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Back for Good: Melodrama and the Returning Soldier in Post-War Italian Cinema

In 1949, the journal *Cinema* published an article entitled ‘Il cinema ha capito i reduci?’ It reported a recent episode, in which an Italian veteran who had written to a newspaper announced that he was going to kill himself. The journalist, Lamberto Sechi, used this case as an opportunity to compare the representation of veterans in Hollywood and Italian cinema: whereas Hollywood managed to produce ‘piccoli drammi intimi’ that captured the alienation and out-of-placeness of the returning soldier in both its public and private aspects – in films such as *The Best Years of Our Lives* (Wyler, 1946) and *Till the End of Time* (Dmytryk, 1946) – Italian films, according to Sechi, had relied on either sentiment or on schematic ideological positions (Sechi 1949, 175).¹ He cites recent films such as *La vita ricomincia* (Mattoli, 1946), *Il bandito* (Lattuada, 1946), and *Caccia tragica* (De Santis, 1947) to prove his point.

However, Sechi’s further claim that the *reduce* had become a forgotten figure on Italian screens by 1949 is not accurate. Between 1945 and 1954, Italian cinema actually produced dozens of films featuring ex-combatants. Many of these films have never been analysed by scholars, because they operate in the mode of melodrama, and thus fall outside the critical parameters that deemed (and still deem) neorealism to be the only cinematic style capable of adequately representing post-war Italian society. In this sense, Sechi’s assertion that the *reduce* is a ‘personaggio ideale di una storia facilmente commovente’ is accurate (1949, 174). Despite the critical neglect of these films, however, they offer to the viewing public a figure who has ‘the power to embody difficult national issues’ and to ‘disturb and dismantle widely accepted versions of national narratives of conflict’ (McVeigh and Cooper 2013, 9-10). The idea of the *reduce* as an ‘uncomfortable or disturbing reminder’ (McVeigh and Cooper 2013, 7) is crucial to my reading of post-war Italian cinema, where he stands in for the ideological chaos of that period, the legacy of Fascism, and the idea of Italian victimhood. Even in films that are typically dismissed as lightweight and politically empty, he remains a complex figure of guilt and innocence, emotions that are then displaced onto the private sphere and onto the sphere of gender relations through plots that depict love triangles, unfaithful wives, and dramatic stories of injustice and forgiveness.

This article will first sketch out the historical context within which the *reduce* is situated, highlighting the silence which surrounded the figure until recent historiography began to re-evaluate him; it will then discuss how the returning soldier, coming home to a country that fails to recognise him fully, and which is in turn unfamiliar to him, is a key

figure of melodrama, a mode that itself functions in terms of (mis)recognition, and divisions of guilt and innocence, silence and expression. It will analyse how the love triangle is used in various films to represent an ideological choice, and will discuss how notions of justice and victimhood, embodied by the *reduce*, resonate both on a personal and public level. The nature of what the *reduce* has suffered, often in prison or concentration camps, cannot be described, and becomes unspeakable, with silence and circumlocution the only options, and the article will relate this private struggle for articulation with Italian repression of many aspects of its war experience on an institutional level. The disturbance caused by the *reduce* to the domestic space and familial relations speaks to the Italian struggle to come to terms with the past while simultaneously trying to move on from it.²

The corpus of films under examination includes the following:³

Title	Director	Year
<i>Due lettere anonime</i>	Mario Camerini	1945
<i>Il bandito</i>	Alberto Lattuada	1946
<i>Un uomo ritorna</i>	Max Neufeld	1946
<i>Il sole sorge ancora</i>	Aldo Vergano	1946
<i>La vita ricomincia</i>	Mario Mattoli	1946
<i>Caccia tragica</i>	Giuseppe De Santis	1947
<i>Cuori senza frontiere</i>	Luigi Zampa	1949
<i>Riso amaro</i>	Giuseppe De Santis	1949
<i>La città dolente</i>	Mario Bonnard	1949
<i>Atto di accusa</i>	Giacomo Gentilomo	1950
<i>Non c'è pace tra gli ulivi</i>	Giuseppe De Santis	1950
<i>Alina</i>	Giorgio Pastina	1950
<i>Napoli milionaria</i>	Eduardo De Filippo	1950
<i>Il Cristo proibito</i>	Curzio Malaparte	1951
<i>Il bivio</i>	Fernando Cerchio	1951
<i>Gli innocenti pagano</i>	Luigi Capuano	1951
<i>Achtung! banditi!</i>	Carlo Lizzani	1951
<i>Tragico ritorno</i>	Pier Luigi Faraldo	1952
<i>Penne nere</i>	Oreste Biancoli	1952
<i>La pattuglia dell'Amba Alagi</i>	Flavio Calzavara	1953
<i>Perdonami!</i>	Mario Costa	1953
<i>Noi cannibali</i>	Antonio Leonviola	1953
<i>Noi peccatori</i>	Guido Brignone	1953

<i>Acque amare</i>	Sergio Corbucci	1954
<i>Guai ai vinti</i>	Raffaello Matarazzo	1954
<i>Pietà per chi cade</i>	Mario Costa	1954
<i>Gli sbandati</i>	Francesco Maselli	1955
<i>Canzone proibita</i>	Flavio Calzavara	1956

While the corpus includes a few films that are reasonably well known (*Il bandito*, *Non c'è pace tra gli ulivi*, *Riso amaro*, *Napoli milionaria*), most are critically unexamined. Some of these films were made in the immediate post-war period, but others were released as late as 1956; as we will see, this gives the lie to the idea that Italy's wartime experiences were elided from its screens in the 1950s, and film, as I will show, was a powerful vector for negotiating the national past.

The Return Home

Ruth Ben-Ghiat (2001, 256) has written extensively of the *reduce* as a 'shameful symbol' of the guilt and trauma of fascism and of Italy's alliance with Nazism, as well as of its failed war.⁴ Soldiers deported to Germany after the armistice of 8th September 1943, and those captured and imprisoned abroad, in Russia, Africa and elsewhere, were often regarded as pariahs when they returned, and carried with them the symbolic task of expiating the sins of the Italian nation.

Over a million Italian soldiers were captured after the 8th September in Italy, France, the Balkans and Greece.⁵ Approximately 600,000 were sent to German camps (where an estimated 20,000 died).⁶ Around 20,000 Italians were also interned in Russia, and 408,000 were made prisoners of the British in Africa, Australia, and Britain, with a further 120,000 held in the USA (Bistarelli 40).⁷

It is important to bear in mind that the term *reduce* covers many categories, and includes combatants as well as non-combatants, partisans, prisoners and non-prisoners.⁸ The films I am analysing generally ignore civilian deportees, and focus on returning soldiers' these are treated quite vaguely, and in general the only firm distinctions the films make are between partisans and those imprisoned who did not fight in the Resistance.

Historiographically, one particular category that has received much attention recently is that of the 'internati militari italiani', those deported to camps in Germany after 8th September 1943, and who chose not to collaborate with the Germans, and refused to fight against the

Allies.⁹ They will figure in particularly interesting ways in my discussion of discourses of victimhood and innocence.

Reduci were often felt to be ‘testimoni fastidiosi’ of Italy’s experience of Fascism and war (Sommaruga 1992, 259), and their return was accompanied by a widespread silence, a silence that for many historians is now evidence **of the work of repression that their presence activated: that is, the repression of Italy’s wartime experience in its complexity.**¹⁰ The official report of the *Commissione storica italo-tedesca*, carried out at the behest of the Italian and German governments in 2012, asserts that after 1945 the returning military internees had been completely forgotten, calling them ‘vittime dimenticate’.¹¹ In the collective memory, they were often overshadowed by the *deportati* and *partigiani*.¹² **MORE.** Additionally, Claudio Pavone (2013, 116) has discussed the fears of antifascist leaders after the war about the reincorporation of veterans who had not passed through the Resistance and had not experienced antifascism; social disorder was also provoked by the *reduci* who throughout 1946 gathered in public protests against the lack of jobs for them (Bistarelli 2007, 124-33).¹³

The silence surrounding the returning veterans can be placed in the broader context of historiography of the last fifteen years or so on the myth of ‘italiani brava gente’ – the refusal to acknowledge the horrors and war crimes carried out by Italian soldiers, especially in the Balkans and Greece. Filippo Focardi has amply documented the attempts to ‘scaricare sui tedeschi il peso di ogni responsabilità, e contemporaneamente attribuire una dimensione epica e nazionale alla Resistenza’ (2013, viii);¹⁴ the way in which both institutions and discourse of the state, as well as press, worked to present Italians as both ‘vittime della ventennale dittatura mussoliniana, ma anche come vittime della guerra’ (Focardi 2013, 89) was joined with the over-emphasis on the Resistance as a symbolic cleansing.¹⁵ In addition, as Ben-Ghiat (1999, 89-91), notes, the failure to purge effectively Italy’s institutions of fascists, or to carry out trials for crimes committed, completes the picture of an uneasy relationship to a past that was not confronted in post-war Italy.¹⁶

The last thirty years or so have seen a new historiographic interest in veterans and in those who were imprisoned, in particular, the IMI (Internati Militari Italiani), who were given the choice after the armistice of 8th September 1943 of fighting alongside the Germans or being deported and imprisoned. Only a minority of soldiers agreed to collaborate, even when imprisoned,¹⁷ and this refusal to collaborate began to be read in the 1980s by historians (many of them *ex-internati* themselves) as a ‘Resistenza senz’armi’ (Associazione nazionale ex internati, 1984). The idea of ‘l’altra Resistenza’, the title of *ex-internato* and future PCI leader Alessandro Natta’s seminal book (1997),¹⁸ has been picked up in terms such as

‘Resistenza del filo spinato’ (Bistarelli 2007, 24), ‘Resistenza disarmata’ (Sommaruga 1995b, 101) and ‘Resistenza attiva’ (Giuntella 1986, 71). The effect of this challenging of previous designations of the choice of the IMI as a ‘Resistenza passiva’¹⁹ has been to broaden the notion of the Resistance in the post-war period, and to redress the overshadowing of the IMI by the partisans. The relationship between the official Resistance and the returned soldiers was complex and fraught: although in 1944 the CLNAI had recognised the ‘disperata resistenza degli internati’, the Italian government only recognised their contribution in 1977, awarding the ‘distintivo d’onore’ to *ex-internati* for their refusal to collaborate.²⁰

The Italian situation was also peculiar in that it was characterised by the delayed return of many veterans: although the majority returned home in 1946 and in the first part of 1947 (Bistarelli 2007, 41), some prisoners were held in Russian camps until the 1950s, with perhaps the most famous case being that of Nicola Silvestro, whose return to Naples in 1958 after being missing for twenty years was covered by national newspapers and magazines.²¹ For many years letters continued to appear in the national press from readers seeking information on family members, and hoping that they were still alive.²² The idea that these men might reappear, or miraculously come back to life (they were often referred to as *redivivi*) attests to the ongoing nature of the trauma of loss and gives a unique inflection to the Italian postwar situation.

The condition of the men who returned was often serious, as they suffered from trauma, physical injuries and malnutrition. This is attested to in letters to *La Settimana Incom Illustrata* in 1952: in response to a female reader’s letter complaining about the lack of healthy men, 82 girls wrote in lamenting that the men who have returned, for whom they had already sacrificed years waiting, are like ‘bambini malati’.²³ These letters help recover what Robert Burgoyne (2013, 353), writing on historical film, calls history’s ‘emotional archaeology’, its affective surround, and they effectively render ‘the “inside” of historical events’. The body of films about veterans, I argue, also does this, conveying the affective valence of such a traumatic moment, and allowing the ‘recovery of a barred emotional history’ (Burgoyne 2013, 351).

Realism, Melodrama and Post-war Italian Cinema

Ben-Ghiat (1995, 662) makes the point that neorealism (or at least the few films generally considered as such), in its studied avoidance of the representation of Fascism, both ‘determined what it was necessary to remember’ and became a ‘model for what would be elided from post-war memory’. Although it is Italian neorealism that is conventionally read

as the authoritative cinematic chronicle of Italy's experience of World War II, and the Resistance, through canonical films such as Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (1945) and *Paisà* (1946), as I will show, many of the films that I analyse enact the conditions of what was sayable about the fascist past, but do so through the mode of melodrama. Despite recent critical work which has restored a fuller picture of the period, especially evaluating the role of melodrama, and providing a greater focus on the continuities between pre-and post-war Italian cinema, a certain orthodoxy has remained, by which neorealism is, in Pasolini's words, a product of the Resistance, and Italy's struggle for reconstruction and its inability to deal with the traumas of the past are best seen through the lens of neorealism.²⁴ However, the traumas of Fascism, war, occupation, and Resistance were worked through by Italian cinema after the war in a range of genres and modes, principally melodrama, as I will demonstrate here.

The fact that films about *reduci* were being released as late as 1956 also helps to challenge the prevailing critical view that Italian cinema of the 1950s was silent on the events of fascism and the war. Vittorio Spinazzola's assertion (1974, 228) that until 1959, with the success of Monicelli's *La grande guerra* and Rossellini's *Il generale della Rovere*, the struggle against fascism was absent from Italian screens is a very common one.²⁵ 1959 is consistently read as the key date after which Italian cinema once again began to address the nation's past: in his recent book, Giacomo Lichtner argues that the themes of fascism, war and Resistance 'had been rare, unpopular, and often censored in the 1950s' – this is only the case, however, if we ignore melodrama, and films that cannot be defined as auteur cinema; it is symptomatic that Lichtner reads the period post-1959 as a 'neorealist revival' (2013, 89), speaking to the ways in which screen representations deemed politically committed are necessarily associated with neorealism.²⁶ Just as Gian Piero Brunetta's diagnosis of Italian cinema's 'amnesia' in the 1950s towards fascism and the Resistance is only partially true (1996, 14), Agostino Bistarelli's assertion (2007, 53) that the *reduce* disappeared from screens after 1948 is also faulty. In fact, the *reduce* has an extensive presence in postwar Italian cinema, which has been mainly ignored because the figure is found in the supposedly trivial and feminized mode of melodrama.

Already in the 1950s, left-wing Italian critics were discussing whether melodramas about the war and the Resistance should be taken seriously. The discomfort around what was perceived to be melodrama's 'trivialization' of the Resistance, in particular, affected the critical reception of films such as *'O sole mio* (Gentilomo, 1946) and *Avanti a lui tremava*

tutta Roma (Gallone, 1946).²⁷ However, the general dismissal of films that address the war in a melodramatic register ignores the importance of the ‘affective charge’ (Wood 2005, 207) of melodrama in making sense of the complex and chaotic situation of post-war Italy.²⁸ The figure of the *reduce* lends itself perfectly to melodrama, a mode that foregrounds love triangles, and narratives of victimhood and injustice, of homecoming and misrecognition. The figure operates as a symptom or trace, in the same way that Danielle Hipkins defines the over-representation of the figure of the prostitute in post-war Italian cinema (and of course, in post-war melodrama, the *reduce* and prostitute are often found together, as marginalised figures). Hipkins (2016) reads the prostitute as a symptom or ‘lightning conductor’ for a range of social anxieties and ideological contradictions that cannot be spoken directly by cinema of the period; the *reduce*, I argue, operates in a specifically national context to embody repressed issues and anxieties around Fascism, the war, post-war masculinities and the struggle for memory.

In recent years, the relation between neorealism and melodrama has been re-evaluated in the light of Christine Gledhill’s formulation of the latter as less a genre than a mode or modality that spans texts and genres; ‘the notion of modality, like register in socio-linguistics, defines a specific mode of aesthetic articulation adaptable across a range of genres, across decades, and across national cultures’ (2000, 229). Rather than seeing melodrama as simply emotional or hysterical excess, conceiving of melodrama as inhabiting nearly all films in the post-war period in Italy is helpful, including so-called neorealist ones, as we can understand events of public history and private emotions being equally significant.²⁹ As Anna Garofalo (1956, 11) put it, ‘la crisi degli affetti, dei rapporti amorosi è in pieno sviluppo e si inserisce nel più vasto quadro del disastro nazionale’. One of the reasons for the critical neglect of the films about *reduci* (with the exception of *Il bandito* and *Napoli milionaria*) is that often the *reduce* is inserted into a schematic love triangle or other domestic plot, with little detailed investigation of his plight and its cause, and the war and experience of imprisonment are often relegated to the background.

In this sense, comparisons can be drawn with post-war Hollywood *film noir*, which, as we have seen, also addressed the trauma of the returning American veteran obliquely: as Frank Krutnik notes, returning veteran figures ‘receive a standardised address within the generic mode of the thriller’ (1991, 66), and are part of what he terms *noir*’s ‘highly regulated and ‘self-perpetuating system of narrative representation’ (72). In the Italian context, the *reduce* was often inserted into the melodramatic film in a similarly standardised or schematic

fashion, with his troubled past only serving as a narrative pretext for the film's dramatic plot unfolding. Yet if we examine seriously this 'self-perpetuating system of narrative representation', we can understand how melodrama often steps in where both neorealism and historiography fail, and recognise how these films were trying to address the 'renegotiation of familial and gender roles' (Pattinson, Noakes and Ugolini 2014, 181) that occurred in the period. Emiliano Morreale confirms that 'alcuni film che utilizzano in maniera più vistosa schemi melodrammatici sollevano temi tra i più scabrosi del periodo, che spesso la politica dell'epoca non sa bene come inquadrare, e che talvolta solo in anni più recenti saranno affrontati dalla storiografia' (2011, 165). Much work in the Anglo-American context has focused on melodrama as 'a site for symbolic resistance to dominant modes of social organization' (Bachman and Calder Williams 2012, 61), and it is into this strand that my work falls.

As Ruth Ben-Ghiat notes, cinema can have the function of 'conveying realms of perception and feeling connected with coping with the legacies of the past' (2010, 159). However, it is not just the neorealist films that Ben-Ghiat discusses which perform this function. Indeed, melodrama, through its hyperbolic emotional register, is uniquely placed to express the 'realms of feeling' Italians struggled with, albeit in a displaced and oblique style. As Linda Williams notes:

If emotional and moral registers are sounded, if a work invites us to feel sympathy for the virtues of beset victims, if the narrative trajectory is ultimately more concerned with a retrieval and staging of innocence than with the psychological causes of motives and action, then the operative mode is melodrama. (Williams 1998: 42).

Neorealism as melodramatic. Bayman.

These questions of victimhood and innocence, narrated in an emotional register, are central to the *reduce* melodramas, through whose plots questions of national innocence and guilt are explored, as we will see.

Love Triangles and Victimhood

The characterisation of Italian soldiers as victims of Fascism has been a persistent one: Gabriella Gribaudi discusses how capture and imprisonment in Russia, for example, allowed the Italian soldier to be transformed 'da invasore a vittima' (2016, 164). Focardi shows how,

already in February 1945, *Avanti*, discussing ‘il dramma dei reduci’, described them as ‘disgraziate vittime della guerra del fascismo’ (2014, 92). The physical and emotional suffering of *reduci* was also emphasised in the unpublished memoirs they wrote after the war.³⁰ It is clear that the suffering of the imprisoned soldiers was real and unrecognised: Schrieber notes that the IMI ‘non hanno trovato né in Germania né in Italia il posto al quale avrebbero avuto diritto per il loro comportamento e per quel vero e proprio martirio fisico e morale patito nei Lager tedeschi’.³¹ Some *ex-internati* have even drawn parallels in their writings with the experience of the Jews: ‘Auschwitz c’è stato, Buchenwald e Belsen, ed anche i lager dove hanno penato e resistito soldati e ufficiali italiani’ (Natta 1992, 327).³² A scene in *Caccia tragica* features a close-up of a camp tattoo on the *reduci*’s wrist and thus clearly aligns him with Jewish suffering [Figure 1].³³



Figure 1 *Caccia tragica*

In post-war cinema, this victimhood and suffering is often played out in displaced fashion through romantic relationships. I have written elsewhere (O’Rawe 2014, 117-37) about how the use of the love triangle (often between brothers) in films representing the *anni di piombo* works to elide ideological differences and to encourage a narrative of equivalence

which also neutralises and expels a difficult past. In the films under examination here, the love triangle brings into complicated proximity men on both sides of the ideological conflict through the body of the woman. For example, in *Cuori senza frontiere*, Raf Vallone's ex-soldier returns to his tiny village near the Yugoslav border, which has been divided into two, and fights for the love of Donata (Gina Lollobrigida) against her lover, who has decided to live on the Yugoslav side of the border. Their violent confrontation is clearly a way of working out issues around political belonging and the fate of the Italian border. In *Il Cristo proibito*, Vallone again plays a soldier, Bruno, who returns from *prigionia* to find that his brother, a partisan, has been killed, and determines to avenge his death [Figure 2]. He then discovers that his ex-girlfriend, believing him to be dead, had slept with the brother while Bruno was away. Her ingenuous confession: 'era come se mi fossi data a te,' suggests a fundamental sameness of ideological positions between the partisan and the soldier, and makes of the surviving brother, betrayed, victimised, and aiming to dispense justice, the representative of the Italy to come.



Figure 2 Raf Vallone as Bruno returns home in *Il Cristo proibito*

Similarly, in *Non c'è pace tra gli ulivi* Vallone again plays a *reduce* who comes back to discover his girlfriend involved with an older man, clearly linked to the Fascist hierarchy, and a similar model is visible in *Atto di accusa*, where Marcello Mastroianni's *reduce* is framed for murder by his ex-girlfriend's new, much older husband. The complexity of the plots - in *Gli innocenti pagano* the soldier becomes involved with his dead friend's girlfriend, but his own ex-wife has left him, and his new love has also had a relationship with a powerful man while her lover was away - is of course typical of the schemes of melodrama, but also alludes to the disruption of domestic life and the difficulty for the returning man to understand the new kinds of relations that have sprung up. These new relations have a basis in fact: Maria Porzio, for example, discusses the difficulties that many *reduci* faced upon returning home and discovering their wives had begun new relationships.³⁴

The casting of Vallone in so many of these films is particularly interesting (he appears also as *reduci* in *Il bivio*, *Perdomami!* and *Riso amaro*): as an ex-partisan and writer for *L'Unità*, as well as an ex-footballer, the actor embodies a robust physicality, and a left-wing persona; his characters are, nevertheless, haunted by the events of the war, and exhibit a fundamental sense of defeat. The tortured paternalism of many of his characters shows an awareness that previous gender certainties (about female behaviour and the need for strong masculinity) are crumbling. Vallone, who emerged as a star well after the war, in 1949 with *Riso amaro*, was thus distinctly unlike Amedeo Nazzari, who as an emblem of pre-war cinema had to redeem himself through roles as *reduci* in films such as *Il bandito*, *Pietà per chi cade*, and *Alina*, in which his characters acknowledge and atone for their compromised past.

In *Caccia tragica*, the love triangle is reversed, and Andrea Checchi plays a *reduce* who has turned to banditry and, although tied to Vivi Gioi's collaborationist femme fatale, is drawn to the good woman (Carla del Poggio), girlfriend of fellow veteran Massimo Girotti. This model is also present in *Il sole sorge ancora* where Vittorio Duse has to choose between a collaborator and a woman of the Resistance. In that film, and in others such as *Due lettere anonime* (where Clara Calamai makes a choice between Checchi's Resistance fighter and her Fascist lover, played by Otello Toso) and *Achtung! banditi!*, where Gina Lollobrigida has to choose between her brother, a former *alpino* helping the Germans, and a man of the Resistance, the setting is not post-war, but post-8th September.³⁵ In that moment, the stakes are clearer, as the war is ongoing, and the starkness of the moral choice is evident, even as it is run together with a sexual, romantic or familial choice, as the male heroes are clearly labelled as former soldiers turned Resistance fighters after the Armistice.³⁶

However, the majority of these films are set after the end of the war, and dramatise the failed attempt to settle back into domestic or civilian life, using gender relations as the lens through which this failure is interrogated. For example, the trope of misrecognition is very prominent in *Tragico ritorno*, *Il bandito*, *Napoli milionaria* and *La vita ricomincia*. The overdetermined dialogue often makes blatantly obvious the recourse to a melodramatic notion of recognition of virtue or villainy in this process: as Marcello Mastroianni's *reduce* remarks bitterly in *Tragico ritorno* on finding that his son doesn't recognise him and that he is looked on with suspicion: 'qui tutto è cambiato. La gente nemmeno ti guarda, forse perché non ti riconosce e chi ti riconosce ti guarda con rancore, forse perché sei ancora vivo'.³⁷ The recognition scene in *Il bandito*, meanwhile, where Ernesto (Nazzari) meets his sister (Carla del Poggio) working in a brothel and finally recognises her, plays out in the classic melodramatic fashion involving extended silences and inarticulacy, as no words are possible, but instead only the man's tears when he realises what has happened. As Steve Neale writes of tears in melodrama, they are an effect and a signal of temporal irreversibility, indicating the protagonist's recognition that 'it is always too late' (1986, 10).³⁸

The belated return home of the soldier to discover a transformed domestic scenario reflects a historical reality, but has other functions;³⁹ the word *reduce* itself, which literally means 'one who returns', foregrounds the act of the return, rather than, for example, the events survived. As Morreale argues (2011, 48), 'spesso [...] la loro funzione più importante è proprio questa: l'arrivo e la partenza troppo presto o troppo tardi. A volte reduci di guerra (*Pietà per chi cade*, *Noi peccatori*) [...] arrivano all'inizio del film e trovano una situazione

tragica'.⁴⁰



Figure 3 Gino Cervi arrives home from war in *Un uomo ritorna*

The 'too-lateness', which is typical of melodrama, works primarily to emphasise the *reduce*'s impotence when confronted with changes in the domestic set-up and in gender relations. Danielle Hipkins (2007) writes of how in the post-war period many films, through the figure of the female prostitute, use sexual relations as an arena for playing out questions of guilt and innocence, displacing Italian guilt onto the female figure. The crisis in gender relations dramatized in films such as *Il bandito* (where Nazzari's sister has turned to prostitution in his absence) and *La vita ricomincia* (in which Fosco Giachetti's wife, played by Alida Valli, has been forced to prostitute herself to save their son) stands for an inability to come to terms with the past, and with what may have happened while men were away.

Several of these films manifest a particular anxiety around women's work: in the absence of most of the male population, this female work happens in morally dubious ways, like sex work (*Il bandito/La vita ricomincia*) or black marketeering (*Napoli milionaria*). Again, there is a historical referent for this: in many cases returning soldiers displaced from the workplace women who had been employed in their absence, a situation legitimised in the

parliamentary bill of 1946 that mandated that in private companies composed of more than 20 employees 50% of new employees in next two years had to be war veterans.⁴¹ In fact Porzio notes that ‘La frivolezza delle donne nel periodo che seguì l’arrivo degli Alleati rappresentò anche uno degli argomenti su cui puntarono i reduci di ritorno dalla prigionia per sostenere il loro diritto di ritornare al lavoro e riprendere quei posti che per le condizioni eccezionali della guerra furono affidati alle donne’ (2011, 115).

Thus the fear that without strong masculine presence Italian women would ‘slip into sexual sin’ is clearly seen in many films, as Hipkins notes (2007, 100). In some films we even have a representation of rape by occupying forces as the inevitable consequence of Italian male absence (*Guai ai vinti/Non c’è pace/Il Cristo proibito*), while concerns about slippages in female behaviour are amply on view in *Napoli milionaria*, and in *Un uomo ritorna*, in which Gino Cervi’s *reduce* is appalled by his young sister, who has been frequenting American soldiers and learning American songs and dances in his absence. The question of blame for the absence of the man is then raised: in *Il Cristo proibito* Raf Vallone’s character is blamed both for the death of his brother (his father says accusingly: ‘tu non c’eri. Forse non avrebbero ammazzato tuo fratello se tu fossi stato qui a difenderlo’) and for the rape by Germans of his old love Nella, who laments ‘tu non puoi sapere ... eri lontano’. Similarly, in *La vita ricomincia*, Valli’s character, forced to prostitute herself to save her son during her husband’s absence, accuses him, ‘voi andate a combattere senza pensare a chi resta’, and in *Penne nere*, the Cossacks attack the women of the Friulian village where the young men have gone off to fight.⁴²

The *reduce* thus is doubly victimised when what happens to the women he leaves behind is also coded as his fault. The reason he left to fight is never explicitly mentioned, so what is left ambivalent is whether it is fascism itself or the humiliation of the war defeat that is the cause of the personal and national suffering. Even in *Tragico ritorno*, where Mastroiani’s character returns after eight years to find his wife, believing him dead, remarried, and his son calling another man father, his wife eventually tells him accusingly ‘tu non tornavi’. Although she and her new husband point out that the law is on his side if he wishes to resume his place in the household, it is made clear that morally that is not the case and the fact of his absence is enough to justify the loss of his family. In *Il bandito*, when Ernesto discovers that his mother was killed during the war, the neighbour breaking the news adds somewhat reproachfully, ‘ti ha aspettato tanto la tua povera mamma’. The lack of sympathy displayed to the *reduce* for the losses he has suffered, which were out of his

control, is marked, and again positions him to the viewer as a victim: in *La vita ricomincia*, when Giachetti's character discovers he has lost his medical laboratory while away, his ex-partner says dismissively 'ecco la vostra mentalità di reduce. Vi sentite tutti danneggiati, tutti vittime'.

These films are dominated by ideas of innocence, guilt, sacrifice and expiation, but are incoherent on who is actually to blame. In several examples the collective is blamed: everyone is guilty but also nobody. The hysterical ending of *Il Cristo proibito* is an extreme case in point: Bruno (Vallone) mistakenly kills the man he thinks is his brother's betrayer, the saintly Antonio, who deliberately sacrifices himself for Bruno; but Bruno then learns the real identity of the traitor, the ex-partisan Pinin. The confrontation between Bruno and Pinin, on a bare hilltop dotted with graves of partisans, is weighted with symbolism: Pinin, the ex-partisan turned betrayer can only offer as an explanation that 'eravamo tutti pazzi in quegli anni'. This faint allusion to partisan violence also creates an equivalence between himself and Bruno. Pinin begs Bruno to kill him and put him out of his misery, but, to a swelling non-diegetic score, Bruno refuses as a single melodramatic tear runs down Pinin's cheek. Bruno is then symbolically forgiven by his mother, presumably for his (unspoken) war crimes, but finishes the film in an extraordinary scene in which he crawls towards Antonio's holy dwelling while an extra-diegetic voice booms out 'perché sono sempre gli innocenti a pagare?' and other such rhetorical questions.

Il Cristo proibito is the most overt and heavy-handed treatment of the question of guilt and innocence, implicating the entire village with the mantra 'la colpa è di tutti', but it is ultimately most interesting for its total failure to resolve these questions, with Vallone's character simply disappearing from the frame as the camera lingers on the Tuscan hills, and the voice-over screams three times 'Perché??'⁴³ The religious framing of the ending is paralleled in the endings of *Guai ai vinti* and *Noi peccatori*, which align their female protagonists explicitly with the figure of the Madonna as emblem of suffering, sacrifice and redemption. As Louis Bayman says of the Marian cult in post-war Italian melodrama: these films 'enact a process of absolving victimhood parallel to that which the county was undergoing after the war, but with the figure of transgression and absolution shifted from public and masculine questions to the private and female sphere' (2014, 49). A parallel can also be drawn with the post-war German 'rubble films' discussed by Erica Carter, in which emphasis on male guilt is counterposed to images of German women as pure victims, often aligned with the Madonna, 'as a defence against collective guilt' (2000, 108).⁴⁴

Vengeance and Silence

In the *reduce*'s thirst for justice or vendetta the inadequacy of the legal system is exposed: this happens strikingly in *Un uomo ritorna*, *Non c'è pace*, *Il Cristo proibito* and *Atto di accusa*. The possibility of official or institutional justice is dismissed, as is patriotism itself: family and the domestic are the only things worth fighting for. This tendency takes on a particular inflection in *noir*-style films: *Il bivio*, *Il bandito*, *Atto di accusa* and *Gli innocenti pagano* (and also *Gioventù perduta* (Germi, 1947), in which Massimo Girotti's police commissioner is a *reduce*) show how 'redundant Fascist militarism' (Hipkins 2007, 93) is now recycled as vendetta or lawlessness: in *Il bandito*, Ernesto the *reduce* says 'dovrei ammazzare un sacco di gente, ma dicono che è proibito' as he turns outlaw.⁴⁵ In *Il bivio*, a *noir* set in post-war Turin, Raf Vallone plays a former soldier turned corrupt police chief, and blames his army training for his ruthlessness, as he is now secretly the head of a criminal gang: 'uno come me, cresciuto nell'odio, nella violenza, nella guerra, non può avere scrupoli'. He, like Ernesto in *Il bandito*, is killed at the end of the film, but this narrative purging cannot remove the force of their dominating presence.⁴⁶

However, in general, what has happened during the war is represented as unspeakable both for those who return and those who stayed home. Use of circumlocution or ellipsis is common when referring to camp experience, both spatially - Russia is referred to as 'laggiù' (*Il Cristo*), and as 'lassù' (*Due lettere*), the prison camp in Africa in *Noi peccatori* is also 'laggiù' - and temporally ('allora', used in *Atto di accusa*). The *reduce* refuses to, cannot, or is prevented from narrating his experiences, and he and his family members have to resort to circumlocution or euphemism, using expressions like 'quello che hai passato', 'quello che ho visto', 'quello che hai patito', 'ne ho passato di tutti i colori'. In *Napoli milionaria*, Gennaro first cannot recount his suffering ('te l'è passata brutta'/'non ne parliamo..') and then when he tries to express it ('questo ve la dovete sentire') the reply is merely 'i guai li abbiamo passati pure noi'.⁴⁷ In *Un uomo ritorna* Sergio evades the topic of his experiences, claiming that 'sono centinaia di migliaia quelli che potrebbero raccontare la storia. Per fortuna, la maggior parte ha solo voglia di dimenticarla'. Fosco Giachetti's character in *La vita ricomincia* merely says shortly: 'Il racconto dei miei guai l'avrò fatto almeno una decina di volte. Del resto, puoi immaginare..'. His elision of the past as 'una passeggiata di sei anni' can also be tied more broadly to the lack of representation of violence or war crimes abroad: in *Il Cristo proibito*, Bruno confesses that he had to finish off a friend in Russia who was dying, but Nella narrates it for him, as he is unable to tell the story. What happened abroad cannot be narrated, or, as in

Napoli milionaria, if it is narrated, it cannot be listened to.⁴⁸ It is never directly shown on screen, and as discussed, many of the films begin with the moment of return to Italy, when veterans discover that things have already changed.⁴⁹

These overdetermined lacunae are indices of the melodramatic ‘text of muteness’ in Peter Brooks’ terms, standing in for victimhood and able ‘to render meanings which are ineffable, but nonetheless operative within the sphere of human ethical relationships’ (1995, 72).⁵⁰ They draw attention to what cannot be said and expressed, to the ‘unspeakable truth’ of the period (Williams 1998, 52).⁵¹ The silences also, of course, bear upon the experience of *reduci* themselves, and on the repression that surrounded their experiences. As Bistarelli points out, ‘il silenzio e la rimozione sono le due facce del problema reduci’ (2007, 13), and Claudio Sommaruga, a *reduce* himself, is adamant on the collective ‘dovere di parlare’ belatedly acknowledged by survivors, most of whom had kept silent out of shame.⁵²

Time, Change, Haunting

This mutual incomprehension (the *reduce* says bitterly in *Caccia tragica*, ‘Voi non avete capito niente di quello che abbiamo sofferto.. noi che siamo stati lontani in prigionia’..)⁵³ also alludes to a situation in which everything has changed due to the war, with the *reduce* himself becoming the very figure of that change. As Anna Maria Torriglia claims (2002, 15), ‘the disruption of identity and the various losses the war induced created an uneasy, ambivalent relationship with time itself’.⁵⁴ The need to disavow not only fascism but the experiences of fighting in the war and of imprisonment, created a sense of discontinuity with the past, which these films make evident through the fixation on unrecognizability, change, and rupture with the domestic past. This, as Gribaudi points out, is also congruent with the way in which many memoirs by *reduci* constructed their experiences of imprisonment: in terms of a *prima* and a *dopo*, with a *trasformazione* in between (2016, 215).

The transformation of the *reduce* into someone or something else, is thus historically grounded - as Bertacchi notes (1999, 275), ‘la prigionia ha reso diversi e irriconoscibili non solo nell’aspetto esteriore, ha cambiato la stessa comunicazione affettiva’ - but the codes of melodrama, which emphasise suffering and sacrifice, symbolically and hyperbolically cast the *reduce* as a figure who instantiates the impossibility of returning to the pre-war (or pre-fascist) era. The cry of the ex-prisoner in *Pian delle Stelle*, ‘non sono lo stesso uomo’ speaks and resonates with a set of transformations, which, at their most emphatic, project the *reduce* as someone who has symbolically died,⁵⁵ and thus as a ghostly figure who haunts the nation.

This metaphor of haunting can be found in the description of the *reduce* as a ‘spettro’ in *Il Cristo proibito*, and echoes an early journalistic description of the returning soldiers as ‘ridotti a larve di creature umane’.⁵⁶ They are represented as literal ghosts at the extraordinary climax of *La pattuglia dell’Amba Alagi* (1953):⁵⁷ Luciano (played by singer Luciano Tajoli), the only survivor of a patrol defeated at the Battle of Amba Alagi in Ethiopia in 1941, travels through Italy visiting the relatives and loved ones of his ex-comrades. He in turn dies a sacrificial death, protecting his ex-love, and the film ends with a ghostly reunion as his comrades reappear on the Amba Alagi mountain, in the cave in which they began the film, and lead him into the light emanating from the back of the frame [Figure 4].



Figure 4 The ending of *La pattuglia dell’Amba Alagi*

Derek Duncan notes the temporal disruption offered by ghosts:

The power of the ghost is to disturb linear conceptions of how time unfolds and of how it is inhabited. [. . . .] Ghosts can be objects of a melancholic attachment that doesn’t want them to go, that requires the trace of their presence precisely in order not to mourn them (2011, 219).⁵⁸

The melancholic attachment to the homosocial bond, which can now only be attained in fantasy, represents an escape from the difficulty of changed domestic and gender roles, and also indicates that there is no earthly place for the *reduce*: in the words of Sommaruga, ‘il *reduce* è un diverso, sospeso con un vuoto di anni fra passato e futuro’ (1995b: 107).

Conclusion

The body of films examined shows the potency of melodrama in offering a treatment of the *reduce*'s time that figures it as, in Williams' words, ‘the ultimate object of loss’ (1998, 69). Melodrama also offers a mode of dealing with national trauma that attempts to contain it diegetically, while often failing to grant comforting closure or cure via resolutions and happy ending.⁵⁹ The ghosts of *La pattuglia dell’Amba Alagi* are a striking sign of this lack of closure, of the unfinished past, which bleeds over into the present. Gender is the locus through which questions of history and national guilt are being worked out, displaced onto individuals and onto romantic and domestic relationships, and it is striking that and unlike neorealism, melodrama both gives women a space in the diegesis and offers a potential female address, thus interpellating female spectators in the drama of Italy's difficult past.⁶⁰

Lamberto Sechi finished his 1949 article on the failure to represent the *reduce* adequately in cinema by lamenting the lack of screen attention to ‘le particolari e contraddittorie situazioni nelle quali il combattente è venuto a trovarsi nel corso del conflitto’ (1949, 175). However, as I have shown, the particularity of the Italian post-war experience and that of its returning soldiers does manifest itself through the obsessive return to these themes, in films that have been dismissed as lightweight, sentimental and implicitly unhistorical. The inability to directly broach or represent the experiences of the *reduci*, alongside the representation of that impossibility of representation, make it clear that the *reduce*'s function is symptomatic, operating as a symptom for Italy's repression of fascism and the war; as Elisabeth Bronfen argues, ‘any symptom articulates something that is so dangerous to the health of the psyche that it must be repressed and yet so strong in its desire for articulation that it can't be’ (quoted in Hipkins 2007, 87). The role of these films is thus to address, obliquely and incompletely, what has been repressed, decades before Italian historiography and public discourse came to terms with it, chiming with what Morreale identifies as melodrama's role of ‘supplenza/exploitation sui temi dell’attualità, spesso rimosso dal neorealismo vero e proprio che preferisce concentrarsi sui momenti di lotta sociale in forma diretta’ (2011, 165). The fact that these melodramatic films managed to do

so, and remained more or less unnoticed and uncelebrated, testifies to the critical inability to see beyond neorealism as a mode of representing history. Their focus on the private, the emotional, and the romantic dimensions of the postwar experience throws into relief that these aspects are evacuated from neorealism, and from Italian film history.

¹ Giorgio Rochat (1999, 20) also notes that the lack of representation of the *reduce* in Italian cinema can be contrasted to his portrayal in Hollywood.

² I am here developing a point made by Ben-Ghiat (2005, 353), who says that ‘returned prisoners of war come across as destabilizing elements who unsettle a hard-won quotidian normality’.

³ Unfortunately the following films, which also treat the *reduce*, are unavailable to my knowledge: *Preludio d’amore* (Paolucci, 1946), *Felicità perduta* (Ratti, 1946), *Tempesta d’anime* (Gentilomo, 1946), *L’altra* (Bragaglia, 1947), *Giudicatemi* (Cristallini, 1949), *Nessuno ha tradito* (Bianchi Montero, 1952), *Addio, figlio mio!* (Guarini, 1952), *Trieste mia!* (Costa, 1952), *Anna perdonami* (Boccia, 1953), *Bella non piangere!* (Carbonari, 1955).

⁴ See also Ben-Ghiat (2005).

⁵ Agostino Bistarelli (2007, 35) estimates the Italian armed forces to amount to around 4.5 million on 8th September.

⁶ See Schreiber (1997, 791-96). See also Bistarelli (2007, 39). For slightly different figures, see Sommaruga (1995b, 119-21).

⁷ These figures are conformed by Focardi (2014, 91), who also counts 410,000 prisoners of the British in Ethiopia and North Africa, 123,000 prisoners of US in Tunisia and Sicily, and 40,000 prisoners of the French in Tunisia.

⁸ *Reduci* were defined quite broadly by the state in 1946 as ‘partigiani, militari congedati dopo il 1 gennaio 1945, civili deportati dal nemico, militari reduci dalla prigionia’. These were the categories eligible for state support. See De Pascalis and Salemi (1946, 57). See also Bistarelli (2007, 119), who notes that the in the figure of the *reduce* ‘si intrecciavano, e a volte si scontravano, figure diverse; c’erano il combattente, il prigioniero, il partigiano, il mutilato e figure che avevano vissuto più d’una di queste esperienze’.

⁹ See Schreiber (1997); Lorenzon (2006).

¹⁰ Schreiber (1997, 803) talks of a ‘velo di immeritato silenzio’ drawn over the *reduci*, and ‘rimozione’ is now a *topos* in the historiography.

¹¹ *Rapporto della Commissione storica italo-tedesca insediata dai Ministri degli Affari Esteri della Repubblica Italiana e della Repubblica Federale di Germania il 28 marzo 2009* http://www.anpi.it/media/uploads/patria/2013/Rapporto_italo-tedesco_su_stragi_naziste_gen2013.pdf (p. 34).

¹² See Finati (1995, 52).

¹³ Claudio Sommaruga (1995b, 87) also discusses government fears that former prisoners might have been indoctrinated by either the Nazis or the Russians in camp, and that their voting intentions might therefore have been swayed.

¹⁴ See also Santarelli (2004) and Patriarca (2010).

¹⁵ Pavone (2004, 273) paraphrases historian Rosario Romeo: ‘the Resistance, performed by few, served as a cleansing of the conscience for all’. On the ‘civic religion’ of the Resistance, see Gundle (2000).

¹⁶ See also Foot (2009, 71-95).

¹⁷ Bistarelli (2007, 39) says that 76% of Italian prisoners refused to collaborate; Lorenzon (2006, 146) gives a breakdown of 90% of *sottufficiali* and 75% of officers who refused. Schreiber’s estimate is that around 23% collaborated, either by agreeing to fight with the Germans or to work for them or to act as ‘ausiliari al servizio dei tedeschi’ (1997, 796).

¹⁸ The book was written in 1954 but remained unpublished for over forty years.

¹⁹ Anna Bravo (2005, 473), asks ‘How can one call a prison camp inmate’s refusal of Nazi orders “passive”?’ (p. 473) and links this refusal to a broader conception of ‘civil resistance’.

²⁰ See Sommaruga (1995b, 61). He also notes that in 1993 ANPI, which had kept the Associazione Nazionale Ex-Internati (ANEI) at a distance until then, admitted that they could not have defeated the Germans without their contribution (1995b, 100).

²¹ See Anon (1958). Nicola Labanca (1999, 214) compares the Italian case with that of France, where by July 1945 80% of French prisoners were home, as opposed to one third of Italians.

²² For example, a letter published in *La Settimana Incom Illustrata* in 1957 from a mother who, having heard of soldiers recently returning from Russia, hopes that someone has seen her son, missing in Russia since January 1943 (Anon. 1957).

²³ Contessa Clara (1952).

²⁴ Pasolini (1969, 39): ‘neo-realism as the expression in the cinema of the Resistance, of the rediscovery of Italy, with all our hopes for a new kind of society.’ See also O’Rawe (2008), on neorealism and melodrama in the period, as well as Bayman (2014).

²⁵ Maurizio Zinni (2010, 54) talks of a ‘cappa di silenzio’ on the theme of fascism between 1949-53 (p. 49), and an ‘atteggiamento di difficoltà ad affrontare determinati discorsi sul passato’. Federico Cereja (1987) makes an almost identical argument.

²⁶ See also critic Steve Della Casa’s assertion that there was a ‘nuovo risveglio del tema della Resistenza’ in the late 1950s (in Olivetti 1997, 44).

²⁷ Ugo Casiraghi (film critic of *L’Unità*) asserted in 1956 that films that ‘exploited’ the war/resistance ‘su temi melodrammatici’ could be safely ignored (Associazione nazionale tra i comuni decorati al valore militare 1956, 16). This was in response to G.C. Castello’s opinion that some of these certain films were worthy of rediscovery, like *O sole mio*, while others, such as *Avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma*, were ‘sottoprodotti’ (Associazione nazionale tra i comuni decorati al valore militare 1956, 14).

²⁸ See also O’Rawe (2012) on this.

²⁹ See Williams (1998, 44), who notes that melodrama is traditionally seen as ‘oppositional excess’.

³⁰ Sommaruga (1995b, 82) estimates that between 1945 and 1985 around 130 memoirs were written by *reduci*, of which few were published. Between 1985 and 1995 he estimates that a further 70 have been written or published.

³¹ Schreiber, p. 802. On the terrible suffering in Russia, both of the retreating soldiers and those captured, experienced by surviving soldiers as incomprehensible and inexpressible, see Gribaudo (2016, 161ff).

³² See Schreiber (1997, 604) on the inaccuracy of this parallel. Sommaruga also parallels the resistance of the *internati* to the Jews at Masada, and, further, aligns them with Holocaust survivors in their inability to recount or be believed (1995a, 33): ‘I nazisti l’avevano previsto: qualunque cosa racconterete, nessuno vi crederà’.

³³ Robert Gordon (2012, 10) notes that ‘in the immediate aftermath of the war, the millions of survivors, [...] *reduci*, DPs (Displaced Persons) making their way home [...] were something of an indistinguishable mass, alike even in their sheer physical emaciation’.

³⁴ She reproduces part of a document from the ‘Comitato provinciale *reduci* della prigionia’ of Bari, in March 1946, appealing against Italy’s lack of divorce law: ‘dopo aver servito per diversi anni la Patria, dopo i disagi, pericoli della trincea, dopo il tormentoso calvario della prigionia, peggiore della galera, nel momento in cui al termine della triste odissea si metteva finalmente piede sul suolo patrio, i segni di immani devastazioni e miserie lasciate dalla guerra si sono rivelati ad ogn’uno di noi nel momento in cui varcava la soglia della propria casa, i segni non meno tristi della profanazione del santuario domestico, dello sfacelo morale della propria famiglia ad opera delle nostre donne irresponsabili, le quali nella nostra lunga assenza hanno tenuto una condotta tutt’altro che conforme ad oneste spose e madri’ (Porzio 2011, 117). This is confirmed by a letter to *La Settimana Incom Illustrata* from a *reduce* who says that when they returned home ‘lavoro niente, comprensione da parte di chi era rimasto nelle retrovie meno ancora, e da parte delle giovani [...] indifferenza assoluta. A quei tempi ballavano, loro! Si divertivano, loro! C’erano i Polacchi, gli Inglesi, gli Americani, I Neo-Zelandesi pronti a regalare cioccolato e caramelle, e sigarette’ (Anon 1952, 26).

³⁵ See also *Pian delle stelle*, where Dina Sassoli chooses Rolando Lupi’s character, an ex-prisoner turned partisan leader, over her Fascist lover.

³⁶ See Foot (2011, 110) on the 8th September as a date that is ‘overloaded with meaning’ and which has produced ‘a fractured memory and interpretations’ of the war as both victory and defeat.

³⁷ See Peter Brooks (1995, 28), on how melodrama works with the recognition of virtue or innocence.

³⁸ The ultimate examples of this ‘too-lateness’ are films in which the protagonist is believed dead, only to miraculously return from the dead, as in *Canzone proibita* and *Pietà per chi cade*.

³⁹ ‘I prigionieri che rientravano dalla Germania incarnavano invece la disfatta dell’8 settembre, che dagli italiani non era stata ancora del tutto superata. Il tanto agognato ritorno in patria degli ex internati militari fu dunque percepito a volte come l’arrivo in un paese straniero.’ *Rapporto della Commissione storica italo-tedesca* (p. 44).

⁴⁰ To these examples could also be added those of *Tragico ritorno*, *Il bandito*, *Un uomo ritorna*, and *La vita ricomincia*, among others.

⁴¹ Apart from businesses where ‘le mansioni sono normalmente e tradizionalmente esercitate da donne (ricamatrici, modiste, telefoniste, dattilografe, ecc)’, where it was advised that war widows and orphans be employed. Decreto Legislativo Luogotenenziale of 16 February 1946, n. 27. ‘Assunzione obbligatoria dei reduci di guerra nelle pubbliche amministrazioni e nelle imprese private’, reproduced in De Pascalis and Salemi (1946, 71). Labanca (1999, 215) asks whether such policy aggravated ‘le contraddizioni in seno alla società italiana del dopoguerra’.

⁴² See Kaja Silverman’s insightful psychoanalytic reading of post-war Hollywood films about veterans, and how the female subject is held responsible for the ‘collapse of traditional gender divisions on the home front’ and for the male’s inadequacy (1992, 53).

⁴³ See also *Cuori senza frontiere*, where the death of the child in crossfire in the politically separated village is glossed by Vallone thus: ‘tutti noi l’abbiamo colpito’.

⁴⁴ Parallels can also be drawn with Williams’ reading of how Hollywood’s Vietnam films use melodrama to ‘solve the overwhelming moral burden of having been the “bad guys” in a lost war’, and to ‘recognise lost innocence’ (1998, 59).

⁴⁵ In *Perdonami!*, the murder of a nightwatchman by a *reduce* is discussed by bystanders thus: ‘ci sono troppi armi in giro e troppa gente che si è abituata a sparare come se accendesse un fiammifero’.

⁴⁶ Ben-Ghiat suggests that Ernesto is killed twice: ‘once by the dictatorship, which made him the perfect instrument of violence, and again by the republic, which sought to forget about him and other ex-soldiers as part of disavowing the history of that violence’ (2005, 359).

⁴⁷ See Montariello (2008, 139), on how Gennaro, with his ‘fissazione sugli orrori della guerra’ was ‘fastidioso’ for centre-right politicians and journalists who attacked the film, and is clearly a symptomatic figure.

⁴⁸ The exception is *Il bandito*, where Ernesto’s friend Carlo narrates, significantly, Ernesto’s act of heroism and resistance in saving him from the Nazis in Germany. See Ben-Ghiat (2010, 167), on how the scene depicts how men can ‘shed their Fascist armatures and recover the ability to connect with others through the telling of their stories’, but it is quite isolated.

⁴⁹ The exception is *Natale al campo 119* (Francisci, 1947), starring Vittorio De Sica, Aldo Fabrizi and Massimo Girotti. The film depicts in a comic and sentimental vein the stories of a group of Italian prisoners held in a camp in the USA, and cuts between the men in the camp and flashbacks to their lives in Italy before the war.

⁵⁰ Circumlocution also applies to female experience: in *Guai* rape is described as ‘non hanno avuto pietà’, in *Cristo*, ‘io c’ero già passata ormai’. In *La vita ricomincia*, the wife of the *reduce* (Valli), who turned to prostitution to save their son in her husband’s absence, says merely: ‘ho fatto quello che ho dovuto fare’.

⁵¹ As Mercer and Shingler (2004, 79) note, melodrama ‘implicitly recognises the limits (inadequacies) of conventional representation (for example, the limits of language, its inability to express or articulate certain contradictions’.

⁵² ‘Constatiamo con amarezza di non avere testimoniato abbastanza [...] abbiamo il dovere di parlare’ (1995a, 32).

⁵³ See *Pian delle Stelle*, where the British ex-POW, turned Resistance fighter John (Antonio Centa), cannot relate to his former girlfriend, and leaves her at the end of the war, saying ‘tanto ora non potrai capire.. ogni tanto gli amici non si riconoscono più’.

⁵⁴ Ben-Ghiat, *Italians were living through an ‘interregnum’ in which ‘the past was a compelling and often disturbing presence’* (2005, 337-338).

⁵⁵ As Marco in *Tragico ritorno* laments when his son doesn't recognise him and wants to stay with his stepfather, 'non posso perdonarvi di avermi fatto morire nel cuore di mio figlio'.

⁵⁶ *Inchiesta in Roma*, 23 September 1946, quoted in Chianese (1999, 292).

⁵⁷ In *Gli innocenti pagano, reduci* are described as 'uomini perduti, and they are wandering souls in *Caccia tragica* ('non sappiamo dove andare').

⁵⁸ In a similar vein, Ross Chambers argues that a haunted society 'is not so much one that has ghosts [...] as one whose ghosts do not submit to being laid' (2004, 196).

⁵⁹ Here the Italian films differ from Kaplan's (2001) judgment that melodrama ultimately covers over trauma, by safely locating it in the past.

⁶⁰ See Lesley Caldwell (2000), who has argued that neorealism created little discursive space for the specific experience of women.