

Visit India.

By Patrizia Santangeli.

Chiara Cavallo Productions, 2011.

55 minutes. DVD format, color.

The Pontine Marshes (Agro Pontino) in Italy's Lazio region were developed after being reclaimed from marshland in the 1930s, wished to life by the dictator Benito Mussolini himself. The area's long and remarkable history is narrated in Antonio Pennacchi's novel *Canale Mussolini* (Mussolini canal) (Mondadori, 2010), which recounts the complexities of life as experienced by those Italians who migrated from the north of Italy to populate the brand new towns in order to construct and maintain the canal system and cultivate the fields. Theirs was an arduous life, made even more difficult by frequent instances of crippling malaria. In 1934, the well-known writer and journalist Corrado Alvaro wrote *Terra nuova: prima cronaca dell'Agro Pontino* (New land: first chronicle of the Pontine Marshes), a book devoted to describing this unprecedented achievement of the fascist regime. Published by the Istituto Nazionale di Cultura Fascista, Alvaro's book documents the monumental system organized in order to create new land for cultivation to feed the nation.

Cities rose quickly in the new territory and were given names such as "Littoria," in honor of the *fasci littori*, symbols of fascist Italy, or "Sabaudia," in honor of the Italian royal family. Built according to a fascist modernist style that marks other rural and urban spaces in Italy, the cities in Agro Pontino were intended to represent the strength and glorious achievements of fascism. Propaganda films, such as Giovacchino Forzano's 1933 *Camicia nera* (Black shirt), document the evolution of the area's development from rudimentary huts among the marshes to a newly colonized area. This locale was intended to be seen as both fascist and modern but still devoted to agriculture. In the 1930s, nobody could have imagined that, once "de-fascistized," Littoria would one day be renamed "Latina," a bureaucratic choice made so that the "LT" indicating the province on car license plates could be retained.

Neither could they have imagined that this agricultural area would, in the last twenty years, attract many non-Western immigrants whom the fascist 1938 racial laws would have declared racially inferior. However, even during the fascist period, this area was a place of complex contradictions: For instance, the Partito Nazionale Fascista of Littoria was dedicated to a Jew, Camillo Barany. Well known in the area, Barany was an Italian war hero and an expert land-reclaimer who died during the colonial conquest in Ethiopia in 1936, two years before the racial laws that would have defined him as an inferior Other. Immigration to the Agro Pontino had the unintended consequence of creating a hybrid, heterogeneous space because at the time circulation within the country was not free (special permissions had to be granted in order to relocate), and thus the presence of others within a territory that symbolized a fascist modernizing triumph was striking. The diversity of the fascist period foreshadowed recent, more radical changes of the human landscape in this area, changes connected to a global process of people's migrations.

Patrizia Santangeli's documentary *Visit India* is a highly valuable and successful project relating to the most recent layer of the area's change due to another kind of immigration. This very original documentary allows the Sikh community in Bella

Farnia to tell the stories of the multiple transmigrations that led them to this small village. The coastal town of Bella Farnia located in the province of Latina, near the city of Sabaudia, is quite small and outside the tourist season has a population of about 460 inhabitants. It has become the destination for a number of Sikh men from the Punjab region of India who have been employed mainly in agricultural activities: working in the fields, in greenhouses, and in stables. Santangeli recalls that on her drive from Rome to the beaches of Sabaudia, she used to see turbaned men riding their bicycles to and from work. Her interest in the Sikh community began after witnessing the changing human landscape of the Latina province and Sabaudia in particular and culminated with this 2011 documentary. (Santangeli has produced another documentary dealing with the representation of Agro Pontino and its history. Her 2006 film *Erano paludi* [They were marshes] focuses on land reclamation, using historical and contemporary images to illustrate the transformation of the territory.)

Visit India benefits from the collaboration of a sociologist, Marco Omizzolo, whose statements (heard as voice-overs) complement the immigrants' narratives. He describes the history of Sikh immigration to Sabaudia and personalizes the life histories of the protagonists of the documentary. In fact, Omizzolo travels to Punjab with one of the men introduced in the film, Hardeep, who is returning home to find a bride. The trip to Punjab uncovers the fact that Hardeep, like some other migrants, comes from a rather wealthy family of landowners, and his migration is motivated by the desire to protect the family from the current downturn in the global economy. Having a son in Europe is an act of economic diversification that gives Hardeep's family the possibility of investing in something other than agriculture and the Indian economy.

However, many of the other protagonists of the documentary do not come from such privileged backgrounds. Deep Singh tells of his harrowing experience of migration to Italy, through Russia, Slovakia, and Austria with very little food to sustain him during the trip. After paying 6,000 euros, Deep found himself living as an undocumented migrant and working in the countryside near Sabaudia. After nine years in Italy, he sent a picture back to India in the hopes of finding a wife, and in fact he later returns to India. Throughout, Santangeli presents Deep in relationship with Italy and Italians: We see him as a worker in a greenhouse, and he introduces himself by showing a photograph of himself with some Italian friends. This is a curious visual juxtaposition given that the Sikh community is rather isolated from the other residents of the Sabaudia area. On the other hand, it is important to note, as the film does, that there are volunteers who teach Italian to immigrants in order to facilitate a possible integration of this particular community into the larger society. To its credit, the documentary does not dwell on the work of Westerners with the Sikh community, a perspective that would have contributed to creating a problematic narrative—one that displaces the attention from the immigrants, the focus of the documentary, to the altruistic work of a rather small group of people. However reassuring to the (presumably native Italian) audience such a portrayal of Italians might have been, it is very relevant to document instead the lives and struggles of people who confront discrimination and intolerance, especially in a country where racist episodes against migrants are numerous.

Among the Sikhs interviewed, it is Satwinder who stresses the importance of language acquisition by stating that if one cannot speak Italian, he or she can only find

a job in agriculture. Satwinder came to Italy from Finland, where part of her family had migrated, in order to marry a member of the Sikh community in Italy. She has made an effort to learn Italian and has held a number of positions in the food industry. Although she lives among the Sikh community, she has developed a more eclectic approach to Italian culture. She has two daughters who were born in Italy and actively participate in local culture. The girls' Italian is native and, Satwinder concludes, her daughters would not feel at ease back in India. Italy is their (hybridized) homeland. For Satwinder, a migration of return is not a viable option, although she is determined to keep some Sikh traditions: When questioned by her mother, one of Satwinder's young daughters states that when it is time to marry, her mother will choose her spouse. Traditions are also maintained through religious attendance and participation in prayers at the temple (*gurudwara*), which are important aspects of life in the Sikh community. The temple is the symbol of traditional values, the location where customary activities can take place, and a meeting point for the community. Anybody can frequent the temple and take advantage of the meals served there. Men and women belonging to different castes, together with local Italians, can freely partake in the ritual repast. Harbajan, a lumberjack and an assiduous participant in temple activities, supervises the meals. He also oversees the Sikh food preparation process to which both men and women contribute.

Although most of the documentary is devoted to highlighting the complex and peaceful lives and celebrations of the Sikh community in Sabaudia, hardships, racism, and loneliness emerge in many narratives. Dhillon Karanjit Singh, the president of the Sikh community in Italy, remembers the violent attacks that targeted the early Sikh migrants to the Sabaudia area. When he arrived in 1985, some local teenagers would throw rocks to make immigrants fall from their bicycles or mopeds, even putting their lives in danger. He also remembers that loneliness drove some of the members of the then small community to fall into the trap of alcoholism, a problem that was even highlighted in the local news as a warning to other immigrants. Anna, an Italian who lives in Bella Farnia, remembers the brawls among Indians that took place in the early days of the community. She also stresses that the process of family reunification, the formation of new families, and the birth of children among the Sikhs improved the relationship between locals and immigrants. It is thanks to the immigrants that Bella Farnia has been revitalized, as they are now living in houses that had long been empty, and, according to Anna, the new residents have contributed to a collaborative atmosphere in the neighborhood.

Santangeli has created a documentary that avoids easy dichotomies in the description of the relationship between immigrants and locals. The testimonies of the interviewees allow *Visit India* to construct a rather inclusive narrative connecting the contemporary experiences of the Sikh community to the area's own local history of internal migrations. For example, Armida remembers her family's migration from the north of Italy to Sabaudia in the 1930s in search of better work opportunities in the newly reclaimed lands. She remembers the hardships, her desperation as a ten-year-old girl, and the daily fight against insects that never gave her any respite. The members of her family were treated as slaves by the local land managers, who could either grant or withhold permission for the internal migrants to return for a visit to their relatives still living in northern Italy.

Recent migrants from Punjab can supply even harsher examples of exploitation due to their status as undocumented migrants. Their precarious conditions embolden some local employers to either curtail their wages or withhold their pay entirely. An undocumented migrant cannot report any mistreatment to the police without taking the risk of being deported. Connected through similar difficulties of life and the complexities and sacrifices inherent in migration, the experiences of Armida, Satwinder, Dhillon, Hardeep, Deep, and Harbajan reject any stereotypes in the definition of the experiences of migration and in the portrayal of contemporary Italy as a destination country.

Visit India is highly successful in presenting the complexity in the life of a community of immigrants in Italy and simultaneously presenting the complexity of the process of narrating other people's lives in a documentary directed and written by nonmigrants. Santangeli and her collaborators chose to highlight the testimonies and celebrations of the protagonists and tried to limit the space allowed for the intervention of experts on others' lives. Hopefully, in the near future we will have narratives authored both by members of this Sikh community and by members of other communities of recent migrants to Italy who can complement and dialog with works such as Santangeli's extremely valuable documentary.

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18 Ius soli.

By Fred Kuwornu.

Struggle Filmworks Production, 2011.

49 minutes. DVD format, color.

In the last two decades, scholarly and artistic works dealing with contemporary immigration to Italy have mainly been geared toward questions of the rights of illegal immigrants; but as large numbers of immigrants continue to cross the Mediterranean to Italy either as a final destination or as a portal to other European countries, debates about immigrants' rights have become more heated. The documentary *18 Ius soli* (18 Right of the soil) sheds light on a new aspect of the immigrant presence in Italy that has been largely ignored: that of legal immigrants and their right to citizenship, a right already granted to them but only by a problematic law not yet put into effect. The ultimate goal of the film is to campaign for a new proposed law, "Modified Ius Soli," put forward, according to the film, by the St. Egidio Community (a Roman Catholic lay association) with the support of social networks of second-generation children and the bipartisan support of fifty members of the parliament. The new law proposes to grant citizenship automatically to children born in Italy "to a family legally resid[ing] in Italy for at least five years." In this way, the documentary, by being "uno dei primi documentari 'grassroot' prodotti in Italia" (one of the first grassroots documentaries produced in Italy), as explained on the film's website (www.18-ius-soli.com), stands as a form of political activism (although what is meant by "grassroots" is not clarified).