrebbe garantirli, riesca, con i suoi proclami prima ancora che con i suoi provvedimenti, a fomentare disordine, rancore, discordia sociale e paura. Invece di moderarli, o reprimerli, li attizza” (72)³⁴. With respect to the past role, reminding what in

30 “There the hostages of the Italian government were more than six hundred, held at bay while the Minister of Police played his poker keeping an eye on the electoral polls. He was raising the stakes to gain consensus. The castaways used as chips”.

31 “You know, I came to wish that someone would die on that ship. I wished a child would die on the *Aquarius*”.

32 “All right, my cynicism can be as repugnant as you like but it is impotent, the cynicism of a minister or a government is instead factual, it produces consequences, it produces life and death, well-being and malaise, it produces justice and injustice”.

33 “Now I had done nothing but apply that same ruthless logic on a small scale (my own private mind) instead of on a large scale (the public action of a Western government), and then confess it. Reveal it”.

34 “It is curious how he, who should guarantee them, succeeds with his proclamations, even before his measures, in fomenting disorder, rancour, social discord and fear. Instead of moderating them, or repressing them, he stirs them up”.

1999 the then Milanese city councillor Salvini did, that is

il leggendario rifiuto di stringere la mano al presidente della Repubblica, nel 1999, cioè al tempo in cui, consigliere comunale milanese, sosteneva che i confini della nazione non fossero sacri e andassero difesi a ogni costo, ma al contrario, bisognava al più presto spaccarli, quei confini, dividendo l'Italia in due, o in tre (91)³⁵.

In his political pamphlet, for Salvini, Sandro Veronesi borrowed the definition of the writer Andrea Camilleri: “uomo di terra che non conosce il mare” (Veronesi 2018 13)³⁶. The decision not to grant disembarkation to the *Aquarius* is referred both to reasons of political consensus and to the broader Italian institutional action in relation to EU action. If in Albinati's book it was the expression *Ministro di Polizia* that pivoted on the emotional aspect of a police state that by definition is the deprivation or reduction of personal freedoms with an authoritarian and top-down approach, in Veronesi's book it is the word ‘corpo’ (body) that appears more than 40 times. The process is initially employed in an open letter published by the author in the newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* on 9th July, 2018 and addressed to the writer Roberto Saviano. This open letter was later incorporated in Veronesi's pamphlet, and its most concentrated section, featuring the term ‘corpo’, is provided here:

mi chiedo se non sia il caso di rompere gli indugi e metterci direttamente il corpo. Perché noi siamo un corpo, e anche le nostre parole vengono dal nostro corpo, e il corpo è ben più di esse — il corpo è la vita stessa. Ecco dunque che scrivo a te, caro Roberto, dato che il tuo corpo è già in ballo, da anni, è già sul campo — e infatti ogni tanto spunta la minaccia di “toglierti la scorta”, cioè di lasciarlo indifeso, quel tuo corpo [...]. Scrivo a te perché in questa condizione hai certamente sperimentato una certa solitudine. E ti dico che “metterci il corpo” per me ha un significato solo: significa andare laggiù, dove lo scempio ha luogo, e starci, col proprio ingombro, le proprie necessità vitali, la propria resistenza, lì. Il corpo, il mezzo più estremo di lotta nella tradizione della non violenza (19)³⁷.

35 “The legendary refusal to shake hands with the President of the Republic, in 1999, i.e. at the time when, as a Milanese city councillor, he maintained that the nation's borders were not sacred and should not be defended at all costs, but, on the contrary, that they should be split as soon as possible, those borders, dividing Italy into two, or three”.

36 “A man of the land who does not know the sea”.

37 “I wonder if we shouldn't break the deadlines and put the body directly into it. Because we are a body, and even our words come from our body, and the body is more than them - the body is life itself. So this is why I am writing to you, dear Roberto, since your body has already been at stake, for years, it is already in the field - and in fact every now and then the threat to ‘take away your escort’, that is, to leave it defenceless, that body of yours [...]. I am writing to you because in this condition you have certainly experienced a certain loneliness. And I tell you that «putting your body there» has only one meaning for me: it means going there, where the havoc takes place, and being there, with your own encumbrance, your own

Therefore, as a reaction to the facts of the ‘*Aquarius* case’, Veronesi promotes a mobilisation and awareness-raising activity among other intellectuals and exponents of the world of culture and the arts in which he asks and invites them to embark on NGO ships to witness their bodily presence there where political proclamations and words affect those who migrate bodily, since it is on those ships that migrant bodies physically suffer the consequences. This process of embodiment is meant to emphasise the border with the inhuman. It is powerful because it is associated with the absence of dry land underfoot and the perpetual rocking of the sea on which the bodies are forced to remain or linger even though they have already been rescued. The aspect that has been previously discussed at the conclusion of the analysis of the novels, namely the uncertain and ever-changing life of those who leave their homes and countries behind to embark on a journey, becomes even more prolonged and intensified during the voyage. At its conclusion, for those who have survived, the refusal to grant them permission to dock equates to a physical expulsion, occurring even before their bodies have a chance to set foot on a piece of land. In Albinati’s book, the cynicism of the author’s words follows a circular trajectory to illustrate that, in truth, the initial cynicism is rooted in the institutions. This path begins with emotion and, in its ultimate reflections, leads to the rational framework that underpins it. In Veronesi’s book, the inhumanity of the institutions’ words follows a circular trajectory to illustrate that, in truth, the people departing from the places of migration are as human as the reader. This path is initially guided by a focus of the physical aspect and leads, in its final reflections, to the recognition of shared humanity, rationalising the commonalities among people: the physical presence in a situation of security or in a situation of danger, with feet planted on the ground or on the wave-like instability of the sea surface. On the side of institutions, Veronesi intends to broaden the analysis of the Italian situation within the European Union and with this aim he hosts an interview with Óscar Camps, the activist and founder of the NGO *Proactiva Open Arms*, according to whom with the events of 2018

si sta alterando il Diritto Marittimo Internazionale, e lo si sta facendo con il consenso dell’Organizzazione Marittima Internazionale e dell’Unione Europea, che permettono a tutti i paesi del Mediterraneo di negare l’approdo impunemente [...] in balia della speculazione politica (78)³⁸.

A migration and asylum policy that was set in motion by the EU from 2015-

vital needs, your own resistance, there. The body, the most extreme means of struggle in the non-violence tradition”.

38 “International Maritime Law is being altered, and that’s being done with the consent of the International Maritime Organisation and the European Union, which allow all Mediterranean countries to deny landings with impunity [...] at the mercy of political speculation”.

16 discrediting independent organisations involved in managing humanitarian crises. This policy also focused on providing financial support to countries of origin with the aim deterring migration towards Europe. It involved the implementation of military border controls and the establishment of Frontex bases in sub-Saharan Africa (79, 81). A policy to which Italy would adapt by financing Libyan criminal organisations so that they would prevent migrants from setting sail from the African coasts (91) and which would, ultimately, follow the Australian model, that is “più morti, meno barconi in mare. Questo è il sistema australiano, ma anche il sistema di Frontex, o quello dell’accordo Italia–Libia” (93-94)³⁹.

To answer the research question on what perception is today given by the two authors with respect to the Italians-migrants binomial, it can be concluded by saying that both writers criticise the institutional and political aspect of Italy and, although Albinati’s pamphlet dwells on it episodically, of Italy in coordination or friction with the European Union, depending on the situation and historical counterparts. The image that remains of the juxtapositions between Italians and migrants thirty years later has as its backdrop the juxtapositions between Italy and the EU, between their relative and temporary political speculations. Whether these political speculations are geared towards welcoming or turning away migrants, they both expose persistent structural inadequacies within migration policies, encompassing national and community levels.

6. Conclusion

The 1989 fictions describe the new phenomenon of foreign migration in Italy in its various aspects while non-fictions of 2018 notice that, after thirty years, its structural nature has not been addressed with the consequent and necessary strategy. Rather, foreign migration appears to be a set of matches and counterparts deliberately left open, negotiable, instrumentalised with respect to the balances and power games between national and EU political agendas. Migration is a complex phenomenon, to which the answers and solutions imply not short timeframes. Nevertheless, thirty years is a sufficient timeframe to develop a plurality of responses that reflect the plurality of approaches naturally emerging in democracies. The decisions of democratic institutions do not always seem to be concretely and completely in compliance with constitutions, human rights declarations, and international laws. One example in this sense may be the decision of the latest English governments to indiscriminately transfer the economic migrants to Rwanda. The management of migration flows over the past three decades has been corrected and changed by people who vote delineating consequently the same electorate’s attitudes. It is unthinkable that electorate’s attitudes always remain unidirectional, whether they tend to be narrower or wider in the

39 “More deaths, fewer barges at sea. This is the Australian system, but also the Frontex system, or that of the Italy-Libya agreement”.

migration's welcoming. Some historical moments favour migration acceptance which in other historical moments is deprecated⁴⁰. In any scenario, since it is an issue congenital to the very nature of the human being, migration deserves strategic visions to be alternated according to the electoral expressions, however consistent with safeguarding human rights in times of closure, with social development in times of openness⁴¹. The deliberate political and institutional lack, shared at the European level, shows that with respect to the migrants' issue it is, despite the decades had at disposal, premature to speak of post-alterity, as otherness has not been fully truly addressed.

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40 The 'Aquarius case' follows the general elections of 4 March 2018 where the right political parties received 37% of the vote and the *Movimento 5 stelle* received 32% of the vote. With its 17% of the votes, the *Lega* left the right formation and with the *Movimento 5 stelle* formed the government that denied docking to the *Aquarius*. A choice, albeit with distinctions, shared by the right parties that did not enter the government, *Forza Italia* and *Fratelli d'Italia*, and thus by the political formations that, in all, received a very large majority, about 70% of the votes.

41 The Italy-Libya agreement at the time of Gaddafi, the Europe-Turkey agreement with Erdogan and those that are currently in the pipeline with the president of Tunisia (Kaïs Saïed) instead nail Italian and European history to timeless actions as they result in the repetition of the same emergency model: bargaining with the country from which last departures set sail, often countries recognized by the EU itself as undemocratic received 32% of the vote. With its 17% of the votes, the *Lega* left the right formation and with the *Movimento 5 stelle* formed the government that denied docking to the *Aquarius*. A choice, albeit with distinctions, shared by the right parties that did not enter the government, *Forza Italia* and *Fratelli d'Italia*, and thus by the political formations that, in all, received a very large majority, about 70% of the votes.

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