

# **Re-Imagining the Italian South**

## **Subjectivity and Migration in Contemporary Italian Literature and Cinema**

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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	3
List of Illustrations .....	5
Acknowledgements .....	7
Declaration .....	9
Abstract .....	11
Introduction .....	13
<u>Part I.</u> Context: The Invention of the Italian South .....	19
From <i>Meridionalismo</i> to <i>Pensiero Meridiano</i> and Beyond: Transnationalizing the “Southern Question” .....	21
From the Italian South to the Other Souths in Italy: The ‘Southern Question’, Emigration, Colonialism .....	28
Genealogies of Racism: Anti-Southern Prejudice, Colonial Racism and Continuity with Today’s Attitudes towards Migration to Italy .....	38
Intersectionality and Transnationalism .....	47
Post-‘Colonial’ and Trans-National Discontinuities .....	57
<u>Part II.</u> The Literary Representation of the Italian South Today .....	63
The South as a Heterotopia: Evelina Santangelo's <i>Senzaterra</i> (2008) .....	69
Languaging, Body, and Translation in Giulio Angioni's <i>Una ignota     compagnia</i> (1992) .....	86
‘Nei paesi del sud le stelle sembrano più vicine’: Self-Translation in Ornella Vorpsi’s <i>Il paese dove non si muore mai</i> (2005) .....	102
Conclusion.....	121

<a href="#"><u>Part III.</u></a> New Representations of the Italian South in Contemporary Italian	
Transnational cinema .....	125
Race and Gender in Emanuele Crialesse’s <i>Terraferma</i> (2011) .....	134
Queering the Southern Border: Challenges to Italian Homonationalism in Emma Dante’s <i>Via Castellana Bandiera</i> (2013).....	147
Jonas Carpignano’s <i>Mediterranea</i> (2015): De-centring the Hegemonic Gaze on the South.....	164
Conclusion.....	177
Conclusion.....	179
Bibliography.....	185
Filmography .....	211

## List of Illustrations

1. Ernesto (Mimmo Cuticchio) in *Terraferma* (00.23.36).
2. Nino (Giuseppe Fiorello) dances for the tourists in *Terraferma* (00.54.33).
3. Sara (Timnit T.). The black woman's face as objective correlative in *Terraferma* (00.41.37).
- 4-5. Rosa (Emma Dante) and Samira (Elena Cotta) looking at each other in *Via Castellana Bandiera* (00.34.26; 00.59.30).
6. The view from the end of the narrow street in *Via Castellana Bandiera* (00.35.22).
7. Samira's first appearance in *Via Castellana Bandiera* (00.10.28).
8. Ayva (Koudous Seihon) on the back of the truck in *Mediterranea* (00.56.02).
9. Ayva at the party in the closing scene of *Mediterranea* (01.50.26).



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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted for a degree at another university. Some sections of Part I were developed from early drafts of part of my unpublished master's thesis and have been later included in the following article I co authored with Sandra Ponzanesi: Sandra Ponzanesi and Goffredo Polizzi, 'Does Italy Need Postcolonial Theory? Intersection in Italian Postcolonial Studies', *English Literature*, 3 (2016), 145-162.



## Abstract

This thesis provides an in-depth discussion of recent Italian novels and movies engaging with different notions of ‘Southernness’ and ‘the south’ and/or exploring the predicament of contemporary southern Italy as a border-space. In considering this production this thesis aims at reframing and rethinking the concept of subjectivity and national identity in contemporary Italy. The aim is to highlight the importance of the interaction among multiple cultures, histories and elements of subjectivity (gender, ethnicity, sexuality) as co-constituting in the process of creation of national and regional identity and to illustrate the concomitant emergence of new conceptions of Italian cinema and Italian literature. This is achieved by drawing from the recent recasting of the ‘southern question’ in postcolonial terms, from renovated philosophical understandings of southern Italian identity and their points of contact with decolonial theories emerging from other souths, as well as from recent historical debates on the Italian diaspora and its links with Italian colonialism. In developing a framework for discussing texts on/from the south this thesis engages and contributes to contemporary debates on the work of southern writers informed by a postcolonial sensitivity, to discussions on the impact of the work of translingual authors writing in Italian and on translingual writing as self-translation, on Italian transcultural cinema. This research aims to answer how literary and cinematic representations sustain or run counter to the process of marginalization of the Italian South on one hand and of migrants to Italy on the other. It provides a discussion of the historical and cultural contexts to which many of the texts taken into consideration refer and proceeds to analyse in depth specific case studies. Novels by Giulio Angioni, Ornella Vorpsi and Evelina Santangelo and movies by Emanuele Crialese, Emma Dante and Jonas Carpignano are discussed in relation to the different and interrelated representations of ethnicity and culture, nationhood and mobility, gender and sexuality, ‘Italianness’ and ‘Southernness’ they provide. These analyses show how these texts, by exploring and establishing links among histories, cultures and languages of different souths participate to the ongoing transformation in transnational terms of Italian and southern Italian culture and identity.



## Introduction

Historically the point of departure for millions of emigrants, Italy has become, at least since the mid-1970s, a destination country for a growing number of people arriving or travelling through the peninsula. As we will see more in detail, patterns of migration to Italy originate from a wide variety of locations; they have significantly changed the social make-up of the country and made it the site of a very diverse multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. <sup>1</sup> This process has been accompanied by the re-awakening of deep-seated social anxieties that testify to the fact that the more current construction of Italianness has historically been marked by the dovetailing of national identity, Catholicism and whiteness and by representations of gender and sexuality that were also implicated in various ways in the nation-building project. On the other hand, the resurfacing in the national consciousness of questions regarding identity brought about by the visibility of migration to Italy has also spurred a return to those cultural and historical conjunctions where the conception of a homogenous Italy has been questioned, interrogated and taken to task. The ‘southern question’ certainly represents one of the most significant and consequential of these sites of interrogation, and, from its first formulation in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, it has not ceased to shape in various ways the perception that many have of the south. Today, the large and very often highly spectacularized visibility of the contemporary Mediterranean routes of migration to Italy and to Europe, which represents one of the main ways

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<sup>1</sup> On contemporary Italian multiculturalism and its difficulties see for example the following sociological studies: Maria Immacolata Maciotti and Enrico Pugliese, *L'esperienza migratoria: immigrati e rifugiati in Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 2010); Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-persone: l'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2004).

in which the Italian south becomes present in the national imagination, takes as its object of representation a space that has already been marked by a variety of interpretations and representations. The legacy of these interpretations appears to be still very present in contemporary images. In contrast to the often sensationalized reports on the ‘emergenza sbarchi’, much less visibility is given in Italian mainstream media to inquiries and analysis on the changing culture of the Italian south, also as a result of migration to Italy. If the south in general is represented, for example in the news, with ‘incursioni di tipo sensazionalistico modulate su una sorta di esotismo localistico, che indicano un Meridione terra di stranezze e di anomalie’,<sup>2</sup> one can wonder about how this entrenched habit of representation impacts the perception of the ‘sbarchi’ and of migration to Italy in general. A tradition of representation that has depicted the south as a place where the laws that regulate society do not hold in the same way as in other places probably contributes to lessening our indignation and numbing our ethical judgement at the sight of images that testify to the violence of frontiers.

It is therefore no coincidence that, at least since the 1990s, when the issue of migration to Italy starts becoming more and more central in the national imagination, artistic production from or on Italy appears to be preoccupied not only with the history of the Italian south, but also with the awareness of what the philosopher Paul B. Preciado calls ‘l’invenzione del sud’.<sup>3</sup> This thesis provides an in-depth discussion of Italian novels and movies produced in Italy since the

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2 Valentina Cremonesini e Stefano Cristante, ‘Dalla ‘Quistione Meridionale’ al fattore M: Mutamenti di percezione del sud nell’immaginario contemporaneo Italiano’, in Valentina Cremonesini and Stefano Cristante eds, *La Parte Cattiva dell’Italia: Sud, Media e Immaginario Collettivo* (Milan: Mimesis, 2015), pp.7-27 (25).

3 Preciado writes: ‘il sud non esiste. Il sud è una finzione politica costruita dalla ragione coloniale. [...]L’invenzione del sud ha avuto come conseguenza diretta la costruzione di una finzione occidentale moderna del nord. Ma anche il nord non esiste. [...]Il sud non è un luogo, casomai l’effetto delle relazioni tra potere, conoscenza e spazio. La modernità coloniale inventa una geografia e una cronologia: il sud è primitivo e passato. Il nord rappresenta il progresso e il futuro. Il sud è il risultato di un sistema razziale e sessuale di classificazione sociale, un’epistemologia binaria che oppone alto e basso, spirito e corpo, testa e piedi, razionalizzazione ed emozione, teoria e pratica. Il sud è un mito sessualizzato e razzializzato. Nell’epistemologia occidentale, il sud è animale, femminile, infantile e poco virile. Il sud è potenzialmente malato, debole, stupido, inetto, pigro e povero. Il sud è sempre rappresentato come privo di sovranità, di conoscenza, di ricchezza e, di conseguenza, intrinsecamente indebitato nei confronti del nord. Allo stesso tempo il sud è il luogo dove ha luogo l’estrazione capitalista, il luogo nel quale il nord raccoglie energia, senso, godimento e valore aggiunto.’ In Paul B. Preciado, ‘L’invenzione del sud’, *Internazionale*, 13 July 2017, <https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/beatriz-preciado/2017/07/13/invenzione-del-sud> [accessed 10 January 2018].

1990s that engage with different notions of ‘southernness’ and ‘the south’ and/or exploring the predicament of contemporary southern Italy as a border-space. Starting with a detailed discussion of how the invention of the south has happened in the case of Italy and of southern Italy, this thesis considers this recent literary and cinematic production with the aim of reframing and rethinking the concept of subjectivity and of national and regional identity in contemporary Italy. This project will develop a methodology that will allow us to see how contemporary Italian and southern Italian literary and cinematic representations sustain or run counter to the process of marginalization of the Italian south on one hand and of migrants to Italy on the other. The aim is to highlight the importance of the interaction between multiple cultures, histories and elements of subjectivity (gender, ethnicity, sexuality) as co-constituting in the process of the creation of national and regional identity and to illustrate the concomitant emergence of new conceptions of Italian cinema and Italian literature.

The many discursive frameworks that the ‘southern question’ first brought to bear on the Italian south are today being re-examined anew in a variety of ways. *Meridionalismo*, in its various and often conflicting strands, but considered a discourse that, in its mainstream current, looked at the south with an implicitly and unacknowledged colonial lens, formed the basis of many later discussions on the south; as the afore-mentioned research on the representation of the south in the mainstream media in the last three decades demonstrates, such a lens still informs the knowledge of the region in substantial ways. This project thus starts with a discussion, in part one, of the literature on *Meridionalismo* and traces a genealogy of various discourses on the south from *Meridionalismo* to contemporary theoretical attempts at rethinking the Italian south informed by a new postcolonial awareness, such as *Pensiero Meridiano*. A large part of the first section of the thesis is dedicated to describing in detail the ways in which the invention of the south has taken place in the case of Italy and southern Italy, paying particular attention to the interrelation of those axes of power/knowledge that Preciado mentions in his discussion. The majority of the existing literature on the invention of the Italian south rarely includes an analysis of the class and racial dimensions of such a process, whereas this thesis takes into consideration how the axes of gender and sexuality have entered into these complex cultural

dynamics. This thesis includes considerations related to gender and sexuality as aspects of the 'invenzione del sud' with the aim of achieving a more integrated picture of the process and therefore offering different venues of subjectivation for real subjects. The main foci of class, race, gender and sexuality are considered as concomitant factors that all contributed to the process of the invention of the south. Therefore, a detailed discussion of the interrelation of these factors in the various historical and cultural vicissitudes of the Italian south occupies a substantial portion of the thesis. This discussion constitutes a necessary contextual framework for the in-depth analysis of texts in parts two and three, given that apparently well-understood concepts or attitudes, such as *meridionalismo*, persist and continue to influence in ways that are not necessarily obvious.

The contemporary return to the south certainly implies a reconsideration of those moments of cultural interaction in which the Italian south became one of the points on a map that spans multiple localities. It is in fact in those moments of contact that very often take place beyond the national borders, or as a result of processes of mobility, when cultural transfer becomes more evident. For this reason, in order to weigh in on the significance of contemporary representations of the south and of migration to the south, the experiences of Italian colonialism and Italian emigration represent two important contexts to scrutinize. In part one of this thesis, then, the discussion of these two phenomena is carried out in ways that try to zero in on how the south or discourses on the south were mobilized in the various phases of Italian colonialism and Italian emigration, again taking into consideration the interrelation of gender, race, sexuality and class. The depiction of the contemporary relationship between southerners and migrants is very present in the texts that this thesis addresses and such a relationship is certainly informed by discourses and representations that emerged at those historical conjunctions. A transnational look at the south is thus required in order to look at these texts in a meaningful way, as they scrutinize not only the position of southerners in relation to Italy but also a different and less linear set of relationships: the position of southerners vis-à-vis the migrants of today coming from other more distant souths, for example, or the position of both the southerners and the migrants in relation to Italy.



The selection of the novels and movies in parts two and three of this work has been made on the basis of aesthetic complexity and of how prominent questions of cultural interaction and cultural transfer were in the texts. It is in the 1990s that the issue of migration to Italy starts to gain centre stage in the attention of the national audience thanks also to the appearance of first-hand narrative accounts of various experiences of migration to Italy<sup>4</sup> and of successful movies that revolved around the same theme.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, the selection of the texts has targeted movies and novels written and produced after that date. In part two, considerations of linguistic heterogeneity acquire great importance as a way to understand how cultural difference is represented and how cultural transfer happens. Giulio Angioni's *Una ignota compagnia*, published in 1992, constitutes possibly the first novel to appear in Italy that juxtaposes the experience of a migrant from the south with the experience of a migrant from a different part of the world and focuses on the relationship between the two. Evelina Santangelo's text *Senzaterra*, from 2008, was chosen as an object of discussion also because it gave me the opportunity to analyse the significance of the different strategies with which various languages are included in the text. Ornella Vorpsi's *Il paese dove non si muore mai* seemed to me, among the initial corpus of novels that I took into consideration, to develop the most perceptive and evocative discussion of the interrelation of constructions of southernness, gender and sexual identity.

Part three analyses the cinematic representation of the contemporary south as a border-space. A substantial number of movies has focussed on this topic in the last three decades. *Terraferma*, by the established Sicilian director Emanuele Crialese, is probably one of the most successful works to have looked at the south as both a place people leave and a place other people arrive. Emma Dante's *Via Castellana Bandiera* stands out among these contemporary productions for the very situated and at the same time evocative ways in which it weaves together questions of local and national belonging and questions of sexual

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4 Mario Fortunato and Salah Methnani, *Immigrato* (Rome: Theoria, 1990); Mohamed Bouchane, *Chiamatemi Ali*, ed. by Carla De Girolamo and Daniele Miccione (Milan: Leonardo, 1990); Pap Khouma, *Io, venditore di elefanti: una vita per forza fra Dakar, Parigi e Milano*, ed. by Oreste Pivetta (Milan: Garzanti, 1990); Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Lontano da Mogadiscio* (Rome: Datanews, 1994).

5 Movies such as *Pummarò* (Michele Placido, 1990), *Lamerica* (Gianni Amelio, 1994) and *Terra di mezzo* (Matteo Garrone, 1996).

and gender identity. Jonas Carpignano's recent work based on the events in Rosarno, *Mediterranea*, seemed to me the movie that has most powerfully de-centred a white gaze on the contemporary south.

As the in-depth analysis of the movies and novels developed in this thesis show, focusing on the predicament of the contemporary south, these texts testify to the current powerful reconfiguration that the local, the regional, and the global are undergoing in relation to the notion of 'Italy'. This reconfiguration is in full sway and it moves in multiple temporal and spatial directions: it brings new understandings of the past to bear on the present and on the future and, in some instances, which some of the texts analysed in this thesis exemplify, it is able to incorporate and to draw on a variety of cultural, linguistic and artistic traditions, and on the experiences of multiple groups, in order to create new images of culture, nation and identity.

## **Part I**

### **Context: The Invention of the Italian South**

In 2011, the 150th anniversary of the *Risorgimento*, the process of creating a nation state in the period from 1861 to 1865, was celebrated as a glorious, patriotic, ‘moment of origin’. These celebrations were certainly appropriate, even more so in the face of the divisive rhetoric that right-wing and openly racist parties like the Italian Northern League effectively utilize. Nonetheless, they could have been more reflective of the complex historical and cultural vicissitudes that have their roots in the *Risorgimento* and in the nation-building process. The uneven distribution of symbolic and economic resources between the north and the south of Italy; Italy’s colonial endeavour, which, starting only a couple of decades after the birth of the nation, was motivated by a ‘ricerca di prestigio a fini interni’<sup>6</sup> aimed at finding a solution to the many shortcomings of the process of unification; the enormous waves of emigration, both internal and external, which make the Italian one ‘the largest voluntary emigration in recorded world history’.<sup>7</sup> Rather than being an occasion for reopening a debate on the complexities that lie at the heart of national identity and of national history, the public discourse in Italy, both the institutional one and that deployed by different mainstream media, has preferred to put aside such questions. This lost occasion is only another instance of a more general difficult relationship Italian culture at large has with its colonial past, with its internal differences, and with its history of emigration.

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6 Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), p.474.

7 Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (London: Harvard University Press 2008), p. 1.

In this work, I will focus on a multilayered notion of the south that tries to encompass the geographical sense of both the *mezzogiorno* as the south of Italy, Italy as the south of Europe, but also the idea that both the *mezzogiorno* and Italy as a whole have historical and present links, through migration and colonialism, with the ‘global south’. In this sense, I am trying here to develop a postcolonial and transnational approach to Italy and its southern regions. Such an approach does not consist of a straightforward application to the Italian case of theories and methodologies developed elsewhere; on the contrary, it tries to adapt and re-think these methodologies in light of the specificities of Italian history and its present predicament.

### **From *Meridionalismo* to *Pensiero Meridiano* and Beyond: Transnationalizing the “Southern Question”**

As the political historian Jean-Francois Bayart points out, postcolonial studies should take into consideration the fields of thought that, in the various contexts to which they try to adapt themselves, have revolved around concerns and issues similar to their own.<sup>8</sup> In the Italian and southern Italian context, this would certainly mean addressing the now centuries long tradition of *Meridionalismo* and the critiques that have been directed towards it. Starting soon after the acquisition, through Garibaldi’s expedition, of the former Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies by Victor Emanuel II in 1860, the debate on the peculiarities of the south in relation to the rest of the country, ‘the body of expertise on the Southern question’,<sup>9</sup> as Gabriella Gribaudi calls it, criticizing the positivist bias

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8 Jean-François Bayart, ‘Postcolonial Studies: A Political Invention of Tradition?’, *Public Culture*, 23.1 (2011), 55–84.

9 Gabriella Gribaudi, ‘Images of the South: The Mezzogiorno as Seen by Insiders and Outsiders’, in *The New History of the Italian South: The Mezzogiorno Revisited*, ed. by Robert Lumley and Jonathan Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.78-96 (p.94).

of the early *meridionalisti*, provided a framework for later discussions on the topic.

Giuliano Minichiello, a historian less concerned than others about the orientalist angle that has marked the works of many *meridionalisti* since the late nineteenth century, has described the history of *Meridionalismo* in three phases: after a period of complex and wide-ranging debate that went from the years of the unification to the end of World War II, there was a phase of heavy political intervention from the state that tried to enact measures for solving the inequalities between the north and the south; but even Minichiello has to concede that, although some good results were attained in practical terms, the debate around the ‘southern question’ somehow lost its depth, becoming, after the 1970s, essentially a discussion in bureaucratic, technical and almost exclusively economic terms. The danger is one of ‘specialization’, of the discussion on the south becoming the province of experts and specialists, thus creating a class of middle-men of some sort, and of ‘sottovalutare aspetti cruciali della ‘questione meridionale’, aspetti che non sono solo o soprattutto di natura economica’.<sup>10</sup> The cultural aspects of the ‘southern question’, then, need to be kept alive as sites of debate in order to counteract the disavowal of ‘the question’ itself in Italy’s collective memory and consciousness, and they need to address the profound changes that southern society has undergone in recent decades.

The figure of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is the one most knowingly associated with a critique of the racial and class biases of the reformist socialist strand of *Meridionalismo*. Gramsci’s analysis of Italian internal differences, of the ‘southern question’, and of the cultural politics that enhanced or could run counter to the marginalization of some segments of Italian and southern societies, have spurred many critical tools (such as the notions of hegemony, subalternity and organic intellectual) that have proven influential far beyond the Italian context.<sup>11</sup> For Gramsci, the founder and leader of the Italian Communist Party, the difficulties that prevented an effective alliance between the northern

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<sup>10</sup> Giuliano Minichiello, *Meridionalismo* (Milano: Bibliografica, 1997), p.66.

<sup>11</sup> A recent evaluation of the importance of Gramsci’s thought for postcolonial movements and postcolonial thought can be found in the collection *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, ed. by Neelam Srivastava and Baidik Bhattacharya (New York: Routledge, 2012).

industrial workers and the southern peasants were not exclusively of an economic, ‘structural’ nature, but they were also cultural: having to do with the northern industrial workers being imbued with the same cultural representations that, at least since unification, had portrayed the south as ‘other’, as an inferior part of the country, as the ‘ball and chain’ of the nation. Such representations, propagated by complacent intellectuals, benefited the state’s ruling elites and fractured the proletarian front. In order to understand the current politics of today’s cultural representation, this classic Gramscian analysis must be updated, taking into consideration the various histories of Italian mobilities, and including in the equation Italians outside of Italy, as well as migrants to Italy and to southern Italy. If we adopt a non-reified version of the term ‘colonial’, the reframing of the ‘southern question’ in terms of a postcolonial issue could help us in fostering a debate on the politics of more contemporary representations of the south. Moreover, by remapping ‘the question’ onto a wider field that goes beyond the constraints of the nation, it should be possible to create a framework for addressing postcolonial issues in Italy informed by the specificities of the context, one that connects phenomena that have been not looked at in relation to each other and that spans multiple localities and temporalities.

Already in 1997, Pasquale Verdicchio, for example, drew attention to a ‘Preclusion of Postcolonial Discourse in Southern Italy’, mostly due to a ‘characterization of postcoloniality almost purely in terms of problematic designations of white versus nonwhite, or First versus Third World’.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the category of race, as Verdicchio demonstrates using the case of the Italian migrants in the United States, is much more ambiguous and dependent on a variety of contextual elements than the white/non-white, first world/third world binaries would account for. Verdicchio defines southern Italians as ‘unrecognized postcolonials’,<sup>13</sup> and delineates a very useful framework for the consideration of Italy and southern Italy through a postcolonial lens that takes into consideration the movement across national borders of people and ideas.

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12 Pasquale Verdicchio, ‘The Preclusion of Postcolonial Discourse in Southern Italy.’, in *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*, ed. by Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 191–212 (p.191).

13 Verdicchio, ‘The Preclusion of Postcolonial Discourse in Southern Italy’, p.192.

Making a similar argument, the anthropologist Jane Schneider has considered the north-south dynamics in Italy as an instance of ‘Neo-orientalism’;<sup>14</sup> Schneider describes the decades from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s as a period of rekindled regionalistic conflict fostered by the conflicting interests of different actors on the national stage (political parties, industrial lobbies and criminal organizations of various kinds) and finds it imperative to rethink the ‘southern question’ as having a strong but somehow unacknowledged racial element.<sup>15</sup> Commenting on what has become an internalized sense of inferiority on the part of southern Italians, Schneider states that the task of the present is to understand ‘what alternative formulations might people create and live by if they were able to escape from the control of the “Question” and to imagine the political, economic and cultural differences within Italy in some other way’.<sup>16</sup> In the almost twenty years that have passed since the publication of Schneider’s book, the task of imagining Italy’s internal differences in another way is still imperative and it now has to come to terms with the process of ‘super-diversification’<sup>17</sup> that Italy, similarly to other western societies, is undergoing as a result of globalization.

An attempt at combining the focus on Italy and southern Italy with a postcolonial line of thought has been the one associated with the conceptualization of the Mediterranean as a postcolonial space; according to Iain Chambers, for example, Italy and southern Italy should be interpreted and should interpret themselves as being part of the larger postcolonial network of the Mediterranean sea. They should be looking south instead of looking north, to Europe, in order to gain a new understanding of their identity. This theoretical move has to be understood against the backdrop of recent discourses on the ‘Europeanness’ of Italy and of the southern borders of Europe becoming ever more impenetrable. According to Chambers, Italy and its southern shores can be a place from where a critique of western developmental teleologies can be

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14 Jane Schneider, ‘Introduction’, in *Italy’s ‘Southern Question’: Orientalism in One Country*, ed. by Jane Schneider (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1998), pp. 1–27 (p.16).

15 Schneider, p.18.

16 Schneider, p.16.

17 Steven Vertovec, ‘Super-Diversity and Its Implications’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30.6 (2007), 1024–1054.



sustained and where an alternative to the hegemonic pressure of capitalist, globalizing transformations can be articulated.<sup>18</sup>

Chambers' theories can be considered part of what Norma Bouchard calls a 'Mediterranean Neo-Humanism' that is not founded on teleology and a progressive view of history or, as it is most often referred to in Italy, *Pensiero Meridiano*. The sociologist Franco Cassano is one of its major proponents. According to Bouchard, Cassano does not endorse a complete rejection of humanism, rather 'from the framework of the Global South(s) of Postcolonial and Subaltern theory, Cassano questions the universalizing assumptions of Eurocentric Occidentalism while seeking to recover a subalternized archive of humanistic knowledge'.<sup>19</sup> *Pensiero Meridiano* thus amounts to a search for a different kind of humanism, one that is not coterminous with a Eurocentric point of view, and one that the cultures of the Mediterranean provide a useful example of. As Cassano makes clear, *Pensiero Meridiano* should allow us to think of the Italian south not only in the terms dictated by European western modernity but rather as a relational option in which the south becomes the site where a mutually transformative encounter with the other can take place.<sup>20</sup> This autonomous form of thought necessarily starts with taking to task what Italian national modernity has meant for the Italian south, where the project of development has produced, according to Cassano, more problems than it has solved. In establishing connections among many different 'souths', Cassano finds a strategy for developing a kind of thought that is global and local at the same time and that does not constitute an indulgent 'apology of the south'.<sup>21</sup> Even if the Mediterranean comes to have an almost metaphorical sense in Chambers' and Cassano's theories, the emphasis on such a precise location and assigning to it a sort of cultural and historical privilege in the elaboration of a form of thought that is able to embrace and conceive of alterity and identity in new ways can seem to

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18 Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p.31.

19 Norma Bouchard, 'Mediterranean Neo-Humanism: Texts and Contexts of "Pensiero meridiano"', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 26 (2008), 299-318 (p.300).

20 Franco Cassano, *Il Pensiero Meridiano* (Bari: Laterza 1996).

21 Cassano, p.128.

exclude other localities or other histories of confrontation with the homogenizing drive of the nation and of western modernity.<sup>22</sup>

It is useful to point out how theoretical trajectories resonant with those of Chambers and Cassano are traced by scholars who take their cue from the history and culture of other 'souths'. Starting from the perspective of Latin America, Walter Mignolo offers a subtle and thorough account of the genealogy of what he calls 'modernity/coloniality', thus using a formula that makes explicit the co-constitutive relation of the two. Mignolo conceives of the project of modernity/coloniality as a set of different 'global designs', which, each springing from a different local history, aim nonetheless at a sort of homogenization of the world 'from above'. These global designs correspond roughly to different phases of the development of capitalism and of colonialism starting in the sixteenth century, of which nation-building processes are an integral part. Each of these phases created its own ideology to support and justify the expansion of colonialism. These different phases and their corresponding ideologies should not be thought of as successive stages in a linear history but rather should be seen in terms of their enduring persistence, in the ways they fade into each other, transforming themselves but never being completely defused.<sup>23</sup> The marginalization of what amounts to the majority of the world population can be addressed through what Mignolo calls 'border thinking' or 'barbarian theorizing'. Throughout the history of modernity/coloniality, correctives to the functioning of capitalism and colonialism have been thought from the inside of the modern and national project itself, and not by those directly marginalized by it, those who inhabit the margins of modernity and of the nation. Moreover, their aim has very often been that of achieving universality and equality. These notions do not challenge the homogenizing drive of global designs, but exhaust their power in claims for the 'inclusion of minorities' within the framework of the nation and of modernity/coloniality, which can also turn into assimilationist

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22 For a very interesting and accurate reading of how, notwithstanding its claims to an open and fluid conception of identity, Cassano's theory can be said to suffer from a form of creeping essentialism see: Berardino Palumbo, 'Campo intellettuale, potere e identità tra contesti locali, "pensiero meridiano" e "identità meridionale"', *La ricerca folklorica*, 43.2 (2001), 117-134.

23 Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p.724.

politics. In contrast to this, Mignolo asserts the need for what Edouard Glissant calls ‘diversality’, which is, ‘diversity as a universal project’.<sup>24</sup> Such a shift entails a new epistemology that does not presuppose a universal point of view or a universal subject. According to Mignolo, this transformation was already initiated in the last thirty or forty years of the twentieth century, when the universality of the subject of knowledge was contested by a variety of differently marginal subjects (women, ethnic and sexual minorities, colonized people). Such a project, which amounts to a process of ‘globalization from below’,<sup>25</sup> can be achieved by building connections among many different souths, and among differently but similarly marginalized places, communities and populations:

If you can imagine Western civilization as a large circle with a series of satellite circles intersecting the larger one but disconnected from each other, diversality will be the project that connects the diverse subaltern satellites appropriating and transforming Western global designs. [...] A cosmopolitanism that only connects from the center of the large circle outward, and leaves the outer places disconnected from each other, would be a cosmopolitanism from above, [...] according to which only one philosophy has it “right”.<sup>26</sup>

Mignolo’s analysis shows how many of the issues discussed by Cassano and Chambers in relation to the Italian south and to the Mediterranean can actually be thought of as springing from a variety of histories and genealogies that are similar and different at the same time. The notion of ‘the south’ proposed in the theories that focus on the Mediterranean and on the *mezzogiorno* could thus be expanded to include a consideration of the historically intertwined relationship, or of the contextual differences and similarities, between the specific region they refer to and other localities, or networks of localities, or the histories of other groups and peoples. Without, in the process, losing the sense of the position of enunciation from which one speaks and writes.

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24 Mignolo, *Local Histories*, p.273.

25 Walter Mignolo, ‘The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism’, *Public Culture*, 12.3 (2000), 721-748 (p.745).

26 *ibid.*

## From the Italian South to the Other Souths in Italy: The 'Southern Question' , Emigration, Colonialism

The literature on the contemporary history of the Italian south is vast and has undergone many changes throughout the decades; recent historical contributions seem to be falling into two different sides. On one side, there are those scholars who have remained loyal to a more traditional 'meridionalistic' stance, and who have studied and analysed the region by giving centrality to the consideration of its economic nature and by looking at its predicament mostly by comparing it to the northern part of Italy or to northern Europe. Recent works that can be said to follow this theoretical framework are *Le due Italie. La questione meridionale tra realtà e rappresentazione* by Claudia Petraccone<sup>27</sup> and *La questione italiana. Il Nord e il Sud dal 1860 a oggi* by Francesco Barbagallo.<sup>28</sup> On the other side, those scholars who have tried to open up the category of *mezzogiorno*, calling for a more attentive attitude to the local differences of the various southern contexts, have tried to develop an approach that includes insights from other disciplines, as well as questioning the framing of any inquiry on the south as a matter of economic underdevelopment. These scholars have found in the journal *Meridiana*, founded in 1987 by Carmine Donzelli and Piero Bevilacqua, an important forum for discussion. Recent contributions on this side are *Breve storia dell'Italia meridionale*<sup>29</sup> by Piero Bevilacqua and *La Questione. Come liberare la storia del Mezzogiorno dagli stereotipi* by Salvatore Lupo.<sup>30</sup>

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27 Claudia Petraccone, *Le due Italie. La questione meridionale tra realtà e rappresentazione*, (Bari, Laterza, 2005).

28 Francesco Barbagallo, *La questione italiana: il Nord e il Sud dal 1860 a oggi* (Bari: Laterza, 2013).

29 Piero Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell'Italia meridionale*, (Rome: Donzelli, 2005).

30 Salvatore Lupo, *La Questione: come liberare la storia del Mezzogiorno dagli stereotipi* (Rome, Donzelli, 2015).

The approach pursued by scholars belonging to the *Meridiana* group, who have questioned the implicit bias in looking at the south only as a place where economic and political ‘progress’ seems to be absent or insufficient in comparison to the more developed north, is generally closer to the theory I am developing in this work. Lupo, for example, questions two equivalences that he sees as deeply entrenched in Italian culture: the first makes the history of the south completely co-extensive with the history of the southern question, while the second equates the southern question with a meridionalistic approach.<sup>31</sup> Lupo notices how these analogies have also contributed to a concept of the south as a metaphor for economic, cultural and political backwardness, a metaphor for the fragility of Italian national identity itself, one that has impeded seeing the south as just another ‘fragment of modernity’ with its own specificity.<sup>32</sup> Notwithstanding these premises, the *Meridiana* group, although keen on enlarging the scope of their analysis and welcoming the input from different disciplines, seem to be reticent about opening up the conversation on the south to a de-centred look informed by an in-depth consideration of transnational dynamics. Piero Bevilacqua, for example, who is also one of the major historians of Italian emigration, gives an account of the history of southern Italy that, even if it avoids seeing the south as a case of unsuccessful modernity, remains fairly traditional and even hostile to a more ‘culturalist’ approach, staying somewhat anchored to a framework based on an unproblematic idea of nation. This is particularly evident in his treatment of the phenomenon of Italian emigration and in his lack of consideration for Italian colonial history. Bevilacqua reconstructs the history of southern Italy and the historical context of Italian emigration from the south in various phases starting from the first decades of the nineteenth century, and through the various vicissitudes of the problematic unification process: the disappointment of many in the south after the expedition of Garibaldi, the ferocious repression of southern brigandage in the years immediately following the unification, and the lack of any strategy for industrial development in the south in the same period, which led to economic dualism and

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31 Lupo, p.35.

32 *ibid.*

a growing disparity between the north and the south.<sup>33</sup> According to Bevilacqua, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the disparity between the north and the south had become something like an ‘auto-dynamic mechanism’ that tended to widen the distance between the two parts of the country. While the north consolidated its industrial basis in the first decade of the century, the south, which had been stripped of its industrial potentialities, stopped attracting any new activity; whoever was willing to invest capital in a new entrepreneurial endeavour was more likely to do so in the north than in the south, since an industrial structure was already in place in the north.<sup>34</sup> In this way, Bevilacqua reconstructs the historical backdrop and the conditions that produced the phenomenon of emigration both in the late nineteenth century and after the Second World War. In fact, the First World War also widened the economic distance between the north and the south, as industries from the north benefited from the demand for machines, arms and goods for the army that the war induced. Such a trend did not reverse with fascism; on the contrary, during Mussolini's regime, the south was pushed even more towards agriculture as its principal activity. After World War II, in that moment of re-boosted economic impulse known as the economic ‘boom’ or the economic miracle, the south did not partake in the same way in the positive effects that were transforming the economy in the rest of the country. Notwithstanding the government program of the Southern Development Fund (*Cassa per il mezzogiorno*), launched in 1950 with the aim of somehow reducing the distance between the two parts of Italy, the divide remained of great concern. After a moment of stasis in the 1970s, the economic imbalance started growing even deeper in the 1980s and it is still growing today.<sup>35</sup>

Massive emigration from southern regions was one of the outcomes of the economic insecurity in the south and of the ‘auto-dynamic mechanism’ that Bevilacqua refers to. Emigration happened in two major waves, although it was always a continual flow. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, masses of southern workers left their towns to go to South and North America; according to the figures offered by Bevilacqua, more than 5,400,000 people left

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33 Bevilacqua, p.63.

34 Bevilacqua, pp.97-98.

35 Bevilacqua, pp. 107-109.

from southern Italy between 1876 and 1914, inducing a deep process of social transformation. Going away represented a way of breaking loose from the power exerted by land owners on workers. The farmers who stayed saw their salaries rise and had the opportunity to negotiate better conditions of work. Women started to be more relevant as workers, even in jobs that had previously been done only by men. Very often, the farmers who had emigrated would come back, at least from time to time, having earned considerable amounts of money and having acquired precious experience abroad. The money that the emigrants would send home had an incredible impact on the lives of the most poor and disenfranchised part of the population of the south and very often would help them out of poverty, making it possible, for example, to buy small properties or start a commercial venture. Bevilacqua comments on how this was of course achieved most of the time at the cost of a very hard life and very hard work, and left the south deprived of its brightest and youngest energies.<sup>36</sup>

The second wave of emigration happened in the decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, when the technological changes that took place in agriculture left millions of people unemployed: when we look at the historical moment of the economic miracle, it is important to underline how the boost to the economy that graced the northern part of Italy was accompanied by massive emigration in the south. Between 1946 and 1976, more than four million people left the south, and this time it was not only farmers and field workers but also a large part of the lower middle class. They went to North and South America, to Australia, but also to other parts of Europe where cheap labour was required (France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium), and many moved to the biggest cities in the north, going on their journey without any kind of help or support from the state. At the same time, a process of internal migration took place: people from the internal countryside and from the mountains moved to the biggest southern cities, which were very much unprepared to receive them, thus determining a situation of unruly growth of the peripheries that still shapes the appearance of these cities.<sup>37</sup> Bevilacqua ends his historical reconstruction noting how migration from the south never completely stopped and offering figures that show how it is actually

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36 Bevilacqua, p. 94.

37 Bevilacqua, p.156.

growing even faster than before in recent years in the form of a 'brain drain' that risks leaving the southern regions impoverished of their youngest and most educated people.

Bevilacqua's discussion of migration recognizes its important role in constituting, especially through the remittances that the emigrants sent home, very important conditions for the industrial development that allowed Italy's first modernization: his consideration of the phenomenon of Italian migration is informed by a preoccupation with giving credit to the role played by migrants in the constitution of the nation as a way of highlighting the southern contribution to the nation, which often goes unacknowledged. Yet, Bevilacqua's considerations could be taken a step further and beyond the national framework, highlighting the southern contribution to a transnational conceptualization of Italy and to devising more flexible, multiple and open-ended forms of belonging. In Bevilacqua's discussion, there is no place for a consideration of how the experience of mobility can alter limiting or oppressive ways of identifying with the nation.

Starting from the analysis of the study of Italian emigration, Donna Gabaccia has offered a diasporic model of Italian emigration that can fruitfully supplement Bevilacqua's attempt at understanding migration within the framework of the southern contribution to a nation whose coming into being is only partially problematized. Gabaccia's model shows how migration itself engenders a new and polyvalent sense of belonging by creating networks that encompass multiple localities, cultures, languages and temporalities and it cannot be reduced in any linear way to the nation. Gabaccia criticizes the majority of the approaches employed by scholars of the history of Italian mobility, who have used notions like 'italiani nel mondo', 'Italia fuori d'Italia' or the idea of a common 'civiltà Italiana'.<sup>38</sup> 'Italiani nel mondo' and 'Italia fuori d'Italia' were first used after the Second World War in order to break with the previous discourses, which referred to Italian emigration in terms of colonies. However, as Gabaccia makes clear, these labels overshadow the fact that, until recently, the vast majority of people who emigrated from Italy did not have a strong sense of

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38 Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), p.XVIII.



belonging to the nation: their sense of loyalty and identification was probably stronger with the closer communities of the family and of the native town. For this reason, it is only when referring to the mobility of Italians in the last decades of the twentieth century that one can probably talk of Italian emigration as creating a single Italian diaspora; instead, the plural form diasporas seems more apt at capturing the variety of experiences that make up the long history of Italian mobility from the Middle Ages to today. For centuries, loyalty towards an Italian nation was a characteristic trait only of a very slim sector of the population of Italy: the most educated and bourgeois people living in the major urban centres, who identified with the accomplishments of medieval merchants, artists and philosophers from the Renaissance, in brief with that 'elite culture that had developed in and spread from Italy to Europe between 1000 and 1600'.<sup>39</sup> Yet, such a construct of a presumed 'civiltà italiana' remained foreign for the vast majority of the residents of Italy, for those peasants, villagers and workers who made up the bulk of modern mass migrations. The vast majority of emigrants from Italy not only did not share the pride in 'civiltà italiana' but was quite hostile to the Italian nation state after its foundation. Bevilacqua comments on the lower classes' lack of identification with the nation state after 1861 in his discussion of *brigantaggio* and of the shortcomings of Italian unification in general, but he sees it only as a problem to be overcome on the path towards complete and successful nationhood. Looking at this matter from quite a different angle, Gabaccia is interested in how the persistence of other forms of belonging, or even the widespread hostility towards the state in different periods of Italian history, created the preconditions for engendering among Italians inside and outside of national borders a multiple sense of belonging that was local and global at the same time, and that resisted the homogenizing drive of a centralistic cultural nationalism. In other words, Gabaccia is interested in the diasporic dimension of Italian emigration as something that can be said to be at the root of Italian transnationalism, which she defines as 'a way of life that connects family, work and consciousness in more than one national territory'.<sup>40</sup> Gabaccia differentiates between a transnationalism as seen 'from below', from the point of view of Italian

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39 Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, p. XXIV.

40 Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, p. XXVIII.

migrants whose experiences of mobility effectively ‘transcended national boundaries and bridged continents’,<sup>41</sup> and the transnationalism of Italy’s ruling classes, who, before and during fascism, saw migratory movements of Italians as a way of consolidating an imperial and colonizing project and, even after the fall of Mussolini, continued to appropriate the experiences of Italian migrants as evidence of Italy’s national strength.

It is crucial when considering the potentialities and theoretical affordances of a transnational turn in Italian studies to pay attention to these different dimensions of transnationalism: to both the experiences of mobility of individuals and groups across borders and frontiers and their inherent potential to engender ‘diversality’ and polyvalent forms of belonging, but also to those official discourses that try to appropriate them within nationalistic rhetorical strategies and consensus-building projects. Consideration of these official discourses and to the ambivalent and intertwined histories of emigration and colonialism should serve as correctives to any facile embracing of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism as the ultimate threat to the hegemony of the nation-state and its exclusionary construction.

Historians of Italian colonialism, for example, have shown how a strong motivation behind the early imperial impulses of Liberal Italy was to apprehend within a nationalist framework of interpretation the mobility of millions of Italians in the post-unification period; Italy wanted to give emigrants a unifying cause to rally for in New York, Buenos Aires, Chicago, Alexandria<sup>42</sup> through the idea of ‘demographic colonialism’ (using the African colonies to stem the flow of Italians to North and South America by resettling them in the colonies), which garnered popular support especially in the south.<sup>43</sup> The first campaigns of the Italian colonial conquest were launched soon after unification under the liberal governments of De Pretis and Crispi, the Sicilian prime minister who was one of the major proponents of ‘demographic colonialism’,<sup>44</sup> and targeted territories in the Horn of Africa that had not been already colonized by other European powers.

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41 *ibid.*

42 Choate, pp.28-30.

43 Choate, p.33.

44 Choate, p.29.

Italy established its rule in parts of today's Eritrea (1882) and in Somalia (1889). From there, Italy tried to expand into parts of today's Ethiopia, waging war against the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II. The Italian defeat in Adwa in 1896 had a strong symbolic resonance<sup>45</sup> and remained an open wound in the nationalistic ego of the country, one that Mussolini would later aim to avenge. Just before the First World War, in 1911, under the liberal government of Giovanni Giolitti, Italy waged war against the troubled Ottoman Empire in order to conquer its North African territories in today's Libya. The war was successful, but its very high cost only served to worsen the already fragile Italian economy.<sup>46</sup> In the fascist period, building on the attempts of previous liberal governments at subjugating the resistance of the local Muslim population, Italy expanded its territories in Libya,<sup>47</sup> hailed in the regime's propaganda as the 'quarta sponda' of Imperial Italy. In 1935, Mussolini declared war against the *Negus* of Ethiopia Haile Selassie. The war was much longer than the regime was anticipating but eventually successful,<sup>48</sup> also thanks to the use of extremely toxic chemical weapons that had been banned by the League of Nations.<sup>49</sup> Finding itself isolated in Europe after this victory, and after the consolidation of its power in the Dodecanese islands, which had been acquired after the war with Turkey in 1912<sup>50</sup> and the invasion of Albania in 1939, fascist Italy was pushed even further into the orbit of Nazi Germany.<sup>51</sup> Italy lost its colonies as a consequence of its defeat in World War II, under conditions that were ratified by a peace treaty discussed in Paris in 1947. Italy's loss of its colonies was not, then, as in the case of other colonial countries' history, the result of a confrontation between the metropole and anti-colonial movements for independence that had grown in the colonized territories, but rather the outcome of a 'sconfitta militare, subita da "bianchi" ad

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45 Alessandro Triulzi, 'Adwa: From Monument to Document', in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 143-164 (pp. 157-159).

46 Labanca, pp. 57-128.

47 Labanca, pp 137-141.

48 Labanca, pp.183-197.

49 Alberto Sbacchi, 'Poison Gas and Atrocities in the Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-1936)', in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 47-55.

50 Labanca, 178-183.

51 Labanca, 209-211.

opera di altri “bianchi””.<sup>52</sup> According to many, this fact is of great consequence in order to explain what has been called Italy’s ‘decolonizzazione mancata’,<sup>53</sup> the lack of engagement of Italian society at large with its colonial experience after the demise of Italian colonialism. The peculiarities of Italy’s ‘decolonizzazione mancata’ can also help in understanding why Italy’s colonial experience and its larger cultural and material implications have only recently become a widely debated topic in scholarship. Because of this lack of general interest, it was quite easy for political elites and colonial circles to disseminate selected memories of Italian colonialism as fundamentally benign and quite exceptional in this regard if compared to more ferocious forms of oppression perpetrated by other European countries: what has been called the persistent myth of ‘Italiani brava gente’.<sup>54</sup> It is only since the late 1990s, in fact, that the history of Italian colonialism, from being the province of military and foreign policy historians, mostly researching its effects on colonized societies, has started to be treated as an integral and momentous part of Italian history and as a fundamental part of the construction of Italian identity.<sup>55</sup> It is even more recently that the links between the seventy years of the Italian colonial history and its discursive construction and later cultural and political processes have started to be elaborated on.<sup>56</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the lack of internal cohesion that characterized the newborn state was a driving force behind Italy’s colonial expansion, both in the liberal and fascist phases of its history; colonial conquest was seen as a cure for internal evils and as a way to create a national consciousness. This ‘cohesive

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52 Labanca, p.434.

53 Gianpiero Calchi Novati, *L’Africa d’Italia: una storia coloniale e postcoloniale*, (Roma: Carocci, 2011), p.3.

54 Angelo Del Boca, ‘The Myths, Suppressions, Denials and Defaults of Italian Colonialism’, in *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. by Patrizia Palumbo, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003), pp.17-35 (p.18).

55 After the pioneering and monumental work of Angelo Del Boca, important contributions in this regard are Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: storia dell’espansione coloniale Italiana* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2002); *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005); *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi Diop and Caterina Romeo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi Diop, *Bianco e Nero: storia dell’identità razziale degli Italiani*, (Torino: Le Monnier, 2013).

56 *Quel che resta dell’Impero: la cultura coloniale degli Italiani*, ed. by Valeria Deplano e Alessandro Pes (Milano: Mimesis, 2014), *Subalternità Italiane: percorsi di ricerca tra letteratura e storia*, ed. by Valeria Deplano, Lorenzo Mari and Gabriele Proglgio (Rome: Aracne, 2014).

device'<sup>57</sup> was considered to be a solution for Italy's poor material conditions and to the massive emigration that, as we have seen, had already started soon after unification. With colonialism, the interpretation of emigration changed and the phenomenon could be apprehended within a nationalist framework. Italian emigration started to be presented as a form of settler colonialism; from being seen initially as an embarrassing issue that demonstrated Italy's inability to provide for the lower strata of its population, emigration came to be conceived of as a sort of 'civilizing mission' that demonstrated the vigour and resourcefulness of the national character. A sort of ideal link between emigration and colonialism was established: both were ways to conquer new land for the rural Italian masses, and it was thought that the exportation of a white labour force would have a civilizing effect on the destination countries.<sup>58</sup> Is it not surprising, then, that the idea of 'demographic colonialism' that many liberal governments sponsored was seen favourably, especially in the south, which had paid the higher cost for the troublesome unification, and which was soon to become a large repository for both Italian emigration and Italian colonialism. Southerners comprised the vast majority of the people who left from Italy to go to Africa, even if the flow of mobility to Africa amounts to 15% of the general percentage of people who left Italy in the 70 years of the Italian colonial period (with America, North and South, being the destination for 50% of the total number). Southerners made up the majority of the Italian population in all the African territories occupied by Italy but were especially present in Libya and in the Mediterranean territories.<sup>59</sup>

When considering the complex links between colonialism in Africa and what, starting with Gramsci, some have called 'internal colonialism' in the south, it is important to draw attention to some other aspects on which scholars have focused: some have seen an important continuity between oppressive discourses and practices that the newborn state put in place against the population in the

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57 Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (New York: Suny Press, 2004), p.107.

58 See Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation*; Caterina Miele, 'Per un'archeologia del discorso razziale in Italia', in *La razza al lavoro*, ed. by Anna Curcio and Miguel Mellino, (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2012) pp.105-122; Carmine Conelli, 'Razza, colonialità e nazione: il progetto coloniale italiano tra Mezzogiorno e Africa, in *Quel che resta dell'Impero: la cultura coloniale degli Italiani*, ed.by Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes, pp.149-168 (pp.163-166 ).

59 Labanca, pp.390-394.

period immediately after unification and practices utilized during Italian colonization in Africa. Forms of material and epistemic violence that were first exerted against southerners during the repression of southern brigandage were a few decades later applied to the African population during the colonial endeavour.<sup>60</sup> Some have remarked how the ‘southern question’, despite the hopes of many politicians of the liberal period, was not solved by emigration; on the contrary, it ‘crossed the Atlantic’,<sup>61</sup> and served as a hierarchizing factor in America and in other countries that were the destination of Italians’ emigration. Italian migrants to North America, for example, were divided between ‘undesirable’ southerners and ‘desirable’ northerners when they arrived in the United States, on the basis of the racial distinction made by Lombroso’s anthropological school, and better jobs were usually given to the northerners.<sup>62</sup>

## **Genealogies of Racism: Anti-Southern Prejudice, Colonial Racism and Continuity with Today’s Attitudes towards Migration to Italy**

Many have speculated on the origin and significance of the popular saying ‘Africa begins just south of Rome’, probably circulated first by northern European travellers at the end of the nineteenth century but also in fashion with the political

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60 See these afore-mentioned contributions: Caterina Miele; ‘Per un’archeologia del discorso razziale in Italia’; Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation*; Carmine Conelli, ‘Razza, colonialità e nazione’. See also: Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione: stampa e razzismo nell’Italia di fine Ottocento* (Rome: Carocci, 2006); Pasquale Verdicchio, *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism Through the Italian Diaspora* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1997) p.27.

61 Choate, p.154.

62 Choate, pp.154-157.

elites at the time of *Risorgimento*.<sup>63</sup> The use of Africa as a ‘governing metaphor’<sup>64</sup> through which the south has been and is still interpreted is seen as evidence of an entrenched internal racial stratification, of how the newborn state was, from its birth, ‘already racialised by a geopolitical fault line that split the peninsula and its islands along a black/white axis’.<sup>65</sup>

Scholars who have looked at the representation of the *Mezzogiorno* in the late nineteenth century in the press, popular media and political rhetoric have noticed the solidifying of stereotypes about southern Italy that were periodically resorted to in order to justify the harshness of the treatment reserved for the south.<sup>66</sup> These stereotypes depicted the south and its inhabitants as:

a place of illiteracy, superstition, and magic; of corruption, brigandage, and cannibalism; of pastoral beauty and tranquility admixed with dirt and disease; a cradle of Italian and European civilization that is vaguely, dangerously, alluringly African or Oriental. The South as the theatre of sweet idleness (*dolce far niente*) and of the ‘crime of honour’; of tragic courage and farcical cowardice; of abjection and arrogance; of indolence and frenzy. Southerners as a friendly people in whom lie dormant the seeds of *mafiosità* and atavistic violence; a ‘woman people’ who practice an ‘Arabic’ oppression of women.<sup>67</sup>

Similar representations were already circulating long before their codification at the time of unification, dating back at least to the second half of the eighteenth century. At the time, an increasing Eurocentrism used the category of ‘the south’ for marking the difference among the countries of Europe that were leading in the way to progress (France, England and Germany) and the countries who were lagging behind.<sup>68</sup> It is in this cultural and political climate that Italy starts to be

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63 Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2002), pp. 143-152.

64 Joseph Pugliese, ‘Whiteness and the Blackening of Italy: La guerra cafona, Extracomunitari and Provisional Street Justice’, *Portal: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Studies*, 5.2 (2008), 1-35 (p.3).

65 Pugliese; Verdicchio, *Bound by Distance*, pp. 22-23.

66 Besides the already mentioned works by Nelson Moe and Michele Nani see John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: the Nation and Stereotypes about the Mezzogiorno 1860-1900*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

67 Dickie, p.14.

68 Roberto Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory)*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

interpreted as the backward south in opposition to the progressive north.<sup>69</sup> The reaction to this discourse from the northern political elites of the second half of the nineteenth century will be to displace this ‘othering’ definition of the south from the whole country onto the southern part of the peninsula and its islands.<sup>70</sup> A rhetoric that many among the southern political elites, before and after unification, did not want to confront or disown entirely as it provided them with a justification for the very strict and oppressive rule under which the lower classes were kept under the Bourbonic kingdom and later gave them an argument through which to ‘preservare mediante la denuncia dell’arretratezza complessiva di quel mondo una posizione di preminenza, sociale e soprattutto politica’.<sup>71</sup> An interesting source for tracing the origins of the stereotypes on southern Italy are the diaries and the narrations of northern European travellers on the Grand Tour that unfailingly described southern Italy as a ‘paradise inhabited by devils’.<sup>72</sup> It is very likely that the bitter tales on the south given by southern revolutionaries who had been exiled to northern Europe after the failed revolutions of 1848 in the Bourbon Kingdom of Two Sicilies might also have contributed to this stereotype,<sup>73</sup> or, more in general, southern intellectuals who shared with foreigners the same class belonging.<sup>74</sup>

Yet, it is certainly with the *Risorgimento* and during the time of Italian unification that stereotypes on the south gained a new political currency and, most importantly, they were given ‘scientific’ legitimation through the racial theories that positivist anthropology was elaborating during those decades. Such a process can be said to be carried out by the work of Alfredo Niceforo (1876-1960), a positivist anthropologist who dedicated his work to ‘scientifically’ proving the racial, moral, social, psychological and physical inferiority of southern Italians when compared to northern Italians and northern Europeans. Niceforo worked and wrote at a time when the ‘southern question’ was already a

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69 Moe, pp.13-84

70 Moe, pp.85-179.

71 Antonino De Francesco, *La palla al piede: una storia del pregiudizio antimeridionale*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2012), p. 78

72 Moe, pp. 46-76.

73 Marta Petrusiewicz, *Come il meridione divenne una questione: rappresentazione del Sud prima e dopo il Quarantotto*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino 1998).

74 Moe, p.53.



highly debated topic and its relation to the problematic way in which the process of unification had been completed had been exposed by many. Niceforo's theories thus represented a nice 'way out' that somehow acquitted the political elite of the *Risorgimento* of its share of responsibility and blamed the very population who had paid the highest price for the political shortcomings of the *Risorgimento* for the dire conditions in which they found themselves.<sup>75</sup> To elaborate his theories, Niceforo mainly referred to his teacher, the founder of the Italian school of criminology Cesare Lombroso, a very influential figure in the scientific culture of the late nineteenth century. In his most popular book, *Criminal Man*, written in 1876 and soon translated into English and French, Lombroso linked criminal behaviour to race and tried to devise ways to discover a natural proclivity for crime through the identification of physical characteristics that differentiated various races (especially through the measurement of the skull).<sup>76</sup> Lombroso had included southern Italians among the races who were more inclined to commit crimes, citing southern brigandage as proof to corroborate his theories. He had also dedicated an entire book to his experience in Calabria as a doctor in 1862, where, conducting research on the local population, experimenting on their bodies as well as finding support for his thesis in their culture and habits, he had arrived at the same conclusions.<sup>77</sup> Alfredo Niceforo picked up where his teacher had left off and dedicated a trilogy to the inferiority of the southerners: the first book, *Crime in Sardinia*, was published in 1897; here, Niceforo related the crime on the island to the existence of a Mediterranean race and used the analysis of local music, songs, traditions and folklore as proof of the Sardinians' racial inferiority and tendency towards crime.<sup>78</sup> Niceforo took the idea of a Mediterranean race from another scientist affiliated to the school of criminology, Giuseppe Sergi; from him, he also adopted the idea of a difference between an Aryan, Celtic race of Germanic origin in northern Italy and a Mediterranean,

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75 Vito Teti, *La razza maledetta: origini del pregiudizio antimeridionale*, (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2011), pp.32-37.

76 Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter, 'Editors' Introduction', in Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, ed. and trans. by Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp.1-36.

77 Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology*, (Westport Ct: Praeger 2002), p.128.

78 Teti, p.56.

Italic southern race of African origin in the south; a race that represented almost a case of ‘arrested development’ of biology and culture, an inferior stage on the ladder of evolution.<sup>79</sup> This insight was brought to the fore in his second book, *Contemporary Barbarian Italy*, published in 1898, where Niceforo wanted to prove the existence of two separate races in the Italian state. This division had serious political implications and, according to Niceforo, only the northerners deserved political freedom, while the southerners had to be governed with despotism and imposing a strict rule on them.<sup>80</sup> The last of Niceforo's books dedicated to the south, *Northern Italians and Southern Italians*, came out in 1901; it was largely based on his previous work but focused more on the concept of ‘degeneration’ and ‘decadence’. Niceforo had a teleological idea of civilization: he identified the most advanced civilization in the Anglo-Saxon countries, which were thus presented as the stage to be attained by everyone else. The concept of degeneration allowed Niceforo to explain how countries like Italy and Greece, which had had great importance in the history of the west, were now in a ‘less developed’ state.<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, Niceforo was Sicilian and his work can be seen as representing an instance of ‘southern complicity’<sup>82</sup> in the creation of an anti-southern cultural climate after unification.

Many scholars in Italy and abroad have discussed the often unacknowledged ‘racial’ dimension of the north-south relationship. Yet, among these scholars too, there is not a complete consensus on the applicability of the categories of race and ethnicity to the southern Italian context. Some have noticed too coarse a use of the category of race in the debate on the south, which tends to be disposed of too easily, being epitomized as ignorance or seen as a phenomenon that is circumscribed spatially and temporally to specific moments in history (Italy from 1937, when the racial laws were promulgated, to the fall of fascism, for example).<sup>83</sup> On the contrary, racism should be seen as constituting a repertoire of concepts and discourses, a ‘rhetorical unconscious’ as Roberto Dainotto calls

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<sup>79</sup> Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.30-32.

<sup>80</sup> Teti, p.72.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Gibson, p.132.

<sup>83</sup> Dickie, p.4.

the recurring repertoires of eurocentrism,<sup>84</sup> which can always be resorted to and reactivated by different social actors based on their political needs of the moment.<sup>85</sup> Some scholars, for example, have commented on how the resurgence of racism against southerners after the Second World War, which accompanied the large internal migration of Italians from the south to the industrial triangle in the north, served the needs of a booming capitalism and the formation of a large labour market on a national scale. By dividing the workers into factions, anti-southern racism hierarchized the labour force and created favourable conditions for the exploitation of southerners as a workforce that could be paid less than the northerners for maximizing profits. In a similar way, they see contemporary racism in Italy, which targets especially foreign workers, as linked to the formation of a transnational and global labour market.<sup>86</sup>

Some recent interventions have addressed what they see as a *foreclosure* of race in the Italian public sphere, trying to understand what kind of power mechanisms it has served and still serves in the present day; these scholars strongly argue for the (re)introduction of the concepts of race, racism and especially the concept of *racialization* in the public debate in Italy as critical tools that can give us a better understanding of past and contemporary phenomena of exploitation and marginalization in Italy and in Europe.<sup>87</sup> Anna Curcio and Miguel Mellino, for example, argue that the problematic disavowal of race in Italian public debate (even in the anti-racist movement, when it comes to anti-southern racism) goes hand in hand with the increase in racial conflict and racist episodes in the country. They see the introduction of the lexicon of race in the Italian public sphere as a way of challenging contemporary Italian racism and

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84 Dainotto, p.8.

85 Dickie p.4.

86 Sandro Mezzadra, *La condizione postcoloniale: storia e politica nel presente globale*, (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2008); *La razza al lavoro*, ed by. Anna Curcio and Miguel Mellino (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2012).

87 Miguel Mellino, 'De-provincializing Italy: Notes on Race, Racialization and Italy's Coloniality', in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo; Curcio and Mellino; Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop. For a reflection on, and examples of, how these conceptual tools should be used with the awareness of the important differences and similarities between the Italian context and the various Anglophone contexts where they were first devised see the essays collected in *Parlare di razza: la lingua del colore fra Italia e Stati Uniti*, ed. by Anna Scacchi and Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2012).

they give an account of contemporary Italian history that wants to trace the work of what they call ‘racialization’, a term that stresses the importance of conceiving of race as a material/cultural process rather than as a given.<sup>88</sup> It is also important to keep in mind how contemporary racism no longer appeals to science (as at the time of Lombroso and Niceforo, for example), but rather to an essentialized conception of culture and ‘cultural differences’ seen as negative, fixed, unchanging and somehow essential in a certain group.<sup>89</sup>

The intertwined histories of colonialism and emigration and the various facets and interrelated aspects of Italian ‘differential mobilities’<sup>90</sup> in the nineteenth and twentieth century have only recently started to be looked at in conjunction as a way to problematize the notion of Italian national identity.<sup>91</sup> The marginalization and splitting off of these different but connected experiences of mobility in the accounts of the nation has favoured the belief in singular identities and solidified the binary opposition ‘Italian/foreigner’, contributing to the creation of a hostile climate towards the arrival of migrants in Italy today. On the contrary, attention to the interrelatedness of these experiences can help diffuse simplistic binary models of identity and devise more complex ones,<sup>92</sup> thus having a positive impact towards fostering transcultural awareness and transnational forms of belonging. In Italy, people of foreign origin will soon make up approximately 10% of the population.<sup>93</sup> The history of migration to Italy has

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88 Curcio and Mellino define the term as follows: ‘by racialization we mean the effect on the social fabric of a multiplicity of institutional and non institutional practices and discourses oriented towards a hierarchically connoted representation of physical and cultural, real and imaginary *differences* and hence to the disciplining of their material and inter-subjective relationships. Oversimplifying, we think that the concept of racialization, since it is highly saturated with the disturbing colonial and imperial legacy of race, is more suitable than others connoted with more neutral meanings (such as ethnicization or multiculturalism, for instance) to describe in an effective way the economic and cultural processes of essentialization, discrimination, inferiorization and segregation, that is of symbolic and material violence, to which certain groups in the Italian and European social space are nowadays submitted’. Curcio and Mellino, p.4.

89 Teti, p.17.

90 Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Malia Hom, ‘Introduction’, in *Italian Mobilities*, ed. by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Malia Hom (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-24 (p.1).

91 *Borderlines: migrazioni e identità nel novecento*, ed. by Jennifer Burns and Loredana Polezzi, (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone 2003); *Italian Mobilities*, ed. by Ruth Ben Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom.

92 Jennifer Burns and Loredana Polezzi, ‘Migrazioni, tra confini e sconfinamenti’, in *Borderlines: migrazioni e identità nel novecento*, ed. by Jennifer Burns and Loredana Polezzi, pp.13-16.

93 Istat, *Notizie sulla presenza straniera in Italia*, <<https://www.istat.it/it/immigrati>>, [accessed 20 May 2017].

followed a different path from other European countries, which started receiving large numbers of people from their former colonies in the 1950s. Only small numbers of Somalis and Eritreans migrated to Italy in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>94</sup> Aside from a few exceptions, Italy starts becoming the destination for more consistent flows of migrants in the early 1980s, when northern European countries adopted more restrictive policies.<sup>95</sup> This is due to a variety of factors, such as location, which encouraged transit migration, the historical connections with other countries in the Mediterranean, the nature of its borders, the looseness, at the time, of immigration control policies, and the social mobility that had happened in the previous decades in the host society.<sup>96</sup> The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of various communist regimes in Eastern Europe also generated new flows of migration, which followed an ‘east-south’ route. The peculiarity of this history of migration is reflected in the wide variety of foreign nationalities present in Italy today, which creates the preconditions for a very heterogeneous form of social composition.<sup>97</sup> The distribution of migrants in Italy tends to follow the north-south divide, with the majority of migrants settling in the north and a much smaller number living and working in the south.<sup>98</sup> The south represents today the entry point for many migrants in Italy, who often follow the same route that the southern Italian migrants followed (and still follow) towards the richest regions in the north. Southern regions have also been the backdrop where episodes of spectacular racism have taken place, like the killing in 1989 of the South African Jerry Esslan Masslo in the fields around Villa Literno. Masslo, fleeing from South African apartheid, had appealed for the political status of refugee, but the law at the time only granted refugee status to people from Eastern Europe. His killing created quite a commotion in Italy and, shortly after his death,

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94 On early Eritrean migration to Italy see for example Sabrina Marchetti, *Black Girls: Migrant Domestic Workers and Colonial Legacies*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp.50-56. On early Somali migration to Italy see Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within: Language, Race and Belonging in ‘Minor’ Italian Literature*, (Cambridge: Legenda, 2015), pp.2-6.

95 Russel King, ‘The Troubled passage: migration and cultural Encounters in Southern Europe’, in *The Mediterranean Passage: Migration and New Cultural Encounters in Southern Europe*, ed. by Russel King, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), pp.1-21.

96 King, p.5.

97 King, p.6.

98 See the chart included in the Istat website: Istat, *Notizie sulla presenza straniera in Italia, mappe dinamiche* < <http://www4.istat.it/it/immigrati/mappe-dinamiche> > [accessed 3 August 2018].

a political anti-racist demonstration took place in Rome that saw more than 100,000 people in the streets. In 1990, the right to have access to refugee status in Italy was extended to people of many more nationalities. Masslo's is only the first instance of violence against the migrants in the south to gain national attention, but many were to follow, such as the Castel Volturno massacre in 2008, which saw six Africans die under the fire of the Camorra, and the racial tensions escalating in Rosarno in 2010. Racism and discrimination affect the migrant population in their everyday life at various levels: according to recent statistical data, migrants have unequal access and are discriminated against in key areas that affect the possibility of sustaining themselves in Italy, such as in the housing market, in the labour market or in their access to education.<sup>99</sup>

Despite the hopes expressed by some of a 'diverse multiculturalism' that could harmoniously include differences, recent migration to Italy has been accompanied by anxious and hostile reactions at various levels of Italian society. These reactions very often bring to mind the historical precedents of Italian liberal, fascist and colonial racism and are informed by deep-seated fears of contamination and degeneration especially regarding issues of colour and religion. The association of Italianness with blackness certainly generates great uneasiness and it still seems for many to 'constitute an oxymoron',<sup>100</sup> a perception that a generation of African-Italian writers is actively trying to challenge.<sup>101</sup> Migrants are also seen as menacing Italy's status as a Catholic nation, and the proliferation of non-Catholic places of worship, especially mosques, and, more in general, the increasingly visible presence of Islam as 'an internal actor within Italian civil society'<sup>102</sup> are often perceived with anxiety and have generated a heated debate.

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99 Istat, *Notizie sulla presenza straniera in Italia*.

100 Caterina Romeo, 'Racial Evaporations, Representing Blackness in African-Italian postcolonial Literature', in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.221-238 (p. 231).

101 *ibid.*

102 Charles Burdett, *Italy, Islam and the Islamic World: Representations and Reflections, from 9/11 to the Arab Uprisings* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), p.4.

## Intersectionality and Transnationalism

The transnational recovery of the different histories of mobility that have had Italy as one of the points of a map that spreads to various parts of the globe and the consideration of their moments of connections and their integral role in the formation of national identity and culture should be done paying particular attention to aspects related to gender and sexuality, as both lived experiences and as discourses whose deployment and construction serves a political-ideological function, which in turn affect and are affected by individual experiences.

Research on gender history and on the history of sexuality in Italy has contributed considerably towards gaining a more nuanced understanding of processes of ‘Othering’ of the south in nineteenth-century Europe and Italy. The Eurocentric discourse on the degeneration of southern Europe and Italy in the mid-eighteenth century deployed by foreign commentators included narratives on the sexual debauchery of the local population and especially on the ‘indolent and effeminate’ character of southern men. These stereotypes later became current in the political works of many Risorgimento patriots, being an integral part of their anti-aristocratic polemical positions.<sup>103</sup> The ‘scientific’ theories of race elaborated by the positivist school of anthropology also made claim to the domains of gender and sexuality in order to classify individuals, cultures and nations on an evolutionary ladder and to associate criminality with ‘racial inferiority’, ‘cultural backwardness’ and blackness. Lombroso and his school had a linear, evolutionary view of sexuality: non-normative sexualities, homosexuality and gender fluidity were all seen as sexual vices that, together with many other ‘perversions’, were associated with a corrupted past, while the superiority of the present was demonstrated by the restrained and civilised behaviour of the monogamous couple.<sup>104</sup> Gender hierarchies and fixed roles were seen as proof of evolution, while indifferenciation of gender roles and women

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103 Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). pp. 20-50.

104 Valeria P. Babini, Chiara Beccalossi and Lucy Riall, ‘Introduction’, in *Italian Sexualities Uncovered: 1789-1914*, ed. by Valeria P. Babini, Chiara Beccalossi and Lucy Riall (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.1-13 (p.2).

taking on traditionally more masculine functions or behaviours were seen as characteristic of lower races.<sup>105</sup> ‘Perversions’ and ‘abnormal’ sexual and gender behaviour were then also associated with those regions and parts of the world that were seen as inferior and backward. In the works of criminal anthropologists like Niceforo and Ferrero around the time of unification, ‘perversion’, ‘effeminacy’ and sexual immorality were increasingly associated with southern Italy and local gender and sexual identities and behaviours, like the *femminiella* in Naples or the idea, apparently quite common in some regions and social *milieux* of the south, that homosexuality was a normal part of male adolescents’ sexual maturation into proper adult heterosexuality, were seen as proof of degeneracy and of a north-south difference.<sup>106</sup> Ironically, later historians of sexuality in the 1960s and 1970s also relied on a teleological view and linear model of sexuality, usually positing a progression from sexual repression in the past to modern sexual liberation in the present. This is evident, for example, in Giovanni Dall’Orto’s discussion of what he calls ‘Mediterranean homosexuality’.<sup>107</sup> Dall’Orto, a prominent gay activist, constructs the Mediterranean homosexual as a residual ‘constitutive opposite’ of the ‘modern’, northern gay man, who is to be the political subject of gay liberation. In setting up this binary opposition, Dall’Orto reiterates the teleological, linear model of earlier commentators on southern sexuality, *de facto* excluding more local and less visible forms of expression of gender and sexuality from a political horizon.<sup>108</sup> Because of his teleological framework Dall’Orto does not see what queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has considered to be one of the main ‘axioms’ which studies which include a consideration of sexuality in contemporary culture should take as a starting point.<sup>109</sup> Sedgwick cautions scholars of sexuality against the idea that different models of homosexuality (and

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105 Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter, ‘Editors’ Introduction’, in Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, ed. and trans. by Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp.1-36 (p.18).

106 Chiara Beccalossi, ‘the “Italian Vice”’: Male Homosexuality and British Tourism in Southern Italy’, in *Italian Sexualities Uncovered, 1789-1914*, ed. by Valeria P. Babini, Chiara Beccalossi and Lucy Riall (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.185-205 (pp.190-191).

107 Giovanni Dall’Orto, ‘Mediterranean homosexuality’, in *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality Vol. 2*, ed. by Wayne R. Dynes (New York: Garland, 1990), pp.796-798.

108 Goffredo Polizzi, *Postcoloniality and the Italian South: Race, Gender, Sexuality, Literature*, (unpublished master’s dissertation, Utrecht University - Granada University, 2013), pp.34-37.

109 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), pp.1-65.



implicitly of heterosexuality) simply supersede and substitute each other, instead arguing for a perspective which is able to ‘show how issue of modern homo/heterosexual definition are structured, not by the supersession of one model and the consequent withering away of another’<sup>110</sup> but by the tensions between ‘the unrationalized coexistence of different models’.<sup>111</sup>

Unfortunately, we do not know as much about the existence of non-heterosexual communities in major cities in the south or in the north of Italy at the turn of the century as we do about European capitals like London, Paris and Berlin, even if recent historical work has started to unearth extremely interesting evidence.<sup>112</sup> On the contrary, male homosexual tourism in southern Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is by now well documented. Northern European homosexual tourists were drawn to Italy and especially to islands like Capri and seaside towns in the south like Taormina by a fascination with the ‘myth of a homoerotic Mediterranean’,<sup>113</sup> which conflated notions about homosexuality in antiquity and during the Renaissance with an original appropriation of present views on the hypersexualization of southerners. Without minimizing the exploitative dimension of many interactions between southern Italian boys and northern European travellers and the orientalist and patronising aspects of much of the tourists’ production on the south, recent scholarship has tried to go beyond the victim/perpetrator, colonizer/colonized binaries in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of these encounters. Looking for an Arcadia untainted by the restrictive mores of their countries, northern European homosexual artists travelling to the south often recast the discourses on southerners’ unruly sexuality in a positive light, turning stereotypes about Italians’ sexual debauchery and effeminacy into ‘positive tropes of sexual freedom’.<sup>114</sup> Although being very often quite oblivious of the power differentials between themselves and the local population, they opened up a space for experimenting with their own fantasies and desires and to criticize indirectly the laws prohibiting

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110 Sedgwick, p.47.

111 Ibid.

112 Laura Schettini, *Il gioco delle parti: travestimenti e paure sociali fra Otto e Novecento* (Milano: Le Monnier, 2011).

113 Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.x.

114 Beccalossi, p.187.

homosexuality in their countries.<sup>115</sup> Both Italian and northern European sources on southern Italy's sexual attitudes suggest that there existed at the turn of the century certain social factors that favoured the acceptance of same-sex practice at various levels of society and that these were shaped by but also ignited processes of physical and cultural mobility and contact.<sup>116</sup>

This type of reappraisal of historical events is in line with an ever growing adoption of transnational and global perspectives in the study of gender and sexuality and their intersections with ethnicity. A transnational outlook on gender and sexuality requires a shift in interpretation that goes beyond the colonizer/colonized binary and away from an exclusive focus on 'the nation, the local or the disembodied and de-contextualized subject of rights',<sup>117</sup> a 'reconfiguration of the intimate and proximate'<sup>118</sup> and an effort to intercept translocal processes of resignification, negotiation and creation of new meanings. While many interventions remain somehow northern-centred, accounts by scholars with an interest in the 'global south' are growing and have started to pose a set of new questions on the localization and globalization of sexuality, on the extent to which a colonialist outlook has constituted sexuality as an object of interest for various disciplines in the north and the south and on the relationship between modernity, sexuality and processes of nation-building in the south.<sup>119</sup> Their insights challenge the West's 'selective memory of sexual pasts'<sup>120</sup> and its pretension to be the beacon of tolerance, freedom and sexual rights, conveniently based on the forgetting of its past of colonialism and exploitation and present conditions of misogyny, racism, and homo- and transphobia.<sup>121</sup>

As many scholars have underlined, gender is a central feature of colonialist representations, and fantasies about gender and sexuality are extremely instrumental in creating a colonialist representation of the other that

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115 Beccalossi, p.202. Aldrich, pp. 69-175.

116 Beccalossi, p.203.

117 Elizabeth A. Povinelli and George Chauncey, 'Thinking Sexuality Transnationally: an Introduction', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 5(4), 439-449 (p.440).

118 Povinelli and Chauncey, p.443.

119 Saskia Wieringa and Horacio Sívori, 'Sexual Politics in the Global South: Framing the Discourse', in *The Sexual History of the Global South: Sexual Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, ed. by Saskia Wieringa and Horacio Sívori (London: Zed Books, 2013), pp.1-21 (p.4).

120 Wieringa and Sívori, p.11.

121 Wieringa and Sívori, pp.10-11.

serves to consolidate unequal power relations.<sup>122</sup> Italian colonialism had a very gendered and racialized character, differently articulated in its various pre-colonial, properly colonial and post-colonial phases. As for other experiences of colonialism, the presence of Italians in the colonies was mostly composed of men and the colonial endeavour in Africa served as a way to confront and mend the ‘male identity crisis’ that resulted from the fast changes that western society was starting to undergo at the end of the nineteenth century and from the new visibility that women started to secure for themselves in various realms of social life.<sup>123</sup> As already mentioned, in Italy, this virilist rhetoric of regeneration had characterized the process of nation building and state formation from the very beginning.<sup>124</sup> The homosocial experiences of war, camaraderie, military discipline and violence were seen as an opportunity for male regeneration. Africa, as a stage on which it was possible to demonstrate virility, heroism, the strength of the national character and the racial superiority of Italians, was very present in the collective imagination of Italians,<sup>125</sup> and the fascist version of this ‘mito africano’ adapted and elaborated on previous codifications, sometimes in confrontational ways, in an effort to underscore the momentous nature of the fascist ‘uomo nuovo’ and to comply with the explicitly imperialist policies of the regime.<sup>126</sup>

Interracial relationships between Italian colonizers and local women took the shape of prostitution, very rarely marriage and more often of *madamismo* or *madamato*, a sort of institutionalized concubinage or temporary conjugal contract, especially present in colonial Eritrea.<sup>127</sup> Building on local social

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122 Anne Mc Clintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

123 Sandro Bellassai, *La mascolinità contemporanea*, (Rome: carocci, 2004), pp.36-58.

124 Patriarca, *Italian Vices*.

125 Angelo Del Boca, *L’Africa nella coscienza degli italiani: Miti, memorie, errori, sconfitte*, (Bari: Laterza, 1992); Alessandro Triulzi, ‘L’Africa come icona: Rappresentazioni dell’alterità nell’immaginario italiano di fine Ottocento’, in *Adua: le ragioni di una sconfitta*, ed. by Angelo Del Boca (Bari: laterza, 1997) pp.255-281; Alessandro Triulzi, ‘la costruzione dell’immagine dell’Africa e degli africani nell’Italia coloniale’, in *Nel nome della razza: il razzismo nella storia d’Italia, 1870-1945*, ed by Alberto Burgio (Bologna: il Mulino, 1999), pp.165-181.

126 Loredana Polezzi, ‘White, Male and Italian?: Performing Masculinity in Italian Travel Writing about Africa’, in *In Corpore: Bodies in Post-Unification Italy* ed. by Loredana Polezzi and Charlotte Ross (Cranbury,NJ: Associated University Presses, 2007), pp.29-55 (pp.50-51); Giulietta Stefani, *Colonia per maschi. Italiani in Africa Orientale: una storia di genere* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2007), pp. 42-45.

127 Giulia Barrera, ‘Madamato’ in *Dizionario del fascismo*, ed. by Victoria De Grazia and Sergio Luzzato (Torino:Einaudi, 2002), pp.69-72.

institutions that contemplated the existence of temporary marriages that included compensation for the women and that bound the men to a set of responsibilities, Italians appropriated this local tradition in a version that did not provide local women, who fulfilled the role of providing the man with all the ‘comforts of a home’, with very many rights and guarantees.<sup>128</sup> Nonetheless, in the period before the promulgation of the racial laws, *madamato* had been recognized and accepted by the white colonial society and often constituted for local women a means of social and economic mobility. In 1936 and 1937, the fascist laws that imposed strict racial segregation in the colonies and punished interracial relationships tried to eradicate the phenomenon of *madamato*, which was not in line with its imperialist ideology. Concurrently, the regime increased the subsidization of institutionalized prostitution and even ‘imported’ white prostitutes from Italy in order to minimize the risks of miscegenation and racial mixing.<sup>129</sup> The racial laws did not succeed in eradicating completely the phenomenon of *madamato*, but exposed the women who entered into these types of relationships with Italian men to even more violence, since they did not even have the minimal legal protection that they had in the past.<sup>130</sup> As scholars have emphasized, the representation of ‘madame’ and of African women in a variety of media in the fascist colonial period is a good illustration of the regime’s attempt at ‘fusing the public discourse with the private one’,<sup>131</sup> through the sexualized image of the ‘venera nera’ whose alluring and exotic attitude of sexual availability served, travelling back home in the form of postcards or images in magazines, as a powerful tool to co-opt and seduce new Italian audiences into supporting the colonial endeavour and entice new settlers to journey to Africa by stirring up their virile and heroic spirit.<sup>132</sup>

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128 Barbara Sòrgoni, *Parole e corpi. Antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interraziali nella colonia Eritrea, 1890-1941* (Napoli: Liguori, 1998), pp.127-138; Ruth Iyob, ‘Madamismo and Beyond: The Construction of Eritrean Women’, in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2005), pp.233-244 (pp.236-238).

129 Iyob, pp.238-239.

130 Stefani, pp. 142-143.

131 Ponzanesi, p. 124.

132 Ponzanesi, pp.119-126.

Even if the majority of the people in the colonies were men, white Italian women were not absent and they made up one third of the entire colonial population in Mediterranean colonial Africa.<sup>133</sup> The peculiar ‘demographic’ nature of Italian colonialism and the fascist policies on the emigration of entire families favoured the presence of Italian women, especially in the 1930s.<sup>134</sup> Their experiences varied widely according to their class belongings and role in colonial society. Although the presence of white women in the colonies has been somehow erased from the virile and misogynist representation of the colonial endeavour that its male participants tended to produce and consume, and due to the scarcity of first-hand accounts by women, recent studies have started to call into question the image of the Italian colonies as an exclusively male domain by retrieving the experiences of Italian women in the colonies, although they have mostly been able to focus on accounts by and on women of the upper classes.<sup>135</sup>

The lack of information on women’s experiences, and especially on working class women like the ones who made up the majority of Italian women present in the colonies, can hardly be said to be characteristic of the history of colonialism. Before the development, in the last thirty years, of a growing literature on Italian women migrants, the image of women involved in migratory processes constructed by historians of migration was characterized by ‘una immobilità più che fisica, [...] culturale’.<sup>136</sup> They were in fact seen either as the immobile women at home patiently waiting for their husbands to come back, or, when migrants themselves, as the ones who would simply transmit the unchanged values of their culture of origin, custodians of a static tradition for the second generations. Their role analysed only as subordinate to and supportive of the male emigrants, they were seen as dependent and ‘unproductive’ in a vision that

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133 Labanca, p.398.

134 Labanca, p.400.

135 Cristina Lombardi-Diop, ‘Pioneering Female Modernity: Fascist Women in Colonial Africa’, in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.145-154; Francesca di Pasquale, ‘civilizzare le civilizzatrici. Insegnanti italiane nello spazio mediterraneo fra Ottocento e Novecento’, in *Quel che resta dell’impero: la cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. by Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milano: Mimesis, 2014), pp.169-189.

136 Maddalena Tirabassi, ‘Trent’anni di studi sulle migrazioni in Italia: un bilancio storiografico’, in *Lontane da casa. Donne italiane e diaspora globale dall’inizio del Novecento a oggi*, ed. by Stefano Luconi and Mario Varricchio (Torino: Academia University Press, 2015), pp.19-40.

completely ignored their reproductive work in the house and their productive work and engagements outside of the house, both in their home country and in the host countries. This situation can be seen as a consequence of a longstanding reluctance of history of migration, in line with the methodological nationalism that has characterized the humanities and the social sciences, to engage with ‘contesti di partenza’ as well as with ‘contesti di arrivo’ and to link the analysis of the two, and, more in general, of a widespread lack of interest on the part of scholars in various fields in the history of women from the lower classes.<sup>137</sup>

Gender historiography on migration has been from its inception quite keen on developing a transnational framework and a comparative outlook that would consider together ‘contesti di arrivo’ and ‘contesti di partenza’. These scholars have been able to trace the experiences of lower class women by reconstructing their roles as active and mobile participants in cultural and social change both in the home country and in the host country, tracing the trajectories of their activism in various political movements in Europe, Australia, and North and South America, documenting the great variety of jobs they did and the complex negotiations between their smaller circles of belonging and the host societies.<sup>138</sup> They have contributed enormously to increasing our knowledge about the peasants’ society to which the majority of Italian women involved in migratory processes belonged. They have also helped reconsider the conventional image of the ‘vedove bianche’ (the women who stayed at home while their husbands or relatives left), usually depicted as simple housewives passively waiting for their husbands, by illustrating instead the various ways in which they replaced the men who had left in many of their functions; they had to manage the remittances with great care, often integrating them with other jobs. Indeed, their activities and central roles in their communities were often

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137 Tirabassi, pp.20-21.

138 Pioneering work has been done again by Gabaccia: Donna Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants, 1880–1930*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); see also: Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta eds. *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

perceived as threatening and caused social anxieties at many levels of Italian society.<sup>139</sup>

Scholars have described how significant the political activity of southern lower class women was in the last decade of the nineteenth century, all throughout the movements of the *fasci siciliani* and of the various peasants' revolts, which were spearheaded by peasant women and seriously threatened the power of the social elites of liberal Italy.<sup>140</sup> They reconstruct a new genealogy of modern working class movements, which can be seen as having been launched by peasant women's participation in southern Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. The period of the *fasci siciliani* and of the peasants' revolts is in fact the same period as mass emigration: peasant women through their mobility helped in spreading practices of resistance and 'traditions of civil disobedience and community-wide revolts [...] independent of formal organizations'<sup>141</sup> all throughout Italy and the diaspora. The representation at the end of the nineteenth century of southern lower-class women as victims to be rescued, as meek, submissive and docile, was embedded with the politics of representation of southern Italy of the period, part and parcel of more general strategies utilized by northern and southern upper classes as a way to legitimize their policies and secure their social and economic position.<sup>142</sup>

The type of analysis that tries to see gender as an element that derives its social meaning from the entanglement with other social determinants such as race/ethnicity, class and sexuality is a methodological framework that has come to be known as intersectionality. It has its roots in the political theories and practices of African-American women in the United States, who had to simultaneously confront the lack of awareness on issues regarding race in the feminist movement and the misogyny of the Black power movement.

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139 Linda Reedder, *Widows in White: Migration and the Transformation of Rural Italian Women, Sicily 1880–1920*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution. Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 40-43.

140 Jole Calapso, *Donne Ribelli: Un secolo di lotte femminili in Sicilia*. (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1980).

141 Guglielmo, p.12.

142 Guglielmo, p.40; Mary Gibson 'The female Offender and the Italian School of criminal Anthropology', *Journal of European Studies*, xii (1982), 155-65.

Intersectionality has only recently started to be employed in Italy. In an article that takes to task the underlying Eurocentrism of much of the scholarship in the field of gender studies, the feminist scholar Oyeronke Oyewumi calls for a greater contextualization and for a careful application of the tools of gender studies to local contexts. According to Oyewumi, in many countries, this need has translated itself into discussions that have focused on the importance of taking into consideration ‘imperialism, colonization, and other local and global forms of stratification, which lend weight to the assertion that gender cannot be abstracted from the social context and other systems of hierarchy’.<sup>143</sup> In other words, the use of the category of gender should be a way to be aware and understand how stratification and power work in a specific place and time.

As we have seen, issues regarding colonialism, racism and the intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality in regard to Italy and southern Italy have only recently started to be taken into consideration. This is certainly due to the general dismissal of colonialism and emigration as embarrassing experiences in Italian history, and to the ‘methodological nationalism’ that prevented the consideration of transnational dynamics and phenomena, but it also has to do with the specificities of Italian feminism and of its relation to other forms of difference throughout its history. Vincenza Perilli has done research on the (mis)fortunes in Italy of what we today call intersectionality and in the second-wave Italian feminist movement of the 1970s. According to Perilli, there was an initial phase in the early seventies in which, also in the wake of the relations that the rising Italian feminist movement had established with other movements abroad, the similarities between women and other oppressed categories (workers, migrants, gays and lesbians) were highly debated; but, already in the early eighties, the centrality gained by a ‘narrow interpretation’ of the conception of gender elaborated by the ‘philosophy of sexual difference’, inspired by the writings of Luce Irigaray, pushed considerations of the intersection of gender with ‘other differences’ out of the feminist picture.<sup>144</sup> In

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143 Oyeronke Oyewumi, ‘Conceptualizing Gender: the Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concept and the Challenge of African Epistemologies’, in *African Gender Scholarship: Concepts, Methodologies and Paradigms*, (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004), pp.1-8 (p.2).

144 Vincenza Perilli, ‘L’analogia imperfetta. Sessismo, razzismo e femminismi tra Italia, Francia e Stati Uniti’, *Zapruder*, n. 13, (2007), 28–32 (p.30).



this interpretation of French ‘sexual difference philosophy’, absorbed very early on by Italian feminists, the difference of women from men was seen as ‘the’ fundamental difference, while all the other differences were seen as less important or secondary in terms of creating subjectivity and structuring social life. These other differences, then, became less worthy of attention.

In the first ten years of the feminist movement in Italy, similarly to other contexts, the analogy between the predicament of women and that of black people in the United States had been very important for the coming into being of a feminist consciousness and for women to become aware of their exploitation. Yet, if, on one hand, the analogy blacks/women was very present and of constitutive importance, on the other it had serious shortcomings. A major one was that, when the feminist movement in Italy thought about black people it often had in mind the anti-racist struggle carried out by African-Americans in the U.S. and tended to overlook racial stratification at home: for example, the differences among southerners and northerners, or among migrant women from North Africa and Eastern Europe and the autochthones. It is also important to remember in this regard that Italy has been for decades the stronghold of a somehow orthodox Marxist leftist politics that has always subsumed all the various struggles carried out by different political subjects under the rubric of class struggle, treating all other issues as ‘divisive’, Gramsci notwithstanding.

## **Post-‘Colonial’ and Trans-National Discontinuities**

In his afore-mentioned article on the usefulness of postcolonial theory in general and in the French context in particular, Jean-Francois Bayart provides a searing critique of the field. Bayart points out what he calls methodological errors in postcolonial studies (namely, a certain ‘reification’ of what it is to be defined as a proper ‘colonial situation’) and calls for a greater contextualization and

historicization in order to avoid some of the possible shortcomings.<sup>145</sup> Somewhat provocatively, Bayart raises an important question, one that we should ponder: if it is to avoid becoming a new normative and exclusive label that falls into the trap it wants to criticize, postcolonial studies need to be made more ‘local’ and parochial; they should be able to keep the global and the local together and zero in on the relationship between them; they should also be able to account for the diversity of the contexts they are applied to, while, at the same time, avoiding fostering somehow essentialist ideas about coherent, self-sufficient identities, be they national or individual.<sup>146</sup> Using Glissant’s terminology, we could say that a certain productive tension between universality and particularity needs to be left unresolved in striving for ‘diversality’.

The Italian case, due to the transnational complexities of its history, can aptly demonstrate how local and global need not be thought of as opposite notions in order to imagine a more inclusive formulation of identity. In a recent article that focuses on *Merica*, a documentary by Federico Ferrone, Michele Manzolini and Francesco Ragazzi that addresses Italian migration to Brazil and the contemporary phenomenon of Brazilians of Italian heritage travelling back to the land of their forefathers, Teresa Fiore develops a conception of postcolonialism based on the specificities of the Italian case. Fiore elaborates on the multiple uses of the term ‘colonia’ in Italy, used to refer to Italy’s emigrant population, to the African and Mediterranean territories that fell under Italian rule shortly after unification and during the fascist period, and to the relocation of people within Italy during the land reclamation program of the fascist regime. Fiore thus proposes a multilayered notion of the postcoloniality of Italy: if read together, emigration and colonialism reveal how the making of Italy and of Italian identity has taken shape in a substantial way well beyond the national boundaries, through the circulation of people and ideas. Her approach differentiates but reads the contemporary interaction among what she terms the emigrants’ ‘post-“coloniality”’, the condition of those people all around the world who have acquired Italian citizenship because they are descendants of Italian emigrants and who very often travel back to Italy, and Italy’s direct but mostly ‘indirect

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145 Bayart, p.65.

146 *ibid.*

postcoloniality', its multi-ethnic make-up that comprises not only people from former Italian colonies but also a majority of people coming from countries that used to be part of the empires of other colonizing nations. Although privileged because of easier access to citizenship, the descendants of Italian emigrants, once in Italy, are very often seen as foreigners. At the same time, non-descendant immigrants and their children (even when born in Italy) are not granted citizenship very easily. The emigrants' 'post-"colonial"' status in contemporary Italy can thus be a vantage point for Fiore to deconstruct 'the ideologically fabricated view of emigration as a successful "colonist" project in other countries' lands or as a successful post-"colonial" return'<sup>147</sup> and expose the fact that, while the ex-emigrant *colonia* is seen as 'a legitimate place of origin for "extending" Italianness',<sup>148</sup> the actual postcolonial experience of migrants who started their journey in former Italian colonies or in countries colonized by other European powers, or 'with no "blood" ties to Italy, is on the contrary a reason for institutional exclusion'.<sup>149</sup> Fiore's complex and multifaceted conceptualization of Italy's postcolonialism is geared towards producing 'a more porous conceptualization of citizenship and a more flexible forms of belonging',<sup>150</sup> not only within the national boundaries of Italy but in all those points on the 'common map'<sup>151</sup> of Italy's postcoloniality. Although not using the critical rubric of the south, Fiore's conceptualization of the Italian postcolonial is operatively not very distant from those 'south-to-south links' that Mignolo elaborates on in his discussion of modernity/coloniality and of the alternatives to cosmopolitanism from above. Moreover, her complex and context-specific elaboration of a framework that takes into account the multiple times and spaces delineated by the transnational circulation of people, goods and ideas seems to be well equipped to address the possible shortcomings of the postcolonial project that Bayart refers to in his critique of the field. Fiore's elaboration on an Italian context-specific

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147 Teresa Fiore, 'The Emigrant Post-"Colonia" in Contemporary Immigrant Italy', in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.71-81 (p.74).

148 Fiore, p.76.

149 *ibid.*

150 Fiore, p.79.

151 Fiore, p.78.

notion of postcolonialism is, then, not very distant from what has been called the use of a ‘transnational’ lens in the field of Italian studies.

In an article examining a purported ‘Trans-national Turn’ in Italian Studies, Emma Bond examines if and how the transnational has been employed in Italian literary and cultural studies and if the Italian context can provide innovative insights and considerations for the transnational as a field concerned with a global scope.<sup>152</sup> In contrast to the sometimes abstract ways in which the global has mostly been conceived of in the field of Italian literary and cultural studies, Bond offers the notion of a hyphenated ‘trans-nationalism’ that amounts to a ‘sustained critical engagement with the real-life processes of transnationalism and globalization itself’.<sup>153</sup> Basing her discussion on Vertovec’s description of the concept in social sciences, Bond highlights three main features of the adjective ‘transnational’, mostly used to refer to: phenomena that go beyond national boundaries; to the individual’s agency in these processes, seen as consisting mostly of flexibility and adaptation; or to an aesthetic quality, a style marked by syncretism and creolization, which characterizes cultural products and expressions springing from or representing these experiences. The use of the hyphen in the trans-national for Bond is necessary in order to make it clear that ‘the national’ is questioned and interrogated by the prefix, in much the same way as the concept of gender is questioned and interrogated, and not naturalized or seen as self-evident, in the term ‘trans-gender’. It is an important analogy Bond is focusing on here, even more than just an analogy, one that I am going to pursue in this work. The hyphenated ‘trans-’, in fact, in both the trans-gender and the trans-national, hinges on the lived experience of the cultural intelligibility of bodies in time, space, and place, and it foregrounds the body as the ‘privileged site of lived subjectivity, yet also as a means of experiencing the local and the global simultaneously’.<sup>154</sup> According to Bond, Italy, because of its history of colonialism and internal and external emigration, which introduce a fragmented temporality and an expanded space into the linear time and contained

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152 Emma Bond, ‘Towards a Trans-national turn in Italian Studies?’, *Italian Studies*, vol.69 No.3 (2014), 415-424 (p.415).

153 *ibid.*

154 *ibid.*

space of the nation, because of its peripheral, southern position and status within Europe, and because of its image as a country of a never-accomplished modernity ‘can easily be seen as a “trans-”, in-between space able to “queer” notions of a national time and space’.<sup>155</sup> A space, then, where multiple temporalities overlap and intersect, where the ‘past’ of emigration and colonialism is shown to be in the folds of the present in the predicament of ‘direct and indirect postcoloniality’ that Fiore describes, and where the linear temporality of progress and modernity seems to be troubled by a never-ending, on the contrary increasingly intricate, ‘southern question’.

In this work, I will supplement the existing literature on *Pensiero Meridiano* and on the Mediterranean with a postcolonial, intersectional and transnational approach: one that should try to recover the history and the memory of the Italian imperial endeavours in Africa and the Mediterranean, the voices of the massive internal and external emigration starting in the late nineteenth century, and that should be able to relate these different but interconnected histories to the present state of Italian ‘multiculturalism’ engendered by a recent wave of immigration. It will see these different moments of Italian history as linked, trying to theorize the link between them and take their legacy to bear onto the present. These hidden histories, and the marginalization of them, have tremendous repercussions on the present time, but these risk going unnoticed because of the scant awareness of the role that both internal and the external colonialism, the phenomenon of migration, and the marginalization of southern Italy have had and continue to have in the construction of Italian identity.

Moreover, taking my cue from Bond and her attention to the body as a site of lived subjectivity through which we can read, in the analysis of cultural texts, how the multiple dimensions of time, place and space interact in a ‘frictional dialectic’<sup>156</sup> that is able to rediscover marginalized histories, I will focus on the ways gender, race and sexuality are represented, deconstructed and reconstructed in novels and movies that focus on what Mignolo would call ‘south-to-south’ links.

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155 Bond, ‘Towards a Trans-national turn in Italian Studies?’, p.417.

156 Bond ‘Towards a Trans-national turn in Italian Studies?’, p. 422.



## **Part II**

# **The Literary Representation of the Italian South Today**

As the ever increasing number of people attempting to reach the shores of Sicily demonstrates, the Italian south today represents a stage where world-scale conflicts are played out on the lives and bodies of those inhabiting the region, or of those trying to reach the south of the peninsula as the entry point towards Europe and the West. The current predicament of the Italian south is in fact that of a border. According to Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, borders in today's world are not only proliferating but also undergoing some major changes; borders are becoming social institutions where the struggle between practices of border reinforcing and border crossing and dismantling is played out. For this reason, borders should not be thought of simply as walls whose function is primarily the exclusion of certain peoples and constituencies, but rather as liminal spaces for the management and the 'differential inclusion of people, places and labour force'.<sup>157</sup> Borders thus become a privileged site to look at the painful transformations and readjustments of international capital and nation-states, at the resistance efforts that surface in these very same spaces and at the creation of a different political subjectivity. Such a subjectivity entails, for its constitution, processes of translation among people and struggles. Such processes of translation are not to be seen as taking place between discrete and self-contained communities/languages; they create a new, common but multiple subjectivity that does not pre-exist the exchange but is the outcome of the translation itself. Using the notion of translation, Mezzadra and Neilson are able to envision a mode

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157 Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), pp.VIII-X.



of connection among different subjects that does not fall back into the idea of universality without differences and that preserves and fosters new forms of agency:

Such a heterolingual approach to translation does not imply the reduction of political thought and action within a series of haphazard articulations which are nonetheless constrained by the existing institutional arrangements. To reconceive the political within this frame is not to obscure or abandon its conflictual dimension. The practice and experience of struggle is not incommensurable with a practice of translation that does not seek to level all languages onto an even field. Such translation, however, does lead us to ask how a politics of struggle in which one either wins or loses can be thought across a politics of translation in which one usually gains and loses something at the same time.<sup>158</sup>

The last question posed by Mezzadra and Neilson entails a rethinking of politics and subjectivity that is absolutely crucial for renegotiating the ethics needed to measure up to contemporary geopolitical transformations.

In the field of literature and of Italian studies, questions similar to the ones Mezzadra and Neilson are posing in the realm of political theory could be addressed with a renewed interest in linguistic heterogeneity and linguistic variance. Confronted with the set of problems and global transformations discussed so far, it becomes vital for the study of literature and of Italian literature to rethink their own principles beyond the tenets of the nation and of the equation between national literatures and national languages. As Loredana Polezzi has highlighted, a way to undermine such an equation could be a focus on mobility. Mobility can very well be a key concept for understanding what Michel Foucault would call the ‘genealogy of the present’ and for updating our conception of the literary system. According to Polezzi, taking into consideration the issue of mobility, throughout Italian history as well as in the present, could be a very effective way out of a nationalistic and ultimately exclusive definition of ‘Italianness’ and of ‘Italian literature’. Polezzi describes how the dangerous

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158 Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, ‘Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor’, *Transversal – eipcp multilingual webjournal*, 06/08 (2008), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/mezzadraneilson/en> [accessed 12 December 2017].

equation between national language and national literature is still the principle on which hierarchical value-systems that marginalize certain types of writing while canonizing others are predicated. Linguistic and cultural hybridity in this framework are reasons for marginalization, and this is even more striking in the face of the current changes that Italy is undergoing, where mobility and migration figure prominently, and also deeply affect current literary production.<sup>159</sup> Engaging with recent debates around cosmopolitanism, world literature and transnational writing, Polezzi argues for a rethinking of Italian writing from its margins. Through a focus on mobility, Polezzi says, we can gain a better and more integrated picture of forms of writing that have been either ignored or devalued. We are able to establish connections among them and to have a more nuanced understanding of the linguistic and rhetorical strategies they employ, which include different forms of translation, self-translation and mixing of different languages.<sup>160</sup>

Similar considerations are expressed by scholars who discuss specifically the literary production and the literary representation of the Italian south. Taking their cue from Cassano, but also going back to Gramsci and the re-reading of his work through Said and postcolonial theory, a number of scholars have started to undertake an analysis of contemporary novels from the Italian south or dealing with the Italian south informed by a postcolonial sensitivity, elucidating how the texts they analyse go beyond the usual stereotypes that have too often informed the representation of the region in literature and are, instead, able to illuminate the Italian south's current situation.<sup>161</sup> Many of these novels aim to expose the damage caused in the Italian south by a misguided and problematic idea of development and of modernity.

Reflecting on the paradoxically chronic 'emergenza rifiuti' that pertains mostly to Campania but, more generally, to the majority of Italy's southern

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159 Loredana Polezzi, 'Disrupting Europe: Polylingual Models and Common Selves', *Transversal – eipcp multilingual webjournal*, 06/13 (2013), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0613/polezzi/en>, [accessed 12 December 2017].

160 *ibid.*

161 *Le Frontiere del sud: Culture e lingue a contatto*, ed. by Maria Bonaria Urban and others (Cagliari: Cuec, 2012); *Letteratura a sud*, ed. by Giovanna Zaccaro and Gianpaolo Altamura (Bari: Besa, 2014); *L'invenzione del Sud: Migrazioni, condizioni postcoloniali, linguaggi letterari*, ed. by Roberto Derobertis and Bruno Brunetti (Bari: Edizioni Graphis, 2009).

regions, Roberto Derobertis comments on how the pursuit of modernity in the Italian south has resulted mostly in the creation of material and human waste, of ‘rifuti’ and ‘vite di scarto’ that are the end product of unsuccessful projects of modernization. Such processes should have filled the alleged development gap that separates the Italian south from the rest of the peninsula and of Europe. Even if the region is represented as intrinsically different from the modern and industrial north, in a way that fosters racist prejudices against southern Italians, it is important to see how ‘il rapporto tra Nord e Sud Italia si configura non come una relazione tra opposti separati quanto piuttosto come una relazione tra entità e territori tra loro intricati, sovrapposti e talvolta coincidenti.’<sup>162</sup> It is crucial, says Derobertis, to understand and to be able to see the connections between the south and the north of Italy in very material terms, to understand how ‘Nord e Sud sono tessere dello stesso mosaico’.<sup>163</sup> This last statement is valid not only for the case of Italy, Derobertis says, but more in general for clarifying the conflictual relation between north and south on a global scale, as the issue of the management of international migration in Italy shows. Derobertis goes on to say that the issue of migration also constitutes a sort of vantage point for looking at the current predicament of the global south and, in the case of Italy, allows the retrieval of a recent past that has been disavowed in the national historical and civil consciousness, as seen in the complex and not very well-known history of Italian emigration. He states:

Le mobilità migratorie offrono uno sguardo sulla complessità sociale, storica e geografica che permette di ribaltare gli stereotipi che tuttora alimentano l'invenzione di sud sottosviluppati e mostrano come nella mobilità, nella coesistenza di fenomeni contraddittori e negli intrecci storico geografici risieda la singolare capacità inventiva dei Sud.<sup>164</sup>

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162 Roberto Derobertis, ‘Sud, mondo’, in *L'invenzione del Sud. Migrazioni, condizioni postcoloniali, linguaggi letterari*, ed. by Roberto Derobertis and Bruno Brunetti eds., (Bari: Edizioni Graphis, 2009), pp XVII - XXXIV (p.XIX).

163 *ibid.*

164 Derobertis, ‘Sud, mondo’, p.XXIV.

In this effort to overturn stereotypes, literature and the literary imagination can have an interesting role, providing the south with a space for autonomous self-understanding and self-determination, thanks to their ability to tell multiple and multivocal stories, offer different perspectives and points of view, and establish insightful connections among geographies and histories commonly understood as separate and discrete. Literature can in fact provide a space for the creative elaboration of those south-to-south links that Cassano and Mignolo refer to and for experimentation with the heterogeneous linguistic practices analysed by Polezzi.

In the pages that follow, I aim to show, through a reading of three contemporary Italian novels that engage differently with the themes of migration and postcolonialism and with the representation of the imaginary of the south, how the theme of mobility that the novels address and the polyphonic linguistic and rhetorical strategies they employ reignite processes of self-understanding for the Italian south that point in the direction indicated by Cassano, Mignolo and Polezzi. My contention is that these texts represent and foster a postcolonial and transnational consciousness, exploring the connections, the difference and similarities, between many intertwined histories, cultures, languages, and elements of subjectivity. I will also show how the current predicament of the Italian south as a border-space is explored in the novels and ask if and how these texts chart the emergence of new forms of subjectivity being forged in this space, in ways that resonate with Mezzadra and Neilson's analysis. Moreover, I will investigate how the language used in the novels tries, with different degrees of success, to displace a unified and exclusive notion of Italianness, going beyond the equation between national language and national literature, and superseding the overlapping of nation, language and country.

## **The South as a Heterotopia: Evelina Santangelo's *Senzaterra* (2008)**

Published in 2008 by Einaudi, *Senzaterra*, by the Sicilian writer Evelina Santangelo, is the second novel of what can be considered a trilogy on migration and its links to (southern) Italian identity, which also comprises *Il giorno degli orsi volanti* (2005) and *Cose da pazzi* (2012). The story follows two main narrative threads that proceed one parallel to the other until the final chapters of the book. The first thread focuses on the arrival of a North African migrant, Alì, to the coast of Sicily after he has escaped drowning during one of the many 'sbarchi': the migrants' landings that regularly take place along the Sicilian coast. Alì is rescued by a family of poor, small landowners and farmers. The family is composed of Totò and his wife Maria, of their daughter-in-law, Lina, and her two children, Margherita and Turi. Lina's husband, we are told, is in Germany working to support his family thanks to the remittances he sends home. Notwithstanding their efforts to try and keep Alì with them, Totò and his family eventually have to send him away. Alì finds himself working in the fields for Don Michele, the local mafia boss, together with other migrants of North African origin. Working conditions at Don Michele's firm are so inhumane that Alì eventually has to flee after he is suspected of having called the police and reported one of Don Michele's overseers who has killed one of the migrants working in the fields.

The other thread focuses on Gaetano, a young man born and raised in the small town where the novel is set. Gaetano has just finished high school with very good grades and wants to move to a bigger city in order to go to university; he lives alone with his aunt, Concetta, after his mother's death from cancer and the departure of his father Antonio. Antonio worked as a mechanic before leaving Sicily, where he did not earn enough to support himself and his family, and has migrated to Germany. He now wants his son to join him there and help him start

a restaurant. Confused and conflicted as to what he should do, Gaetano decides to look for a job in his town, in order to avoid the fate of migration. He starts working as an accountant for Don Michele, in the same firm where Ali works as a farmhand. Here, he is faced with the ethical dilemma posed by the extremely harsh conditions in which the migrants live and decides to anonymously report Don Michele after one of the North African men is killed. Other characters include Liborio, Gaetano's best friend who works odd jobs in order to support himself; the young boys and girls who meet regularly in the bar in the main square of the town, where they spend much of their time and whose dialogue, stories and conversations constitute the background of the action and give insights into the way of thinking of the people of the town; and the other North African migrants who work with Ali at Don Michele's firm.

One of the most prominent features of *Senzaterra* (and of many other novels by Santangelo) is the high degree of linguistic experimentation in the text. In order to achieve her expressive aims, Santangelo makes a very interesting use of different varieties of language in *Senzaterra*: the language used by the omniscient, third-person narrator is a very precise and limpid standard Italian, while Sicilian dialect and a mixture of Sicilian dialect and Italian, that is, a Sicilian regional version of Italian, are mostly used by the characters in much of the dialogue that constitutes the majority of the text. The use of dialect is not folkloristic, nor is it simplified to meet the needs of a monolingual Italian reader. Thus, the novel presumes a reader that will make an effort to understand the dialect. There are also small but significant passages where these varieties mix with German, giving expression to Antonio's hybrid speech. In the following passage, we can find examples of all the previous usages:

-Hallo, ich bin Antonio... Ja, Her Mayer... ja, ce le avevo addumannáte da un mese... hatte da un mese, die Ferien... Ja... arrivo Donnerstag... ja... ich komme Donnersdag, Her Mayer... e certo che arrivo... ich komme, ich komme... Herr Mayer... col pullman ich komme...

Gaetano rimane per un attimo ad ascoltare quel tedesco tutto mescolato. Poi torna in cucina. Prende il telecomando, comincia a pestare sui tasti, saltando da un canale all'altro, nervoso.

-Tuo padre sta parlando a telefono, *in tedesco*, - sussurra, sua zia, inarcando le sopracciglia. -Magari lo disturba 'sta televisione... Astùtala!<sup>165</sup>

The hybrid mixture of German, Italian and Sicilian dialect used by Antonio to communicate with his boss in Germany, marked by repetition and ellipsis typical of spoken language, is juxtaposed by Santangelo with the very neat and limpid Italian used by the narrator in describing Gaetano's restlessness, while the last sentence pronounced by zia Concetta shows the mixture of standard Italian and Sicilian dialect.

While Antonio, the Italian migrant to Germany, is made to speak his native Sicilian mixed with Italian and German, Alì, the North African migrant to Italy, takes part in hardly any dialogue, and remains for the most part of the novel a mute presence. The only section in the text where he is made to use direct speech is when he meets for the first time the small group of North Africans who work for Don Michele in the fields. Interestingly, this dialogue, interspersed with references to different surahs of the Quran, takes place in standard Italian. The choice to use standard Italian is an 'unrealistic' option, very different from the one used for giving expression to the other characters of the novel. Apart from dialogue and direct speech, Alì's thoughts and feelings are given expression in the text with long passages of free indirect speech that are almost exclusively reserved for his character:

*Nasco in nome dell'acqua e in me si genera acqua...nasco in nome dell'acqua e in me si genera... correre correre... le gambe perdute... correre correre... uscire dai miei nomi... correre correre... nell'acqua... chi possiede il mio corpo è in una terra e chi possiede il mio cuore in un'altra... correre correre... lontano... dalle voci che chiamano... nell'acqua... correre, correre... via dalle voci... che adesso popolano il mare, gorgogliano, mentre i legni battono ancora più forte contro gli scogli affioranti... correre, correre... gambe d'acqua... correre, correre... tra tonfi di corpi... nell'acqua...<sup>166</sup>*

The emphasis on the lines of the text in italics signals the closer proximity of the narrator to the character in the passages that want to convey Alì's inner thoughts,

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165 Evelina Santangelo, *Senzaterra* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), pp.127-128.

166 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.8.

differentiating it from the more objective descriptions of the setting. The sentences in italics in this passage are direct references to the Italian translations from different poems by the Syrian poet Adonis, while, in other passages, Ali's indirect speech is mostly constituted by quotes from the Quran. In these passages, the standard Italian used by the narrator finds a traditionally lyrical rendition, in a way that constitutes another striking difference with the parts of the text that relate Antonio's and the other southern Italian characters' thoughts. These differences prompt us to think about what kind of strategies the text employs to represent cultural difference and what importance and relevance is given to different languages and cultures to alter the dominance of standard Italian. Transliterations from Arabic are in fact almost absent in the text, and the fact that Ali's thoughts consist almost uniquely of quotes from the Quran or from the verses of a very prestigious and canonical Syrian poet seem to almost invest Ali's character with the function of representing a non-specific Arabic culture. The references to Adonis's translations are incorporated into the text in a way that conceals their status as translations, so enhancing the alleged 'realism' of the passages but somehow also increasing the idealization of the character. In contrast to the very precise localization that the hybridity of the parts of the text that concern the Sicilian characters brings to the fore, or to the significance of mixing Sicilian, Italian and German in the case of Antonio, whose plurilingual speech can disclose to the reader the route of migration he has followed, Ali's background story, his journey of migration, is not illuminated in any way by the lyrical register or by the variety of language that the text employs to represent him. As we will see, this is a very different strategy from the one used in the novel by Giulio Angioni, which will be the focus of the next section, and the difference in the ways the two texts deal with translations and with the incorporation of references to different cultures are quite telling. Santangelo will move further in the direction of a hybrid multilingual style in her following novel *Cose da pazzi*: while in *Senzaterra* the third-person omniscient narrator uses a variety of Italian that sounds very standard and the experimentation with mixing different languages pertains more to the dialogue, in *Cose da Pazzi* the picture is complicated by the fact that a mixture of Spanish, Italian and Sicilian dialect is used (although quite rarely) not only by the protagonist, Rafael, a second



generation boy (the son of a Latin American mother and a Sicilian father), but also by the omniscient narrator, especially in free indirect speech.<sup>167</sup> But this strategy remains very tentative and rare even in *Cose da Pazzi*, in a way that signals a reticence on the part of the text to engage with the representation of ‘other souths’ besides southern Italy.

The use of Sicilian dialect adopted by Santangelo in *Senzaterra*, as well as in the other two novels that comprise the trilogy, does not concede much to a monolingual conceptualization of Italian literature and language, and certainly the multilingualism employed in the text can be seen as a strategy for taking to task the idea of the homogeneity of Italian literature and language, and the equation between standard Italian and Italian literature, which, as Polezzi says, justifies the exclusion and marginalization of plurilingual types of contemporary writings while supporting the centrality of more canonical and standard writing practices.<sup>168</sup> Nonetheless, the mixing of languages is reserved for European languages (including Sicilian) and while the use of hybrid forms in the case of the representation of Sicilian characters retrieves the marginalized history of migration from Italy, the use of Arabic or of references to Arabic cultural elements remains fairly canonical and generic. While contesting mechanisms of marginalization in the Italian sphere is one of the central themes of the novel, the linguistic strategies employed in the text do not always measure up to the complexity of the situation in the Italian south today as a border between Europe and other souths. *Senzaterra* can be rightly considered an exploration of the marginalization of southern Italians and of migrants from the global south, but the space dedicated to the long-standing marginalization of southern Italians seems to occupy a more prominent space, as becomes even more evident from the analysis of how the text confronts the history of the representation of Sicily.

Sicily and the south are presented from the very beginning of *Senzaterra* as a ‘terra di morti’. Different meanings of this expression are evoked and put to work in the text. If Sicily is a ‘terra di morti’, this is so in many ways: because of

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167 For example: ““Troppa mala suerte” diceva sua madre. “No, troppa mala carne”, l’aveva corretta suo padre che non aveva piedad””, from Evelina Santangelo, *Cose da pazzi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), p.310.

168 Polezzi, ‘Disrupting Europe’, p.116.

the sickness and illnesses that befall the local population; because the migrants who try to reach the Sicilian coast tragically die; because southerners do not have any reaction to all the wrongs that are done to them or around them, but are rather passive and tend to accept everything. The different literal and metaphorical meanings of the word 'death' are explored and connected in the text. The book opens in a cemetery where Gaetano has gone to pray at his mother's tomb, and where the guardian surprises him and tells him 'Lássali dórmiri Gaetà, lássali dórmiri in santa paci, 'sti poviri morti';<sup>169</sup> the remark sounds like a fatalistic invitation to accept what happens without thinking too much about the reasons. The small and sleepy coastal town where the novel takes place is presented as a town of 'dead people' in all the senses mentioned above: the old people who crowd the bar on the main street are 'imbalsamati prima del tempo',<sup>170</sup> Liborio, Gaetano's best friend, compares one of the bar's clients to a 'pezzo d'antiquariato',<sup>171</sup> and a general sense of stillness, immobility and death saturates even nature and the environment:

Fuori il paese è immerso in una cappa d'afa. Anche le grandi foglie del ficus al centro della villa comunale paiono imbalsamate, tanti grossi pipistrelli verdi aggrappati ai rami. Gaetano si fa l'ultimo tratto di strada rasente il muro, in un silenzio rotto di tanto in tanto dal fragore di qualche motorino smarittato che, sfrecciando, imbocca la discesa diretto al mare. Si ferma quando sente un suono sordo, cadenzato, di campane invadere tutta l'aria. Vede gruppetti sparuti salire le scale che incombono sulla piazza, impennandosi verso il sagrato. Molte donne, molte vecchie, qualche bambino in braccio alle madri o per mano. - Fantasma paiono - <sup>172</sup>

The inhabitants of the small town are ghosts or dead people, the text suggests, also because their attitude towards their condition is one of meek acceptance, fatalism and resignation, marked by a heavy scepticism towards the idea that things could ever be any different:

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169 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.7.

170 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.13.

171 *ibid.*

172 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.17.

“E picchè le varche affunnu... [...] E picchè la terra è asciutta comu na vacca invicchiùta... e picchè s'avi a partiri pì forza pì un po' di travagghiu bono... e picchè s'avi a stari accussì... luntani... tutti luntani... Cu lu sapi... picchè, - abbandona le mani lungo i fianchi - Picchè lu sulì e in cielo e la terra è in terra... Ecco picchè...” - dice infine disarmata.<sup>173</sup>

This is what Lina answers to her son Turi when he asks why Ali, who has just been found in the fields close to the family's house, is not waking up, comparing the evils that afflict the Italian south to a self-evident and unchangeable fact of nature. A heavy sense of scepticism also marks the meditations of Gaetano's aunt, Concetta, while contemplating the sunset, whose red colour might be the effect of poisonous substances in the air:

-Chi russu... - mormora zia Concetta, seduta vicino alla finestra aperta contro un cielo infiammato, irreal. Sofferma lo sguardo sui silos che irrompono azzurri tra i tetti delle case nuove, sui cubi grigi di eternit mimetizzati tra le tegole, nell'ammasso informe delle case vecchie. - E cu lu sapi se è vero che il cancro veni di llà,- aggiunge.- Dio solo lu sapi...<sup>174</sup>

Sicily is first called a 'paìsi di morti' by Antonio, Gaetano's father, during his first encounter with his son after his return from Germany. In his words, the only thing their homeland granted them was Gaetano's mother's cancer: 'Ni stu paìsi di morti, io e tu 'un ci avemu chiù a stari, lu capìsti [...] E che ci detti, sta bella terra! Sintemu! Lu cancro di to matri, ci detti! E pane e tumazzu!'.<sup>175</sup>

The expression 'terra di morti' is later also used by Nadia, one of the girls living in the small town, after a new 'sbarco'. Some of the migrants arriving by boat have drowned, as usually happens. Nadia gets very upset thinking about how many people have drowned in the last few months: 'Che terra di morti... ci sarebbe di scapparsene subito... lontano però...',<sup>176</sup> she comments. Gaetano answers 'A me i morti non mi fanno spaventare',<sup>177</sup> probably referring to the

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173 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.38.

174 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.45.

175 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.29.

176 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.33.

177 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.34.

death of his own mother. If interpreted keeping in mind the symbolism of the word 'death' that the novel plays with, this statement is particularly significant and can be read as a stubborn drive to commit to an inquiry on why people have to die in such painful ways.

Similarly to Derobertis's description of the Italian south, this 'terra di morti' is a land of human waste as much as of material waste. The descriptions the text offers of the Sicilian urban and rural landscapes highlight the connections between material and human waste:

Ruotando piano la maniglia della porta a vetri esce sulla terrazza. Abbassa gli occhi verso il caotico ammasso di tetti e cavi volanti e pensiline abusive, punteggiato di cisterne bluastre e grigie. Ne scorge una abbandonata proprio sotto la terrazza, su una copertura, qualche metro più in là: il bordo sfilacciato, le maglie d'amianto ridotte ad una ragnatela inerte. - Eternit beviamo, - mormora a fior di labbra. [...] - Ma che terra è? Che paese è? Che gente siamo?

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The land is contaminated, scattered with poisonous materials that end up causing illnesses and sickness among the population. The causes of this situation, far from being a natural, self-evident fact, have much to do with the marginalization of the Italian south. Historically, but up to the present day, the marginalization of the Italian south has also passed through what I will call, referring to Homi Bhabha's discussion of the colonial stereotype, a colonialist 'discourse of unchangeability'. Literature can be said to have also participated in the elaboration of such a discourse.

The fatalistic and resigned attitude expressed by Concetta and by Lina is presented as the interpretation of religious beliefs that valorise suffering and the endurance of pain, or as the effect of material conditions of need that make people particularly prone to accepting the dramatic circumstance they find themselves in, and that produces a certain passivity of the subject; but such an attitude, which makes people symbolically dead before their actual passing and turns them into ghosts, is also presented in other parts of the novel as the effect of discourses on

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178 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.94.

southern identity. The text relates this kind of attitude to what has probably been the most popular representation of Sicily from the eighteenth century onward, a representation that is part of what I would call, following Bhabha, a colonialist discourse based on the idea of fixity and unchangeability,<sup>179</sup> an Orientalist gaze that still dominates the representations of Sicily and that is related to the history of its Othering in the construction of a 'modern' Italian identity.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha describes how the discourse of the colonialist relies on fixity and on the idea of unchangeability, which are identified as the main characteristics of the colonial stereotype. The purpose of fixity is to construct otherness, 'fixing' the other in his/her difference, a difference that must at the same time be represented as unchanging and somehow degenerate. We should probably stop, says Bhabha, categorizing representations as good or bad in term of their adherence to an allegedly un-mediated reality, and ask ourselves instead what kind of processes of subjectivation they activate and make possible.<sup>180</sup>

Sicily and southern Italy have been consistently depicted as places that are almost ontologically resistant to change, places where, in the words of Tomasi di Lampedusa, 'se vogliamo che tutto cambi bisogna che tutto resti com'è'.<sup>181</sup> Literature has been instrumental in the construction of this representation and Lampedusa's formulation has probably been the most popular rendition and codification of it, but it is by no means the only or the first one. There is a long tradition of literary figures that have upheld this representation of Sicily in particular and of southern Italy in general, starting with foreign travellers during the age of the Grand Tour, and gaining momentum during and after Unification: many great Sicilian writers, from De Roberto to Verga and Sciascia, can also be said to have indulged in this essentialist discourse in one way or another.<sup>182</sup>

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179 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.66-84.

180 Bhabha, p.67.

181 Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002 [1958]), p.39.

182 On this argument, see for example: Frank Rosengarten, 'Homo Siculus: Essentialism in the writing of Giovanni Verga, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, and Leonardo Sciascia', in *Italy's "Southern Question": Orientalism in One Country*, ed. by Jane Schneider (Oxford: Berg, 1998), pp.117-131; Mark Chu, 'Sciascia and Sicily: Discourse and Actuality', in *Italica*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (Spring, 1998), 78-92; Santiago Parga-Linares, 'Representations of Sicily in the Contemporary Narrative of the Risorgimento', in *Carte Italiane*, 2.8 (2012), 53-67.

In *Senzaterra*, the classical, *Gattopardo*-esque considerations on the unchangeability of the Italian south, on the impossibility of its ‘redemption’, are expressed by a ‘mafioso col colletto bianco’, one of those middle-class professional types whose collusion with the mafia allows it to thrive. Ragionier Miceli is in charge of finances in the agricultural firm of the local mafia boss, Don Michele. When Gaetano decides to look for a job as a way to avoid emigration, he finds work as an accountant for Don Michele. Part of his job is to keep track of the illegal payments for the undocumented migrants who work for Don Michele. On his first day of work, he is given a briefing by Ragionier Miceli, who urges him to do his job without asking too many questions. Miceli also adds the following socio-historical justification for maintaining this kind of behaviour:

Allora io... quando penso a tutti i bordelli che abbiamo fatto noi siciliani nella nostra storia... che so li Vespri siciliani... li Fasci siciliani... dico: ma come è possibile che noi, Patreterni come siamo, sempre sempre... o ci fottiamo da soli, come fu nei Vespri... o ci facciamo fottere dagli altri... che so... continentali... forestieri e quant'altro... che di noi, e del nostro patreternume, se ne fottono, dopotutto diciamolo chiaro... Allora, io dico: meglio starisinni al proprio posto belli quieti, Gaetà... a sorgere e tramontare ognuno tranquillo... a casa sua... e non fare bordello... Chè, ricordatelo [...] di noi non ce ne fotte niente a nessuno... [...] neanche a noi ce ne fotte stringi stringi...

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As the passage shows, in Santangelo's novel, this classical discourse on the south is exposed as an ideological construct that works towards maintaining existing power-relations. The essentialist historical explanation is in fact used by Ragionier Miceli in order to convince Gaetano not to pay attention to the way migrant workers are treated in Don Michele's firm. The discourse of unchangeability thus fosters the engendering of a subjectivity that is prone to accept with fatalism one's own or others' condition of ‘human waste’.

Such a discourse tends to create a subjectivity that passively accepts the wrongs done to him or her, without questioning the underlying motives and ignoring the suffering of others. Santangelo's text confronts this ideology, trying to undermine the passivity it induces and its fracturing and isolating outcome. In

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183 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.113.

contrast to the discourse of unchangeability and to the representation of the south as a ‘terra di morti’, the text hints at the idea of the south as a heterotopia. Santangelo's novel clearly wants to bring to the fore how migration and the diasporic culture that it engenders cannot be conceived of within any binary logic and how multiple belongings and affects tie subjects simultaneously to different parts of the world. The text opens with an apparently paradoxical quote from Khalil Gibran, concluding with the words ‘Se resto qui, c’è’ un andare nel restare; se vado là c’è’ un restare nel mio andare...’, and finishes with Gaetano shouting at Alì ‘Vatinni, si voi arristari...’: the ending of the text leaves both Gaetano and Alì at the start of their journey towards an elsewhere that, in the forms of Foucault's heterotopia,<sup>184</sup> has to be always here and now if it wants to escape the teleological traps posed by utopias. According to Foucault, while utopias by their very nature cannot be found in reality, heterotopias are interstitial spaces that are to be found within and against existing social realities, spaces of dispute and inversion where the experimentation with alternative forms of life can take place, constituting ‘a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live’.<sup>185</sup> The novel's ending gestures towards heterotopias as a possible way out for subjects caught in the oppressive structures that regulate the borders. In Santangelo's novel, the negotiation of such a heterotopic dimension seems to be the privileged form of resistance the characters have managed to find for themselves.

This particular point is explored in the novel with references to a queer character and to queer desire in a specific section that takes place in a night club where Valerio, one of the local boys who spend their free time in the bars of the town, exhibits himself in drag lip synching to the popular song ‘Rumore’ by Raffaella Carrà. In the otherwise bleak depiction of Sicily and of the town where the story is set, the descriptions of the Splendor night club and of the mesmerizing performance offered by Valerio (described as a mermaid emerging from the desires of the spectators) seem to point to the night club and by extension to queer desire as an almost Bachtinian space for subversion. This is clear from the

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184 Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, trans. by Jay Miskowiec in *Diacritics* 16 (1) (1986), 22-27.

185 Foucault, p.25.

dialogue between Liborio and Gaetano taking place after Valerio's performance: Liborio explains to Gaetano, who is quite shaken after having realized that the beautiful mermaid is actually Valerio, that the sense of the show is 'una presa in giro',<sup>186</sup> a joke whose sole purpose is to make fun 'di tutto lu schifíu di munnu [...]. Di mía, di tía, di tò patre, di Marcello, di lu campusantaru, di li fímmini, di li masculi, di lu Patre Eterno... e di quelli come a Valerio, pure...'.<sup>187</sup> Besides this scene where Valerio is mostly presented through the eyes of the crowd watching him, other references to his character present him as having quite thought-out, well-informed and unconventional perspectives on many issues, including gender roles, than most of the rest of the youth in the town. Although subtly, the text seems to indicate in Valerio one of the few characters who is able to inhabit the south as a heterotopic space and, in the overall economy of the text, his story seems to be functional for the development of Gaetano's character, somehow pre-empting Gaetano's change of heart at the end of the novel by showing him the possibility of living at the border of different facets of identity. Such a positive representation, while offering a glimmer of hope in the otherwise dismal portrayal of the town, seems once again to resort to an idealized construction of a queer subject and of queer desire without really exploring in depth the contradictions of such a subject position.

In *Senzaterra*, the lives of almost all the characters are marked by migration in a way or another: Gaetano's father is a migrant worker in Germany; the family that first shelters Ali on his arrival in Sicily is composed of women, children and old people, because the only young man has migrated to Germany, leaving behind his wife and his son and daughter; Ali and the other migrants working on Don Michele's land have arrived from Africa by boat; Nadia dreams of leaving Sicily to find a better life elsewhere, far from her small town. The relations among southern Italians and North African migrants arriving in Sicily are very often not marked by solidarity or alliance, but rather by a certain distancing of southern Italians from the newcomers. Zia Maria, the very religious grandmother of the family where Ali first finds shelter, reacts with anger when her husband decides to give aid to Ali and keeps urging him to send the 'turco'

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186 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.91.

187 *ibid.*



away; when her husband compares Alì to their son, she refuses to see any similarity:

-E allura... *tu* l'avía a sapíri che io...turchi...- punta l'indice storto verso la finestra, - ni la mè casa... 'un nni vogghiu... mi scanto...[...] picchí io... a mè nora e a mè niputi Margherita... 'cu chiddu che dormi ccà e fa i so còmmoda... 'un ci li tegnu! Lu capisti?  
-Chiddu vinni pí travagghiàri... [...] Come mè fígghiu. Che fa mè fígghiu alla Germania? Travàgghia e basta, e aiuta la famíggia.  
-Nostru fígghiu è... nostru fígghiu – si batte la mano contro il seno. - chi è un *turcu* nostru fígghiu?<sup>188</sup>

Her motivations for sending Alì away are dictated by fears fostered by an explosive mix of sexism and racism, which leads Zia Maria to use an argument based on the need to defend the honour and safety of the women of the house in order to send Alì away. In the end, because of the lack of material resources that would allow the family to keep Alì with them, they find work for him in Don Michele's firm.

Much of the dialogue among the characters in the book revolves around the issue of migration and hinges on a comparison between the locals' and the North Africans' experience of migration and displacement. In order to convince his son to join him in Germany, Antonio presents the experience of migration as a 'happy' prospect, a journey to a better place, where life is, in general, easier (this view is epitomized in the sentence: 'a la Germania... non li fanno crepare di cancro, li cristiani...').<sup>189</sup> To this idea Gaetano opposes the fact that the fate of the *emigrante*, from what he can see, and from the number of people he sees dying at sea, is a hard one:

-Sto cercando lavoro.  
-Lavoro... - fa Antonio con una vena d'ironia nella voce. - Lo sai di la varca ch'affunnò a mmare?  
Gaetano annuisce. - quale delle tante? - dice sarcastico.  
-Ci nn'eranu cento... forse chiù assai... Puru carusi... e fimmini... Un sacco di morti...  
[...]

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188 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.53.

189 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.49.

-Io con quei disgraziati morti di fame non c'entro. Io ci sono nato qua! Non sono un...*emigrante*, io.

-Un *emigrante*... un *emigrante*, - [...] -il sottoscritto- in Germania ci ha un signor lavoro, cu li contributi e la cassa malattia! E grazie al lavoro di *operaio specializzato* del sottoscritto Cannella Antonio, *emigrato*, a la Germania - batte la mano sul libro aperto sopra il tavolo, - ecco qua!- Apre le braccia a indicare la casa.- E to zia, grazie al sottoscritto, si po mettiri in sacchetta sana sana la pinsione d'invalidità e campare bona... Grazie all'*emigrante* di to patri!<sup>190</sup>

In this dialogue between Antonio and Gaetano, we can see how they both make a rhetorical appeal to the North Africans' experience of migration, but they use this topic in order to make opposite points. Moreover, we can see the distancing at work in Gaetano's character: even if Gaetano is sensitive to the hardships endured by the North Africans, and though it scares him to see himself in their position, he does not see the link between his own marginality and lack of agency *at home*, and the migrants' marginality and lack of agency. Such a link will become clearer to him in the course of the novel.

The evolution of Gaetano's character is significant in this respect, because of his initial ambivalence towards migration and towards the migrants themselves. The North Africans are for Gaetano a mirror where it is too painful to try and see himself reflected. In some ways, Gaetano feels that his experience in Germany would be similar to the North Africans' in Sicily; in others, he does not want to see the points of contact with their experiences and even blames them for their own condition and for the ways they 'let other people treat them':

Gaetano guarda il pick-up verde attraversare l'incrocio con quel suo carico d'uomini accucciati dietro. Scorge un pezzo di stoffa a quadretti bianchi e neri avvolta intorno a una testa, che pare di donna o di vecchio, i lembi che svolazzano al vento, poi due bozzoli scuri, tutti ripiegati sulle ginocchia, a nascondere la faccia dal sole.

-Certo li trattano come armali, - dice Liborio, indicandoli con un cenno del capo.

-Sono loro che si fanno trattare come animali, - ribatte Gaetano, senza riuscire a distogliere lo sguardo. - Sono loro...

- Ma che dici Gaetà! Gli dà una manata sulla spalla. - Sono solo dei morti di fame, vorrei vedere a te...

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190 *ibid.*

- A me non mi ci potrai vedere mai, - fa Gaetano dissimulando un sussulto. -  
Meglio morire di fame a casa propria...<sup>191</sup>

Gaetano's attitude changes after he is obliged, if he is to avoid going to Germany with his father, to accept a job as an accountant in Don Michele's agricultural firm, where six North Africans are working illegally. There he can see how the migrants are treated by Don Michele's overseers and he starts to feel a sense of connectedness with them: if they have no other choice than to work for Don Michele, putting up with inhumane working conditions and unfair pay, he is himself also forced to work for Don Michele.

The lack of empathy in many of the characters and the refusal to find a common ground with the North Africans' experience of marginality is described in the novel as one of the most common types of relationship between southern Italians and North African migrants. Contrary to the isolating tendency and distancing attitude that many of the characters express, however, we can identify in the construction of the text, particularly in the juxtaposition of Gaetano's and Ali's vicissitudes, an attempt at a counter strategy that tries to illuminate the links and points of contact between southern Italians and North African migrants. From the very beginning, the two characters are presented in a specular way; their stories are placed side by side until they meet and collide in the concluding chapters of the novel. After Gaetano meets Ali at Don Michele's firm, the text shows Ali and Gaetano together at the cemetery where Gaetano has gone to pray at his mother's tomb and meditate on what he should do. Similarly, Ali has gone to the cemetery to pray at the tomb of a woman he tried unsuccessfully to rescue from the sea when he first landed on the coast of Sicily. Gaetano watches Ali performing an elaborate ritual on the tombstone of the 'profuga ignota' and his empathy with Ali grows stronger. In the following days, Gaetano's awareness of his own lack of agency and marginality is profoundly heightened by his experience at Don Michele's firm and, after one of Don Michele's overseers, named Lucida Follia, kills one of the youngest migrants, he makes the decision to report Don Michele to the local police. In so doing, he puts himself in danger,

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191 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, p.79.

but he also puts Alì in danger, since Alì is the one suspected by Don Michele of having pressed charges against him. In order to warn Alì (who, after the killing of the young boy, has fled Don Michele's house) of the danger he is in, Gaetano starts desperately looking for him. When he finds him, the exchange they have shows how Gaetano by now feels that his own predicament is in many ways similar to Alì's:

Se se stanno così per un po' faccia a faccia stremati. Poi Gaetano, a fatica, si rimette in piedi. Si preme il dorso della mano sul labbro. -Tu te ne devi andare, - dice, mentre un sapore dolciastro, nauseante gli si insinua in bocca. Alì storce il collo, sollevando il capo da terra. Lo fissa. -Se vuoi arristare, - fa Gaetano, aiutandosi disperatamente con i gesti, - tu te ne devi andare, ti devi levare da 'sta mmerda! Hai a scappari, hai capito? No là, - scuote forte la testa bagnata, indicando il cespuglio sotto la roccia. No là! Scappare! Via! - si mette a urlare. - No là! - la voce strozzata dal respiro che gli monta in petto. -là... - torna a indicare il cespuglio, - polizia! Manette! Casa! Tu... scappare! Via! - indica il paesaggio riarso intorno...- Via di qua! - come mummificato dall'afa. Lontano! - Punta il dito verso il promontorio. - Si voi arristare... [...] -Vattinni! Fa lui, afferrandolo brusco per un braccio e tirandolo su. - Vattene, ti dissi! - ripete spingendolo sempre più forte verso il promontorio che incombe su quell'unghia di sabbia. -Fuori da tutta 'sta mmerda.. se vogliamo restare... - mormora tra sé, mentre Alì indietreggia incerto, gli occhi spersi. Si gira, prende a correre brancolando verso la sterpaglia. -Se vogliamo arristari...<sup>192</sup>

Both Gaetano and Alì have to 'andare se vogliono restare'. The change in the verb, from the second singular to the first plural, signals Gaetano's turning point in his understanding of the similarities between his and Alì's condition and his realization of a common if different marginality. Notwithstanding the relevance given to Gaetano's transformation and access to a more sympathetic understanding and personal coming to terms with migration, the text presents this outcome only as based on the idea of a common marginality that is somehow taken for granted, that does not emerge from any shared cultural and material practice and whose condition of possibility is not scrutinized in the novel because of the scant attention given to Alì's character.

The analysis of the linguistic choices and rhetorical strategies used in the novel, of the representation of the Italian south in it, and the discussion of the

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192 Santangelo, *Senzaterra*, pp.168-169.

ways different relationships between southern Italians and migrants are scrutinized in the narrative show how Santangelo's novel tries to foster a new understanding of southern Italian identity in the light of mobility. The text's linguistic and rhetorical strategies can be seen as tending towards undermining a monolithic notion of Italianness and of Italian literature by making an oppositional use of dialect and of hybrid forms of mixing among different languages. This attempt can be regarded as only partially successful. The descriptions of the southern Italian landscape expose the damage produced by a misguided idea of development that Cassano and Derobertis, but also Mignolo in regard to a different context, criticize. The passivity and the lack of agency of southern Italians is put in relation to a wider discourse that has served the purposes of modernity/coloniality in the Italian south and that literary representations have supported. Even if the relationship between southern Italians and migrants is described as often marked by exploitation and hostility, the text, through the narrative of the evolution of Gaetano's character and the reference to an idealized representation of queerness, aims to show how what we can call processes of translation at the border, which imply a rethinking of one's own identity through finding a common ground with others' experiences, histories and cultures, can point to new forms of subjectivation. Nonetheless, this connection in the novel only assumes the form of an allegedly common marginality, and given the limited nature of the engagement with Ali's culture and language in the narrative, this connection remains only a faint gesture the text makes in the direction of the constitution of a new subjectivity in the south. As we will see, other novels that have quite a similar theme to Santangelo's, like Angioni's *Una ignota compagnia*, make use of very different linguistic and thematic strategies in order to explore the specific south to south link that constitutes the focus of their interest. Moreover, in both Angioni's novel and in Ornella Vorpsi's *il paese dove non si muore mai*, references to the experiences of embodiment, to sexuality as a key factor in the construction of identity, and to the corporeal dimension of the making of subjectivity serve as correctives to an abstract exploration of transnationalism.

## **Languaging, Body, and Translation in Giulio Angioni's *Una ignota compagnia* (1992)**

Published in 1992, Giulio Angioni's novel *Una ignota compagnia* can be considered one of the first texts to address the issue of what was starting to be perceived as Italian society becoming multicultural. Angioni's novel addresses the topic of Italian multiculturalism through various rhetorical and narrative devices that are geared towards unearthing the long-standing heterogeneity of Italian culture. In this way, the novel gives prominence to the differences that constituted Italy long before the nineties, when the phenomenon of 'multiculturalism' started to take centre stage in public debates. In his work, the notion of multiculturalism predicated on an idea of culture as a rigidly bounded entity, clearly defined and contained by either nation, language, religion or geographical area, gives way to a more nuanced idea of transculturality where the fluid dimension of cultural interaction is seen more clearly. This goal is achieved through a focus on mobility and migration.

Calls for a better understanding of what is meant by the term culture have come from different areas of the humanities and social sciences. The anthropologist James Clifford, for example, has focused in many of his works on what he calls 'traveling cultures',<sup>193</sup> thus redefining the idea of culture that he saw as underlying much of the work done in anthropology and in other fields. According to Clifford, anthropologists have studied culture as something rooted in a specific place and defined mostly by the peculiarities of space in a specific area. But the 'native informant' on which the anthropologist relies is very often also a traveller or is influenced by the cultural exchanges that his or her culture has and has had with other cultures. It has been a bias of many studies on culture

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193 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp.17-46.

to give prominence to the 'roots' of a certain culture rather than to the 'routes' that this culture has followed and that have shaped it in very substantial ways.<sup>194</sup>

In the study of culture, the preference given to the dimension of dwelling and inhabiting a certain place determined a situation where the relationship between space and cultural expression has been interpreted only in a very static way. But there is also, according to Clifford, a dynamic aspect to every culture, its routes, itineraries and trajectories, which have a constitutive function. To conceive of cultures as 'traveling cultures' implies thinking of them as ever-changing entities, always open to movement, to contamination, to exchange and to conflict too, between what is 'local' and resides within a certain culture and what travels through it from the outside and from the inside, including media, goods, images and imaginaries, migrants and tourists, and fluxes of people and capital.<sup>195</sup> Anthropology, then, as well as other fields in the humanities and social sciences, should be self-reflective about this bias and start from the idea of 'translocal cultures', complex entities shaped by the interactions between what is local and what is global. In order to redefine the premises of the notion of culture the humanities use and to trace the coming into being of cultures in a translocal way, it is necessary, according to Clifford, to pay attention to those phenomena of dialogue and translation among cultures and among different segments of them, to those crossroads of cultures that are sites of interaction, exchange, but also conflict and the elaboration of new meanings. According to Clifford, western societies also have to be understood as 'traveling cultures' to be studied in light of their encounter and historical relationship with peoples and cultures external to Europe, which, in general, Europeans have deemed as primitive, exotic, and pre-modern.<sup>196</sup>

Similar preoccupations with finding a more complex definition of culture and identity can be traced in the work of scholars analysing the artistic production of diasporic cultures. Stuart Hall, for example, has famously discussed the different meanings and roles that appeals to cultural identity can have in the context of diasporic cultures, formulating an idea of cultural identity as dialogic

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194 Clifford, pp. 21-24.

195 Clifford, pp. 18-20.

196 Clifford, pp. 28-29.

and translational.<sup>197</sup> When approaching the artistic production of diasporic cultures, according to Hall, it is of the utmost importance in our analysis of texts to take into account the notion that cultural identity is shaped by the position of the enunciation of that particular text in relation to both the idea of an ‘original shared culture’, which is thought of as somehow uniting the people in the diaspora, but also to the different ways in which the relation of coloniality with Euro-American powers has been negotiated in local contexts.<sup>198</sup> Texts from diasporic cultures continuously re-articulate and re-imagine these sets of relationships to construct new points of identification and of enunciation, in a continuous renewal of culture and identity, which are then not to be thought of as coming before or being forged outside of the realm of representation.<sup>199</sup> Even scholars working in apparently more conservative fields, such as literary studies, and focusing on more canonical works are preoccupied with expanding the narrow boundaries within which the concept of culture is too often made to operate.<sup>200</sup> In relation to the specific locale of southern Italy, Iain Chambers’ work has offered persuasive discussions of how many of the region’s cultural products cannot be interpreted doing justice to their complexity without a focus on mobility and the awareness of the mutual interactions of the many cultures bordering the Mediterranean.<sup>201</sup>

Considering the mobility of culture means considering the mobility of people and ideas, of those processes of translation, self-translation and the constitution of identity that Angioni scrutinizes in his book. By focusing on mobility and on those crossroads of cultures described by the scholars mentioned above as interesting sites to examine in order to have a more integrated vision of cultures, Angioni's novel recovers a transnational memory of Italy's past that contests a univocal version of history and a homogenous idea of Italianness. The

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197 Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp.222-237 (pp.226-228).

198 Hall, ‘Cultural Identity’, pp.232-235.

199 Hall, ‘Cultural Identity’, pp.236-237.

200 See for example Stephen Greenblatt’s discussion of how a useful definition of culture for literary studies could be one that articulates together the set of constraints but also the elements of mobility to be found in specific historical contexts. Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Culture’, in *Critical Terms for Literary Studies*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp.225-232.

201 Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*.



text thus creates the space for a complex interpretation of the present of 'Italian multiculturalism' and for making hypotheses about its future. This is done especially through the adoption of the conventions of the detective novel and through the complex interplay of different temporalities in the text.

Like some of the major Italian authors of the twentieth century before him, Angioni utilizes the structures of the detective novel in order to investigate some of the most pressing concerns of the present.<sup>202</sup> Although the story revolves around the friendship between the Sardinian Tore and the Kenyan Warùì, both recently arrived in Milan, the most powerful device at the basis of the narrative in *Una ignota compagnia* is probably the mystery surrounding Warùì's decision to leave Italy. At the very beginning of the text, the reader is informed of the fact that Warùì has left Milan and it is only in the last four chapters that the explanation of how and why this happened is given. While the mystery story surrounding Warùì's departure of course serves as a sort of narrative hook for the reader, eager to know why this happened, the bulk of the narration, taking place in between these two points, is not concerned with this event and is occupied by the description of Tore and Warùì's life as immigrants in Milan, by the description of their friendship and observations and reminiscences about their places of origin. Nonetheless, the detective novel structure is more than just a narrative hook, it also works on a conceptual level by equating Warùì's presence with the viability and possibility of a transcultural Italy and hence his departure with the difficulty or impossibility of such a thing. What is at stake, then, in this de-structured detective novel, are the conditions of existence of an open-ended and transcultural Italian identity. Such an identity is configured as a mystery to be solved, hence as a process and not as a given.

This opening up of the category of Italianness is also achieved through the consideration of at least three different but intertwined 'crossroads': the story of internal migration is recuperated in the novel and juxtaposed with the present marked by the relatively new phenomenon of migration to Italy, but it is also the presence of Italians beyond the borders of Italy that finds space in the text. These

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202 See for example Angioni's discussion of Sciascia's style: Giulio Angioni, 'della virtù del cavare', in *le forme della brevità*, ed. By Milly Curcio (Milano: Franco Angeli 2014), pp.11-21.

three thematic strands constitute the vast majority of the content of the book, but they are not treated as separate objects; rather, they are presented as constantly intertwined and as seen through the perception of Tore's narrating voice. In this sense, the choice of first-person focalization and of a narrator whose point of view is omniscient on the vast majority of the narrated events and especially on those events regarding Warui's decision to leave Italy allows for a detailed rendition of those processes of subjectivation induced by globalization and by the awareness of how 'già da molto le cose del mondo si trovano tutte in qualsiasi contrada'.<sup>203</sup>

Interesting examples of how these different moments are linked to each other and to Tore's understanding of his new reality can be found in chapter five of the text, where Tore recounts the arrival of Warùì in Milan and his own arrival, a few months later. Through Tore's mediation the reader is introduced to the history of the presence of people of African descent in Italy long before the nineties: like Tore himself, Warùì has been called to Milan by a friend of his father, Mr. Serenelli, 'uno proprio del Kenya, nero di pelle ma italiano'.<sup>204</sup> The son of a Kikuyu woman and of an Italian man taken prisoner by the British after the demise of the Italian troops in the *Africa Orientale Italiana* and later transferred to Kenya in the prisoner camp of Eldoret, Serenelli was adopted by his father and later moved to Milan with him. Through Serenelli's story the text registers the changing perception Italians have of the presence of black people in Italy, from paternalistic benevolence to hostility, while at the same time reconstructing a genealogy of Italians and of black Italians that reaches back to the colonial past and to the presence of Italians in Africa, thus linking the present multiculturalism of Italian society to the nation's colonial and postcolonial vicissitudes.

At the same time, Warùì's story and his experiences of migration are juxtaposed with Tore's own story and experience of migration. Tore's recounting of the two in a way that constantly moves from one to the other, picking up on the similarities of their cultures of origin but also on the differences, gives a

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203 Giulio Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, (Nuoro: Il Maestrale 2006[1992]), p.34.

204 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.54.

narrative representation of the multiple negotiations that Tore has to go through in order to make sense of his experiences of mobility. These experiences are in fact different from those of an older generation of migrants from Sardinia and from within Italy represented by the character of Eligio Zara. Similar to Serenelli's character, Eligio Zara is a friend of Tore's father who has helped him secure a job in Milan. Eligio has been in Milan for almost thirty years, working as a tram driver. His daughter Giuseppina was born in Milan from his marriage to a Milanese woman. When Tore compares his reality to that of Eligio, the specific characters of contemporary migration come to the fore, marked as they are by the effect on the labour market of the implementation of increasing neoliberal policies, the feminization of work and globalization. In order to adapt to his new reality, Tore then has to turn not only to Eligio's help and advice but also to Warù's knowledge and views of the world, which resonate in various ways with his own. It is only through a personal elaboration of these heterogeneous materials that Tore is able to make sense of his own complex and unprecedented experiences.

It is, then, the coming into being of a transcultural subjectivity that constitutes the main topic of the novel in the specific circumstances marked by the peculiarities of the Italian case in the last decades of the 20th century and of the multiple histories and experiences of mobility of Italians and of those arriving in Italy. It is in fact the exploration of the complex mechanisms activated by the coming together of these histories that occupies the vast majority of the text, in long digressions and flashbacks that constantly move the narrative away from the main plotline. By recuperating these strands of 'marginal memory', Angioni's book is successful in making visible a complex notion of identity that is able to go beyond the nation through the recovery of a stratified history of the nation itself, of the history of its peripheries and of its encounters with other cultures and its peculiar itineraries. Memory is crucial for processes of identity formation and the creation of imagined communities<sup>205</sup> and this process has been and still is very often linked to the nation seen as a container of a given culture and as a

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205 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125-133.

*telos* of that culture. On the contrary, in Angioni's novel, we can find an attempt at reconstituting a transnational cultural memory of Italy, through the creation of a narrative that, displacing most current and official versions of the past, is able to change the grounds on which to imagine common futures starting from what Astrid Erll defines as 'the many fuzzy edges of national memory'.<sup>206</sup>

Another example of this can be seen in the ways the text confronts the historical racialization of southern Italians in ways that avoid the pitfalls of a 'southern cultural nationalism' based on a self-contained notion of identity and culture. In *Una ignota compagnia*, the historical racialization of southern Italians is confronted first and foremost by reclaiming the idea, normally used in order to discriminate against southerners, of southern Italy being more akin to Africa than to northern Italy and to northern Europe. Mr and Mrs Bolgiani, the employers of both Tore and Warùì, quite often comment on the similarity of southern Italy to Africa, as do the owners of the dilapidated boarding house where the two are staying, both of them labeled as 'terrone neri'.<sup>207</sup> In chapter ten, Eligio is able to arrange a meeting for Tore with a local priest, padre Antonio, hoping that the priest can help Tore find a new job. Padre Antonio's paternalistic attitude towards Tore is very evident in the dialogue between the two; moreover, at a certain point it becomes clear that he has mistaken Tore for a Moroccan man. The incident has quite a comic effect, but the text takes the risk of such a comparison quite seriously.

This alleged similarity is in fact carefully scrutinized in the novel. Thanks to the constant exchange with Warùì and to the complex mechanism of adaptation I have just described, Tore takes a sort of 'doubly estranged' perspective to bear on the narrated events, coming from his realization that 'certo eravamo simili e diversi: nella sua differenza rivedevo certe cose nostre, ma più evidenti, perfino nella tenebra della pensione, nella foschia dei viaggi e dei risvegli'.<sup>208</sup>

The text is interspersed with references to Kenyan culture and to the Swahili language but also with interesting reflections on Sardinian culture and

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206 Astrid Erll, 'Travelling Memory', *Parallax*, 17:4 (2011), 4-18.

207 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.20.

208 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.28.

history and on its differences or similarities with both Italian and Kenyan culture. Tore and Warùì have in fact engaged in a joking competition over proverbs, comparing and contrasting Italian and Sardinian proverbs with Swahili and Kikuyu ones. Warùì draws on these proverbs for his improvised compositions, which he has termed Baringo Raps. Loredana Polezzi has called for a broad definition of ‘migrant writing’ that would show how ‘scritture che portano il marchio (i diversi marchi) della mobilità (geografica, linguistica, culturale) si scoprono allora avere molto in comune’.<sup>209</sup> She discusses how the polilingualism that characterizes much of Italian migrant writing presupposes forms of translation and of dialogical, translational processes to take place before the writing of the text.<sup>210</sup> This could also apply to a text like *Una ignota compagnia*. Through the idea of the Baringo rap and the proverbs competition, the text incorporates a lot of Kikuyu and Swahili, as well as Sardinian words and sentences. The ways in which they are included in the text are quite various and significant and they are interesting to take into consideration.

Indeed, we could say that the use of Italian becomes heterolingual in Angioni's novel,<sup>211</sup> as it is used to convey content derived from subaltern epistemologies and to address multiple minority groups. The sort of plurilingualism that Angioni employs is very different from the plurilingualism of many major Italian authors in the 20th century, because it is informed by an attempt to understand the dynamics of cultural exchange and cultural translation, by an awareness of how the changes induced by globalization have somehow displaced (but not eliminated) the nation as a framework for culture and language, and by an idea of culture similar to Clifford's notion of ‘travelling cultures’. Rather than plurilingual in the sense used to describe 20th century experimentalism in Italian literature, or multilingual, a definition that does not put into relief the movement across languages, Angioni's use of language could

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209 Loredana Polezzi, ‘Questioni di lingua: fra traduzione e autotraduzione’, in *Leggere il testo e il mondo: vent'anni di scrittura della migrazione in Italia*, ed. by Fulvio Pezzarossa and Ilaria Rossini (Bologna: CLUEB, 2012), pp. 15-31 (p.15).

210 Polezzi, ‘Questioni di lingua’, pp.24-25.

211 Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On Japan and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp.1-17.

be defined as translingual, in line with recent theoretical developments in the field of linguistics.

Ofelia García and Camila Leiva use the term ‘translanguaging’ not just to refer to fluid language practices that bilingual speakers employ in order to make sense of their complex worlds and experiences, but also to highlight the transformative potential of these practices, which can be seen as challenging hierarchies of languages and linguistic activities that deem some of them more valuable than others.<sup>212</sup> Drawing on Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia,<sup>213</sup> recent interventions in poststructuralist sociolinguistics have emphasized the need for an understanding of linguistic phenomena not based on the normativity of a pre-given and ultimately abstract notion of the ‘standard use’ of language but on a more contextual, materialistic approach to language as a social practice, and have even gone as far as contesting the existence of distinct languages and hence the notions of bilingualism and discrete multilingualism. Similarly, García and Leiva adopt the term ‘languaging’ instead of ‘language’ in order to make visible this shift in the conception of linguistic phenomena.

Moreover, García calls for a careful consideration of how claims to the purity and complete autonomy of a certain language have very often served the agenda of those in power, those interested in maintaining existing imbalances and divisions. Borrowing the prefix trans- from Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz's idea of *transculturación*, which refers to cultural exchange not just as adaptation but as the creation of something new, García uses it to emphasize how translanguaging is a different concept from code-switching. This latter notion is in fact predicated on the idea of two static language codes taken into consideration only as abstractions coming with baggage linked to the dovetailing of nation, language and culture, and seen as pre-existing the act of ‘languaging’ rather than enmeshed in a material communicative situation. On the contrary, translanguaging is a notion that entails a rethinking of our idea of what a language is and does:

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212 Ofelia García and Camila Leiva, ‘Theorizing and Enacting Translanguaging for Social Justice’, in *Heteroglossia as Practice and Pedagogy*, ed. by Andrew Blackledge and Angela Creese (New York: Springer 2014), pp.199-216 (p.205).

213 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist and trans. by Caryl Emerson and Mixhael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp.269-422.

From social practices and actions ‘between’ two languages that are no longer static or linked to one national identity emerges what I call *translanguaging*. In translanguaging the speaker is situated in a space where alternative representations and enunciations can be generated because buried histories are released and alternative, conflicting knowledges are produced.<sup>214</sup>

We can say that the use of Italian in *Una ignota compagnia* is de-centered and unhinged from the nation and its official history, and enmeshed with words and expressions from many other languages, first and foremost Swahili, and from various Italian dialects, in various ways where the simultaneous use of different codes gives a more integrated picture of the characters and of their complex world-views and creates the space for the reader to build an alternative knowledge of their own reality.

Non-Italian words are usually in italics, unless they are words that might have a certain currency (like ‘Mau Mau’), and they are sometimes translated into Italian, as in the following example: ‘finché un giorno gli ha detto che i *Wazungu*, tutti quanti i bianchi, pensano in modi solo loro’.<sup>215</sup> Or they can also not be explained or translated into Italian: ‘Nemmeno lui poteva prevedere che Warùì sarebbe ritornato con un *calabash* pieno di dubbi’,<sup>216</sup> or ‘Warùì sapeva che il Serenelli non gliela avrebbe data mai, sua figlia, neppure con un *lobòla* di tremila vacche’.<sup>217</sup> In these cases, the reader has to either infer the meaning from the context or decide to look up the non-Italian word. Sometimes non-Italian proverbs or idiomatic sentences are included in the text in italics with the Italian translation: ‘ricorda però *akili ni mali*, il senno è ricchezza’.<sup>218</sup> Other times, only the translation is given and incorporated into the text. Let us consider the following quote: ‘Fate e disfate, decidete voi, fate sporta e corbello, dico io; tosatevi la capra ed il caprone, direbbe anche Warùì’.<sup>219</sup> Although the language

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214 García and Leiva, p.205.

215 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.49.

216 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.51.

217 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.55.

218 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.50.

219 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.75.

used throughout the whole quotation can at first sight look like standard Italian, and although the sentence includes a Sardinian and a Swahili proverb with no reference to the original languages, the incorporation of the proverbs introduces new elements to the repertoire of standard Italian, altering and expanding it. Grazia Biorci's linguistic analysis of a variety of hybrid formations in the language used by many writers writing in Italian but whose first language is not Italian concludes that the hybridization of the Italian language is 'the result of a development in metaphorical concepts, in imaginative and figurative ways of perceiving and feeling life and society as embodied in inter-cultural and inter-linguistic applications'.<sup>220</sup> This can also apply to a writer like Angioni and to his linguistic and stylistic choices.

Swahili and Sardinian are not the only two languages that the text incorporates into its mainly standard Italian body. Angioni's translingualism in fact includes a variety of Italian dialects, as well as English and Portuguese. The attention to the varieties of language spoken by the characters is one of the most striking components of the text and it is used to undermine, as from within, the idea of a homogeneous Italy and Italian culture. The use of dialects in Angioni's novel serves the purpose of giving a sense of the different local histories within Italy itself and of the histories of mobility of those finding themselves in Italy. A particularly emblematic passage in this sense centres around the figure of Carlino, the owner, together with his sister, of the boarding house where Warùì and Tore are staying in the small city of Brugherio on the outskirts of Milan. The passage starts with Carlino coming back drunk one night to the house shouting racist insults loudly in Milanese dialect. His tirade against Africans and southerners, 'beduini e menelik', as he calls them, soon turns into a bitter rumination against Milan itself, while his language switches from Milanese to a 'lingua mista':<sup>221</sup>

Veneto, non poteva fare fino in fondo il milanese, ci avvertiva tutti che – *Milàn, l'è larg de buca e strett de man* – e terminava con lamenti su – *Milàn de merda*, – sempre che non finisse giù per terra a lamentarsi: – *Madona che ciulada*, o

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220 Grazia Biorci, 'Beyond Hybridization: Metaphors and New Visions in 'Migrant Literature' in Italian', in *Destination Italy*, ed. by Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver and Federico Faloppa (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), pp. 203-220 (p.208).

221 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.17.



mamma mia che botta che m'han dato i menelik, – con voce di cammello moribondo, parola di Warùì.<sup>222</sup>

The emergence of a Venetian dialect in Carlino's drunken speech cannot be reduced to code-switching from one code to another, but it rather constitutes a complex intermixing of standard Italian with Milanese and Venetian dialects. Carlino's complex speech gives the reader important information not just on the character's origin but on his history of mobility and reveals the fact that Carlino himself is a migrant. Later on, Carlino is shown to be very surprised and almost suspicious when, after asking Warùì what Africa is like, he gets an answer that makes him think that Warùì's country is in some ways 'il paese veneto ai suoi tempi'.<sup>223</sup> Through Carlino's character and through a subtle use of linguistic varieties and dialects, the text then complicates the binary opposition North-South, displacing it across different lines.

Angioni thus reverses the usual spatial categories that define and divide the north and the south as two mutually exclusive entities. An example of how the text manages to complicate the most current symbolic geography that divides the north and the south can be seen in the representation the text gives of Milan and of its inhabitants. In contrast to the representation of the city as the alleged capital of northern Italy, always opposed to Rome and to southern Italy in the discourse of openly xenophobic political forces like the Lega Nord,<sup>224</sup> which were gaining momentum in the years when the novel was published, the representation the text gives of Milan is that of a cultural crossroads where multiple histories of mobility and migration intersect and interact, fostering a transnational awareness that counters the divisive rhetoric of conservatives.

In this way, the novel straddles the different levels of the local, the national and the global and is able to reveal the connections between them. In Angioni's novel, the possibilities for mutual comprehension and transcultural subjectivity come not only from a shared experience of marginality, as seems to

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222 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.18.

223 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.20.

224 John Agnew and Carlo Brusa, 'New Rules for National Identity? The Northern League and Political Identity in Contemporary Northern Italy', in *National Identities*, 1:2 (1999), 117-133.

be the case for Santangelo's novel, but from the interest in and knowledge about cultural differences and similarities. The idea of culture that emerges from the novel is not that of something with clear and rigid borders but rather that of an unstable, mobile, ever-changing entity that can be understood through an analysis of processes of adaptation, negotiation, transposition and translation. It is in these processes, as Clifford says, that we can identify the creation of something new, of a new cultural paradigm and also of the possibility of agency for subjects and groups with a history of marginalization. How the text seems to uphold a similar view of culture can be seen clearly in the following quotation:

- Holy Mary: Mary, Mery, *meri*: *meri* vuol dire nave in Kiswahili. Ecco così mi distraevo. E non riuscivo più a soffrire con la Madre Dolorosa. - E si è lasciato scivolare giù per la scarpatata erbosa, rotolando e gridando avemarie.<sup>225</sup>

This quotation briefly describes Warui's decision to leave the seminary where he studied to become a Christian priest when he was a teenager in Kenya. The unruliness of polylingualism and languaging, their being not reducible to any self-contained, static notion of culture and identity, is evident in this quotation, which shows them to be transgressive practices that are not compatible with the kind of education imparted in the seminary. Moreover, what is striking in this passage is a certain link drawn between the unruliness of hybrid linguistic practices and what we can call a certain unruliness of the body.

In a recent article on what she calls 'trans-national' writing in Italian, Emma Bond asks how mobility affects embodiment and how a 'fluid conception of the body-image',<sup>226</sup> which migration can be said to induce, is represented in contemporary transnational writing. Works on the representation of the migrant body have often focused on it as a locus for the expression and articulation of the pain and suffering of migration. The migrant body is seen as the material ground on which wider social diseases are played out. According to Bond, such a

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225 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.52.

226 Emma Bond, 'Skin Memories': Expressions of Corporeality in Recent Trans-National Writing in Italian', in *Destination Italy*, ed. by Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver and Federico Faloppa (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), pp.241-256 (p.242).

perspective does not give a full account of the processes of embodiment in migration and can also run the risk of stripping agency away from the ‘person telling the story’.<sup>227</sup> Taking a different path, Bond wants to show how:

Corporeal representations in literature do not just illustrate, but can also subvert and play with expectations and preconceptions, twisting and exceeding previously narrow-drawn categories of identity (relating to race and gender, for example) as well as working as a specific narrative strategy and linguistic apparatus.<sup>228</sup>

Basing her insights on close readings of texts by Lakhous, Khouma, Vorpsi and Ali Farah, Bond shows how migration prompts an awareness of the body and of its mortality that is also ‘capable of communicating and establishing new signifying relations’.<sup>229</sup>

A similar, complex, multifaceted and even ambivalent description of the body and its predicament can be found in Angioni's novel. Attention to the body, to different forms of embodiment and bodily experience and to the complex relationship between body and language is pivotal in Angioni's book. The body in the text is certainly described as the material ground on which labour exploitation takes hold. In chapters nine and ten, the effect of repetitive work on the bodies of Tore and Warùì, who are in charge of cutting the fabric with a machine in a sewing workshop, are described in detail: the sweat, the danger of distraction, most of all the electricity that is generated in the process of cutting certain types of fabric and that has to be endured and eventually discharged through the body of the worker in a painful release. The relationship between race, the body and identity and the role that language and culture play in such a complex mechanism is explored in the following passage, where Warùì seems to be rapping on the stereotypes surrounding black masculinity:

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227 Bond, ‘ ‘Skin Memories’ ’ , pp.242-243.

228 Bond, ‘ ‘Skin Memories’ ’ , pp.243.

229 *ibid.*

Io, chi sono io? Io sono un corpo estraneo, già nella mira di anticorpi della vostra razza. Prima però di liberarvi dal mio corpo nero, una cosa la voglio: parlare a una donna e non vederle in faccia la curiosità per il bestione africano tutto pene, con donne e uomini poter trattare senza più il sospetto che ti scansino come uno di quelli che sollevano nuvole di seme scuro che minaccia ogni donna sotto questo cielo.

Cose così, leggende e miti, solo se dette e ancora più se ripetute, si costruiscono una loro verità. Solida, lavorata col fuoco e col martello, liscia e puntuta come una zagaglia. Tu arrivi qui, ed ecco interi sciame di parole ti pungono la pelle come vespe scocciate dentro il nido.<sup>230</sup>

The performativity of language, its somehow coercive force coming through its repetition and especially through the harmful propagation of racialized and sexualized fantasies translated into ‘miti e leggende’, is described as attacking the body and especially the skin and making the black body a ‘corpo estraneo’.

On the other hand, we can also find a meditation in the text on how the performativity of bodies, their ability for repetition, and the incorporation of habits for their survival are seen as a way of adapting to a hostile environment and of survival. Through the incorporation of habits, the body put to work is able, for example, to master and reduce the pain of work and the text carefully registers all the ways in which, through a routine, almost a ritualization of their gestures and movements, Tore and Warùì are able to get used to their job:

Non è uno scherzo: la taglierina elettrica richiede perfezione. Farcì la mano è poco, bisogna farla diventare parte del tuo corpo, non aggiunta smontabile alla mano: così diventa naturale, e solo quando il corpo fa da solo, senza più sforzi di attenzione, come un mulo che sa la strada da seguire, solo allora ti fidi nel lavoro. Diversamente è come camminare stando attento ai muscoli che muovi: chi camminerebbe? Io l'ho imparato lì che sono le abitudini che ti salvano la vita, e noi poi le incolpiamo di volerci dominare.<sup>231</sup>

A similar line of reasoning in the text can be seen in regard to language and its incorporation; if, on one hand, as we have seen in the quotation where Warùì discusses black masculinity, language is described as ‘sciame di parole [che] ti pungono la pelle come vespe’,<sup>232</sup> on the other, and as a proof of the ambivalence

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230 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, pp.84-85.

231 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.98.

232 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.85.

of the skin in these type of narratives that Bond investigates, language and its incorporation as a form of habit is also extremely empowering for a 'foreign body' like Tore's or Warui's. This is especially evident if we consider the ending of the novel, once the mystery surrounding Warui's sudden decision to leave Italy is explained in the text (he has been unwillingly involved in a fight between his employer and his wife and he has possibly killed him by accident). This decision seems to indicate the impossibility of a trans-cultural subjectivity in Italy and for the racialized subject to thrive outside of his/her country of origin. Yet, although Warui's decision to leave Milan could suggest a resolution of this type, the analysis of the last chapter, where the narrative goes back to focus on Tore, seems to indicate a different reading. This chapter opens with a description of how Tore, waiting on the platform for his train to work three days after Warui's departure, in an attempt to assuage the anxiety and confusion that his friend's absence is inducing in him, starts softly singing to himself an old rhyme in Milanese dialect that he has picked up at work. The same old Milanese rhyme opens the whole text, in the first chapter of the novel, but it is used in an opposite manner: in the first pages of the novel, Tore is described waking up with this rhyme in his head, defined as an 'astrusa filastrocca',<sup>233</sup> in the grip of anxiety, being afraid he might be late for work. The two complementary but opposite functions of the Milanese rhyme, as a source of anxiety at the beginning and as a way to assuage anxiety at the end, and the ring composition they form, emphasize the ambivalent centrality that the themes of languaging, incorporation and the body assume in the text. If Warui is gone (possibly momentarily), Tore has somehow incorporated the Milanese 'astrusa filastrocca' to the point of using it as a sort of reassuring ritual, then the incorporation (more than just the learning) of the other's language is also described as a form of empowerment, and the final passage of the text centres around a description of how Tore's body is now more at ease in his new environment, thus hinting at a small glimmer of hope, notwithstanding Warui's absence.

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233 Angioni, *Una ignota compagnia*, p.10.

## **‘Nei paesi del sud le stelle sembrano più vicine’: Self-Translation in Ornella Vorpsi’s *Il paese dove non si muore mai* (2005)**

Ornella Vorpsi’s *Il paese dove non si muore mai* (Einaudi 2005), a short novel set in Albania at the time of Enver Hoxha’s socialist dictatorship, can be read as a meditation on how a transcultural conception of culture and cultures as entities in flux, shaped by movement and exchange, seems to be hindered by the stifling nationalism and homogenizing drive of the regime. Making use of a sharply and bitterly ironic tone, the text highlights the incoherence of the official version of Albanian culture and identity constructed by the regime, and criticizes its levelling tendencies. Despite the internationalism dictated by socialist ideology, Hoxha's rule was in fact characterized by a suffocating nationalism and by an almost complete isolationism. The narrative, centring on a young girl growing up during Hoxha’s rule, focuses on such inconsistencies and exposes them, exploring their effects on the lives of the protagonist, of her family, and of other characters around her, in short, almost self-sufficient, chapters that, nonetheless, when read together constitute an overall narrative development. More generally, the novel takes to task an idea of cultures based on the premise that some cultures are better or superior to others by referencing the intertwined histories of Albania and Italy and relying on the theme of mobility. *Il paese dove non si muore mai* is also a text about Italy and about a migratory trajectory, as it concludes with the journey of the main protagonist from Albania to Italy and it is written from a position of enunciation that is not fixed in Albania and from a moment in time after the departure of the protagonist.

The text is very aware of and skilfully able to problematize the risk it runs of consolidating exotic or pitiful views on a ‘backward’ country, being a text on Albania by an Albanian-born writer written in Italian, to serve as a sort of ‘native informant’ for a non-Albanian reader. In other words, the text manages to criticize and explore the traumatic conditions of Albanians under socialist rule,

while also avoiding two complementary dangers inherent in its positioning: the danger of reinforcing a sort of colonial view for Italians of Albania, a western country that has been colonized by Italy, and the danger of subscribing to the representation of Italy as a ‘terra promessa’, an idea that the novel criticizes.

In the introduction to a collection of essays dedicated to the ‘intertwined history’ of Albania and Italy, Emma Bond and Daniele Comberiati argue for a broad definition of postcolonialism and for a careful consideration of colonial elements in the history of the relationship between Albania and Italy. Indeed, if one adopts a narrow definition of colonialism, the five years of invasion of the Italian fascists in Albania might seem like a short period of time that did not have a lasting impact. On the contrary, the essays collected in the volume testify to the legacy of Italian colonialism in Albanian culture and to the influence of contemporary Italy in today’s Albania. As Bond and Comberiati note, during the Cold War, when the Adriatic Sea became a border between the eastern and the western block, there can be said to have been a neocolonial relationship between the two countries. Italian pop culture, for example, had an enormous impact on Albanians starting in the 1960s. Therefore, the editors argue for a reconfiguration of what is usually thought to mean ‘colonial influence’ and go as far as arguing that the Italian colonization of Albania was somehow a double colonization:

nata in principio con l'invasione del 1939 e proseguita attraverso l'influenza della televisione italiana sull'immaginario collettivo albanese durante gli ultimi anni del comunismo, elemento che ha comportato l'identificazione dell'Italia come “terra promessa” durante gli sbarchi dei primi anni Novanta.<sup>234</sup>

Vorspi’s text deconstructs precisely this image of the ‘terra promessa’ and references the experience of the Italian colonial presence in Albania, foregrounding the ability of the subject to retrieve this history for her own processes of agency making. As I will show, reconsidering the relationship

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234 Emma Bond and Daniele Comberiati, ‘Introduzione’, in *Il confine liquido: rapporti letterari e interculturali fra Italia e Albania*, ed. by Emma Bond and Daniele Comberiati (Nardò: Besa 2013), pp.1-21 (p.17).

between Albania and Italy in this way and showing the complex 'southern history' of Albania and Albanians that was effectively silenced at the time of the regime, the text envisions a transnational notion of culture, shaped by cultural contact, that is never static and always in transformation.

One of the text's main polemical targets is, then, a hierarchical conception of cultures: one that sees them in terms of self-contained entities that can be compared and compiled in a list of more advanced and progressive ones and more backward ones. Such a notion has in fact served the purposes of colonialism. As many of the theories discussed previously in this work demonstrate, sexuality and gender in the colonial context are heavily invested with the role of constructing notions of self and other, identity and difference, progressiveness and backwardness. Vorpsi's text criticizes the ambiguous position of the regime that allegedly promoted equality between the sexes, in line with its communist ideals, while in reality attentively policing women's behaviour. Yet, at the same time, it powerfully criticizes the idea of Italy as a sexual 'terra promessa', unhinging the representation of gender and sexuality from the articulation of geopolitical dichotomies and from their exploitation on the part of nationalism or colonialism. This can be seen with great clarity in the epilogue of the text, which describes the main protagonist's journey to and arrival in Italy. Once in Italy, in fact, Eva soon realizes how sexism and the objectification of women are not an exclusive prerogative of any specific culture. In contrast to the depiction of the regulation of gender and sexuality on the part of oppressive ideologies, the text offers a meditation on these elements of subjectivity that puts into relief the agency of individuals.

In the short section that opens the novel, functioning as a sort of introductory prologue, titled 'campa, campà e non crepà l'albanese', the narrator makes it clear that the topic of the narration will largely be Albania, but the narrating voice plays with its risky position of 'native informant' by adopting it and disowning it at the same time in a paradoxical way through a subtle use of irony and hyperbole. It is very clear from the first page that 'The country where no one ever dies' is of course Albania, but the hyperbole present in the title itself highlights from the very beginning that the text that will follow is not to be taken as a straightforward account of Albania. Nonetheless, the narrator inhabits the



position of the 'native informant'. The narrating voice 'pretends' in a way to be 'explaining Albania' to the reader, but the voice clearly belongs to an unreliable narrator.<sup>235</sup> Having established 'megalomania' as a characteristic trait, possibly an essential trait of Albanians, which makes everything become 'iperbolico e contorto',<sup>236</sup> the narrator proceeds to tell her story, but 'senza esagerare'<sup>237</sup> she specifies, hinting at the fact that she herself may be suspected to be offering a narrative that is hyperbolic and that should to be taken with a pinch of salt. Another interesting way in which the text manages to undermine the reliability of the narrator, but also of the authority of the author, is through the multiplication of points of view. The autobiographical relationship that could be inferred between the life of the author and the vicissitudes of her main character is at times confirmed and at times disavowed. If, for example, in one of the longest episodes of the novel, the narrator's name is Ornela, her name changes in the other chapters, although always maintaining a phonic similarity to the author's name: are Ormira, Elona, Ina, Eva, etc. etc. the same person as Ornela or are they different? Are they the same person as Ornela the character in the diegesis or as the author of the text? Is this an individual or a collective story? Vorpsi's text programmatically decides to pose these questions without offering any final answer as a way to complicate linear accounts of autobiography and identity.

'Ci sono regole che nello spirito di un popolo nascono così, in modo naturale, come le foglie su una pianta',<sup>238</sup> states the narrator when introducing one of the main themes of the narrative, which is 'la questione della puttaneria'.<sup>239</sup> She thus seems to subscribe to a sort of essentialist conception of culture, one that would also see Albanians' preoccupation with the social control of women's sexuality as a characteristic trait of a homogenous Albanian culture; a characteristic, moreover, that also signposts that culture as backward. Yet, such a statement is undermined by the hyperbolic recurrences that have punctuated the narrative in the preceding pages and by the unreliability of the narrator, who

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235 Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1983), pp.158-159.

236 Ornela Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai* (Turin: Einaudi 2005), p.6.

237 *ibid.*

238 Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, p.7.

239 *ibid.*

might herself be a hyperbolic narrator, and will ultimately be seriously challenged in the conclusion of the novel.

It is appropriate, then, to state that the text adopts a sort of ‘strategic essentialism’, even if in ways that are quite possibly different from those theorized by prominent feminist scholars in the late 1980s.<sup>240</sup> The narrator seems to adopt such a stance in order to access a position of enunciation that will seem familiar and unthreatening to an average reader, but this position is also thematized, problematized and ultimately reversed, making the outsider's look on Albania become a look towards the reader's culture as well or to an all-encompassing scenario not filtered through the framework of the nation.

In contrast to the nationalist rhetoric of the regime, which emphasized the Illyrian-Albanian continuity, the text highlights the stratified history of the country and, in particular, it recuperates the memory of the Ottoman tradition. This can be seen in one of the longest chapters in the text, titled ‘il dervish delle meraviglie’. The first-person narrator, Ina, finds herself at a military training camp for girls in order to learn how to defend her country: “‘imparare a difendere la patria, per di più la nostra, invidiata da tutto il mondo per la sua marcia così riuscita verso il comunismo”, dice il nostro compagno il Timoniere Enver Hoxha.’<sup>241</sup> It is interesting to note here how this is the only time in the novel when Hoxha is explicitly mentioned and even quoted. While out on a military exercise, Ina, together with a small group of other girls, decides to escape momentarily the control of the captain supervising them. They cross a river and wander through the countryside until they find themselves in a small cemetery. The tombs are all very old and not very well taken care of, except for one, which, on the contrary, is very clean and covered with flowers and lit candles. It is the tomb of the ‘dervish delle meraviglie’, who is said to be able to grant people's wishes if you kiss the tomb and lay your forehead on it three times. As the guardian of the cemetery explains to the girls, the dervish is considered to be very

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240 See Teresa De Lauretis, ‘The Essence of the Triangle Or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the US, and Britain’, in *Differences* 1 (2) (1989), 3 - 37; Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* (London: Routledge 1989); as well as many of the interviews collected in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Sarah Harasym, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (London: Routledge 1990).

241 Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, p.81.

powerful but its tomb may soon be destroyed and the body relocated elsewhere under an unnamed tombstone by the communist administrators, since religious practices of this kind are not tolerated by the regime, Albania being from 1967 an officially atheist country. Ina then finds herself caught between the fear of contradicting the rules set by the party and a longing to make a wish; she has always wanted to be a painter, but she has stopped thinking of it as a viable option for herself because, being the daughter of a political prisoner and art being reduced to propaganda in communist Albania, that path would be precluded to her. Ina's conflict is interesting and, as is the case in other parts of the novel, it points to the internalization of the control exercised by the party. Nonetheless, the mysterious look of the dervish in the picture on the tombstone, his smile seeming to 'racchiudere grandi misteri',<sup>242</sup> convinces her to dare to dream of becoming an artist and make her wish:

Coraggio Ina, dico a me stessa, tu hai un grande sogno no? Un grande sogno che sai che è irrealizzabile. Non è forse la pittura la tua vita? Con un papà in prigione non si ha diritto all'arte; l'arte è propaganda. Nessuna possibilità di fare studi di pittura, ma se baci il dervish forse...<sup>243</sup>

As in other parts of the text, this chapter explores one of the prominent themes of the novel: how the regime's repressive climate and official, monolithic account of history and the paranoid isolation in which it has plunged the country and to which the thousands of bunkers scattered around the country testify seem to be stifling the imagination and depriving people of the vital faculty to dream and to imagine. In contrast to this, the reference to the repressed 'southern history' of Albania, and of its Muslim heritage ignites in Ina new processes of self-understanding and gives her a glimmer of hope of fulfilling her wish to become an artist. In relation to the diegesis, this episode illuminates the effect on imaginative agency that coming into contact with tangible proof of the country's

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242 Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, p.85.

243 Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, p.87.

forbidden multicultural history can have, while also alerting the reader to, and informing her of, the importance of this very same history.

Earlier in the text, the protagonist, Eva, who acts as the narrator in the majority of the narrative, finds some old Italian postcards in the basement of her house and decides to take them to school. The text describes how these postcards, depicting images of little angels, which Eva and her schoolmates have never seen before, ignite their curiosity and their fantasy:

Peró il cielo in queste cartoline era blu beato, blu mistero, blu perfetto, le nuvole bianchissime come cotone in fiore, la casa sotto brillava di una luce senza ansia. Tutto era spalmato come uno strato di formaggio dolce su una torta dorata. Ma la cosa che mi gonfiava il cuore, che mi faceva sognare, che mostravo alle mie amiche esclamando “Esistono, ma si che esistono, se ve lo dico!” erano dei piccoli esseri-bambini con le guance rosa e paffute, i capelli fatti di riccioli d’oro, nudi, con delle ali bianche dietro le spalle, che sparsi nello spazio volavano in cielo fino agli angoli dentellati della carta.<sup>244</sup>

Eva and her schoolmates have never seen a depiction of those ‘*esseri-bambini*’ and they do not even know what angels are. The sense of fascination and of pleasure is conveyed through repetition and through the wondrous choice of adjectives and qualifications referring especially to colour. Yet, the postcards with images of angels, also as objects that testify to the embarrassing issue of the Italian colonial presence in Albania and to the Italian influence in the country, are not compatible with the strictly un-religious education and with the official account of history devised by the regime and Eva is heavily punished by her school teacher. Nonetheless, the postcards, found by Eva in the basement of her house, and the excitement they are able to produce show how even the past of Italian colonialism can be re-interpreted and re-adapted by the power of fantasy and the imagination. Fantasy and the creative imagination thus seem to retain the power to counter the stronghold of oppressive discursive regimes of history, ideology and nationhood.

As these episodes demonstrate, any cultural aspect that the regime has deemed not compatible with its ideology is considered to be foreign, expunged

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<sup>244</sup> Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, p.21.

from the identity that the ‘Madre-partito’ is trying to fashion for Albanians. The centuries-long history of cultural, political interactions that the country has been part of, including the experience of Italian colonialism, is downplayed and erased from view. This claim to cultural purity goes as far as inventing new etymologies for names of places:

Ho saputo anche che il mar Ionio (conoscete lo Ionio, questo mare blu e trasparente che bagna l'Albania, la Grecia e una parte del sud Italia?), ecco adesso anche voi potete sapere che questo mare leggiadro e cristallino si chiama Ionio grazie a un partigiano albanese di nome Ion, il quale un giorno cadde per la patria colorando col suo sangue le acque profonde, di rosso scuro. Mi chiedo come poteva chiamarsi il mare prima, prima che Ion lo colorasse col suo sangue rosso. Sembra quasi che il mare non abbia avuto un nome fino al giorno in cui il partigiano albanese lo ha battezzato. Mi domando anche cosa ne pensano gli italiani e i greci, che devono chiamare il loro mare con il nome di un partigiano albanese. Anche loro magari hanno dei partigiani... ma probabilmente i loro partigiani non sono mai morti in questo mare.<sup>245</sup>

It is interesting to note in this quotation how the story of the Albanian partisan Ion constitutes a veritable ‘invention of tradition’, one that, as Hobsbawm points out, aims at ‘affirming its continuity with a carefully selected historical past’<sup>246</sup> and that is instrumental in the creation of the image of a homogeneous and self-sufficient Albanian national community at the time of the regime. Of course, the irony that pervades the account of the story of Ion and the rhetorical questions that play on the alleged naïveté of the narrating voice are powerful devices for calling into question the official version of the story. Moreover, the evocation of the image of the fluidity and especially the clarity of this ‘trasparente, leggiadro, cristallino’ sea that connects Albania, Greece and southern Italy, in contrast with the opaqueness and thickness of the ‘rosso scuro’ of the blood of the dead partisans, can be said to allude to the Mediterranean as a shared cultural space, a dialogic site of the elaboration of meaning, a crossroad of exchange and history in ways that are resonant with the description of a common, transnational and polyphonic ‘Mediterranean cultural landscape’ described by Chambers.

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245 Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, pp.93-94.

246 *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.2.

Such a fluid notion of culture is paralleled in the novel by a fluid notion of gender, sexuality and corporeality. Representations of gender and sexuality are very complex in the book and if, on one hand, these two traits of identity are presented as terrains on which the normative force of the regime is heavily felt, they are also shown to be elements of subjectivity amenable to being forged also according to the force of creative agency. Gender and sexuality are not seen as reductively natural, but they are rather presented as social constructs whose naturalization by dominant ideologies renders them extremely powerful in controlling people's lives, a process that is, moreover, imbricated with the politics of the regime. In a very significant passage at the very beginning of the text, the narrating voice describes how the men have the habit, sitting on balconies and at the tables outside the bars and cafés, of looking intently at women passing by while making sexual comments that revolve around their desire and 'la questione della puttaneria'. The narrator comments:

Quando passi per la strada, i loro sguardi t'incrociano penetrandoti fino al midollo, così a fondo che il tuo cuore diventa trasparente.  
Una volta dentro di te, questo sbirciare diventa un'arte meticolosa.<sup>247</sup>

In this short passage, the narrating voice goes for the first time from a third-person to first-person, also making it clear that the narrator is a woman. This account of the internalization of the male gaze, described as a deep penetration that deprives of colour (colour being such an important feature in many descriptions in the text) stresses the physical impact of this process and is particularly resonant with other moments in the narrative when the internalization of the norms dictated by the regime is described. Yet, as mentioned earlier, this narrator is a very ironic and hyperbolic one and, as becomes clearer in the course of the text, this 'arte meticolosa' can also be re-appropriated and used against the 'male gaze'. Indeed, the body and sexuality also seem to always be in excess of the internalization of the masculine norms of patriarchy and of the totalitarian norms of the regime, as

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247 Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, p.8.

Daniele Comberiati has stressed in his discussion of one of Vorpsi's short stories, *Vetri rosa*: 'La Vorpsi vede nella riappropriazione del corpo la resistenza più strenua alle invadenti interferenze della morale del regime che pretende di governare anche la sfera privata dell'individuo'.<sup>248</sup> I would like to qualify and expand on Comberiati's insight in my reading of the novel by showing how it is not just a generic notion of the body that is identified in the text as a key site of resistance but, more specifically, what Freud would call the 'polymorphous perverse' aspect of human sexuality.

Similarly to Comberiati, Anita Pinzi, in her perceptive reading of the novel drawing on sexual difference feminism, has noted how in the text 'il corpo della donna si costituisce come punto di una giuntura e movimento tra una pressione esterna oggettivizzante e una risposta interna soggettivizzante'.<sup>249</sup> According to Pinzi, this dynamic renders the subject capable of always adapting, changing, rearticulating itself even in the face of oppressive discourses. Supplementing Pinzi's analysis, in my reading of the text, I emphasize, with the help of Jean Laplanche's innovative re-interpretation of Freudian concepts, how the subjectivizing process described by Pinzi might have a lot to do with polymorphous perverse sexuality: a specific aspect of sexuality in the personal history of individual subjects that starts before the Oedipal structuring of subjectivity and sexuality, and that remains active throughout the individual's life.

In his analysis of Freud's *Three Essays on the theory of Sexuality*, Jean Laplanche has distinguished two different aspects of human sexuality: the first, which he calls 'le Sexual', coining a word that does not exist in French but whose function is exactly that of making the distinction easier, would be perverse infantile polymorphous sexuality, which is regulated by sexual drives, while the second, which he calls 'le Sexuel', using the standard French term, is coextensive with Oedipal genital, 'normal', reproductive sexuality based on heterosexuality

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248 Daniele Comberiati, *Scrivere nella lingua dell'altro: La letteratura degli immigrati in Italia (1989-2007)* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2010) pp.215-254.

249 Anita Pinzi, 'Corpi-Cerniera: corpi di donna in *Il paese dove non si muore mai* di Ornella Vorpsi', in *Il confine liquido: rapporti letterari e interculturali fra Italia e Albania*, ed. by Emma Bond and Daniele Comberiati (Nardò: Besa 2013), pp.167-184 (p.167).

and binary gender.<sup>250</sup> For Laplanche, perverse sexuality, the sensorial excitement that the body is capable of receiving from the outside and from the inside, is registered by the subject as messages that form both the unconscious and the ego of the individual. The enigmatic messages that compose the unconscious form a repository that the subject can tap into in order to ‘translate’ them at least partially into new conscious content according to the different discourses and contexts in which it will find itself placed.<sup>251</sup> As in every translation, something will be lost (and it will remain unconscious but possibly translatable in different circumstances) and something will be gained. In contrast with other psychoanalytical models of the psyche, Laplanche’s account of subjectivity as contextual translation allows for constant change and adaptation and for a high degree of agency of the subject in re-articulating his/herself. In Laplanche’s formulation of subjectivity, then, the body has a primary importance and it is articulated together with wider discourses and cultural contexts and not in opposition to them.<sup>252</sup>

In Vorpsi’s novel, we can find many instances of these subjective processes of translation. In the chapter titled ‘Albania la sensuale’, the narrator describes her relationship with her father, her mother and her extended family, her formative discovery of literature and reading, and her family’s trip, later on, to Spac, the prison for political prisoners where the narrator’s father is serving his sentence for having criticized the regime. The narrator describes her deep attachment to her mother and her jealousy and lack of love for her father, and how the reading she does, through which she makes important discoveries on love and gender, encourages her obedience to her mother and her adherence to the normative femininity she embodies and performs:

Scoprii quanto faceva soffrire questa cosa chiamata amore. Le ragazze avevano quasi sempre diciotto vent’anni, l’uomo poteva averne di più. Lui ha diritto più a

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250 Jean Laplanche, *Freud and the Sexual: Essays 2000-2006*, ed. and trans. by John Fletcher and Nicholas Ray (New York: IPA Books, 2011), pp.128-131.

251 John Fletcher, ‘Seduction and the Vicissitudes of Translation: The Work of Jean Laplanche’, in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, LXXVI (2007), 1241-1291.

252 Judith Butler, ‘Seduction, Gender and the Drive’, in *Seductions and Enigmas: Cultural Readings With Laplanche*, ed. by John Fletcher and Nicolas Ray (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2014), pp.118-134.



lungo a questa cosa deliziosa che è l'amore. Lui può frustare la carne bianca, la carne-desiderio di Zinaide. Gli amanti in questi miei libri ardon a fuoco lento di un amore che fa dire a Lermontov: "Chi è bruciato una volta non si accende più". Sono segnati per sempre.

La donna deve svegliarsi presto al mattino, spruzzare acqua fresca sul viso per rinvigorirlo dal torpore del sonno, il marito non deve vederla con il viso gonfio e assente.

Dio, quanto chiedono questi uomini!

Dio, ma quanto tanto chiedono questi uomini!

Sconvolta da Zinaide e da Tamara obbedivo agli ordini della mamma.<sup>253</sup>

In this passage, the unjust power-relations between men and women are validated by the literature of the great Masters of the nineteenth century, in whose works women are condemned to be uniquely objects and projections of male desire and where romantic love disguises the exploitation of women and its naturalization through gender; all of this articulates itself with and feeds into the gendering of the subject, her incorporation of femininity, the structuring of the subject according to 'le Sexuel', to the Oedipal scheme. This incorporation, producing 'normal' (hetero)sexuality and gendered subjects, constitutes the link between oppressive ideologies and individual conduct: it is exactly this incorporation that allows for the somewhat voluntary enlisting and participation of subjects in the very ideology that oppresses them. The text is keen to show how such a regulation of gender and sexuality does not pertain only to Albanian women. In the epilogue of the narrative, set in Italy after the arrival of the protagonist and her mother, the text manages again to address and, at the same time, deconstruct ideas of the 'terra promessa' that an Albanian audience might have and ideas of western superiority that an Italian audience might have. The narrator states:

Trovó che le donne dell'altra parte avevano la carnagione resa scura da abbondanti dosi di sole, i capelli biondi chiarissimi e le cosce magre (i suoi zii laggiù avrebbero detto: magre da buttarle al cane, e nemmeno lui le vorrebbe mangiare!) [...]

In quali luoghi si nascondevano le straordinarie mogli di casa, che pur circondate da tre figli avevano corpi sontuosi e che stendendo il bucato fatto con il detersivo Dash stendevano a terra anche i cuori degli uomini?

I maschi delle nostre parti quando le vedevano di nascosto alla televisione sospiravano: "Ah bella mia, vieni che ti faró veder il paradiso... mia

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253 Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, pp.34-35.

colombella... Ah, oh..." per poi lanciare una sorta di ululato amaro e disilluso alla propria moglie, ormai appassita e asessuata: "Dai, sbrigati te, portami il mangiare e sta' zitta!"<sup>254</sup>

As is evident from the relating of the Albanian idiomatic sentence attributed to the protagonist's uncles, the narrating voice here, while parodying the fantasy of Albanian men, interestingly adopts their point of view, their male gaze, but only to ridicule them and to show how they would be very disappointed to see how the reality of Italian women is not the one they would expect from their knowledge of Italy acquired through advertisements and the mass media. In this passage, then, it is evident how the idea of a sexual 'terra promessa' is deconstructed but also how the 'arte meticolosa' that derives from the interiorization of the male gaze is somehow reappropriated and, through a process of translation, used against that very gaze that created it. The passage in fact provides a striking example of the mechanism of subjectivity-making as translation: the journey of the protagonist, her being exposed to a different reality, to a different codification of gender and different forms of embodiment, prompt the awareness of the constructedness of the male gaze. The fact that what Albanian men consider to be a beautiful woman does not translate directly into what Italian women consider to be a beautiful woman, and the realization that actually the two notions clash with each other, constitutes a failure of direct translation that opens up new spaces of understanding social reality and the self. At the same time, the epilogue ironically dismantles ideas of Italian superiority based on the premise that relationships between men and women are more equal in Italy. While Eva walks into a shop to buy tickets for her and her mother who are travelling to Rome, her mother is approached by a young Italian man who addresses her asking 'a quanto scopi?'. Her mother does not understand this sentence, and she mistakes it for a kind offer of help in carrying her luggage, thus generating a comic situation.

In contrast to the representation of the internalization of patriarchal norms, what the novel calls 'la sensualità', which is, in my reading of the text,

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254 Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, pp.108-109.

coterminous with Laplanche's 'le Sexual', grants the only alternative, the only possibility of a counter-subjectivation. This is evident, for example, in the luscious description of the sweets that her father denies the young Eva, a moment in her infancy to which she attributes the lack of love she has for him. Later on, we can also see this in the description of her travelling with her mother and her grandfather to the prison where her father is detained, when Eva is offered a banana by the truck driver who is giving the family a lift:

Così ebbi la fortuna di assaggiare un frutto di cui non conoscevo ancora il nome. Il gusto e l'odore mi ubriacarono di meraviglia. Grazie a questo profumo sentivo meno la puzza dei maiali. La buccia di questo frutto raro si toglieva dolcemente, e il contenuto era morbidissimo. Cercavo di non mandare giù la polpa, masticavo, ruotavo la lingua sulle pareti della bocca la rimasticavo di nuovo, poi tenevo tutto in sospenso e non rispondevo più a nessuno; lasciatemi per favore insieme al piacere!<sup>255</sup>

In this passage, the oral pleasure of which the body is capable and remains capable even after the formation of the Oedipal structure suspends the narrative and takes the character away from the stark scenario in which she finds herself, opening a momentary window onto another dimension, beyond the order of the Oedipal structure, beyond the phallus as logos and away from the prisons of the regime. In Lacanian terms, we could say that the phallic symbolic order that constitutes the background of this episode (the truck driver has just harassed Eva's mother) is pleasurable, although only momentarily, defused by oral sexuality, showing how perverse polymorphous sexuality, 'le Sexual', resists the Name-of-the-Father and a complete acceptance of Oedipal sexuality. Laplanche's theory of the drives constituting the affective economy pertaining to perverse sexuality distinguishes them from the instincts in so far as the drive is both material and cultural; a very important consequence deriving from this fact is, as Teresa de Lauretis aptly summarizes, that 'infantile sexuality, perverse and polymorphous, or in Laplanche's words "the sexual," is indissociably connected

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255 Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, p.37.

to fantasy'.<sup>256</sup> In line with this theory, we can say that the excitement and the pleasure in savouring the banana in the passage quoted above also comes and is undistinguishable from the 'cultural' value of the fruit: the banana described in this passage, seen for the first time by the young Eva, is a 'frutto raro', it has travelled from and through many countries, and, as in the other examples in my discussion of the text, this fact ignites in Eva the pleasures of fantasy and of imaginific, creative agency: the banana's texture and delightful taste are tied up with the symbolic value the fruit has acquired through its journey.

The discourse of proper and improper sexuality and the disciplining and social control of women's sexuality on the part of the regime and of society in general are very entrenched in the world described in the novel. 'La questione della puttania' is thus an obsession in the dominant ideology imposed by the regime, but it is also rooted in people's habits and ways of thinking, and the text describes on numerous occasions how it is enforced by various social institutions like the family or school. Yet, we can trace in the novel the coming into being of a different awareness that constitutes itself within and against these dominant discourses of gender and sexuality. 'La sensualità', seems to indicate in the novel that dimension of sexuality and pleasure that is resistant to the technologies of gender and of desire devised by the dominant powers in order to produce 'docile subjects'. Art and literature can be participants in the disciplining mechanisms of these technologies (as is the case with many of the authors and novels mentioned in the text), but they can also offer pleasures<sup>257</sup> that, going beyond identification with the dominant discourses, promote forms of alternative subjectivation that contest those dominant discourses. This is particularly clear again in the episode 'Arance di Tirana'. Here, the protagonist, significantly named Ornela, while studying the French revolution of July 1830, comes across a reproduction of Delacroix's famous painting *Liberty leading the people*. Yet, in Ornela's history book the picture is in black and white, so she goes and look for the painting in

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256 Teresa de Lauretis, 'The Queerness of the drive', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 64:14 2017, 1913-1929 (1926).

257 Colour emerges in the text as one of the most prominent of these pleasures. Colour, I would argue on the basis of many of the descriptive passages in the text, is opposed to or not reducible to form and representation. For a discussion of this sort of aesthetic pleasures not reducible to representation see: Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

the ‘piccola enciclopedia Italiana’ (again an object testifying to a past of cultural interaction, albeit a violent one), which her grandfather has in his house. However, the image of the painting in the ‘enciclopedia’ is quite different from the one Ornela has seen before: here, the female figure leading the revolutionaries has bare breasts, while she appears to be fully clothed in Ornela’s history book. Ornela’s reactions to this discovery exemplify the internal struggle of the female subject taken in the midst of different and embedded discourses on gender, politics, and sexuality:

- Ma nonno cos’è questo brutto scherzo? Nel mio libro di storia lei ha i seni coperti da una stoffa bianca, e nell’enciclopedia dell’Italia capitalista i suoi seni svolazzano in aria. Qual’è il quadro vero? Non è che gli Italiani vogliono compromettere la figura della donna, e insieme a lei anche la rivoluzione?<sup>258</sup>

Yet, the re-interpretation of which the subject is capable and which ignites processes of understanding within and against these dominant discourses, the split at the core of a subject that is constantly ‘in the making’, is not seen either as a stable source of identification and identity but as a conflictual space where numerous discourses intersect. It is a space that constantly generates fruitful questions and contradictions:

Però come sapete, il vero quadro era quello coi seni all’aria, proprio due magnifici seni in fiore, liberamente mostrati sulle barricate, in mezzo alla sparatoria. La guerra è vinta: chi potrà sparare contro di lei? Contro quel candore e quella sensualità che turbava? ...  
*La sensualità che guida il popolo*, così doveva intitolarsi – forse la rivoluzione ha a che fare con la sensualità, o forse può riuscire grazie alla sensualità? Perché no? La cosa mi diventa d’un tratto complicata<sup>259</sup>

The representation of sexuality in the novel, which, as the analysis of the passages quoted above shows, puts into relief the individual agency of the subject in

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258 Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, p.68.

259 Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, p.69.

resisting or opposing oppressive ideologies, is consistent with the stylistic choices at the level of language that the text makes. The process of subjectivation that emerges from Vorpsi's text can effectively be described as self-translation in terms that are consistent with Laplanche's theory of the psyche and of sexuality and also with recent literary and translation studies that have called for a widening of a too narrow and technical definition of self-translation. The term self-translation was in fact used until recently mostly to refer to those works that were translated by the same author into another language. Such a technical definition has been expanded and problematized in order to show how self-translations very often call into question the notion of the original text, because they constitute simultaneous endeavours and because they are very often rewritings rather than sequential translations.<sup>260</sup> As Rita Wilson demonstrates, the term can have quite far-reaching theoretical force also as a metaphor used to discuss the work of translingual authors, especially when they engage with themes that are related to their own biography, when they negotiate questions of identity across and in-between different languages and cultures in a way that 'awakens both a revision of the self and a renewed awareness of the limits of stable linguistic and national identities'.<sup>261</sup>

Translingualism, the phenomenon of writers who write in a language different from their primary one, is certainly not a recent phenomenon. Translingual authors whose work has been written about a great deal are Nabokov, Conrad and Beckett; although there are thousands of cases of translingual authors from antiquity,<sup>262</sup> the recent increase in mass mobility certainly demands an in-depth look at this type of writing. As Steven Kellman writes, translingual authors somehow 'challenge the limits of their own literary medium'<sup>263</sup> and their works are particularly apt at debunking what Reine Meylaerts calls 'the myth of

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260 Susan Bassnett, 'The Self-Translator as Rewriter', in *Self-translation: Brokering Originality in a Hybrid Culture*, ed. by Anthony Cordingley (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp.13-25.

261 Rita Wilson, 'Forms of Self-Translation', in *Reconstructing Identity: A Transdisciplinary Approach*, ed. by Nicholas Monk and others, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), pp.157-177.

262 Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

263 Kellman, p.ix.

monolingualism',<sup>264</sup> which is the idea 'according to which there is a one-to-one match between one territory, one nation, one language and one literature.'<sup>265</sup>

Vorpsi's text decidedly challenges the myth of monolingualism. Even if the novel does not directly incorporate Albanian words, it is able nonetheless to preserve some of the music and the features of the author's first language, which emerge surreptitiously in the voice of the narrator, thus creating what Jennifer Burns has called 'a form of interference to the creation of meaning which forces the reader to take immediate account of another language and another culture insisting behind the Italian text'.<sup>266</sup> Daniele Comberiati has offered the most detailed discussion to date of the language used in *Il paese dove non si muore mai*. He notes the high frequency of neologisms and syntactical variations that alert the reader to an 'accented' quality in the variety of Italian used by the text. He also comments on other features: the use of concise and syntactically very simple sentences, the use of the 'tu generico', of nominal clauses and especially of the alternation of first-person with third-person narration as ways to express distance from the subject matter and to achieve a multi-focal point of view, which is external and internal at the same time.<sup>267</sup> This is of course very coherent with the awareness of that ambiguous positioning in-between Italy and Albania that I mentioned at the opening of this discussion and it can be seen again as a way to claim agency through specific language choices and to carve out a translangual and transcultural space within the Italian language and Italian culture. For example, in the passage quoted above where the narrating voice comments on the representation of women in the works of many literary masters, she concludes by exclaiming 'Dio, quanto chiedono questi uomini!' and then repeating with a slight variation 'Dio, ma quanto tanto chiedono questi uomini!'. The repetition incorporates an emphatic formula that violates the standard usage and rules of Italian. This violation is very expressive and alerts the reader to the 'accented' quality of the Italian used in the text.

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264 Reine Meylaerts, 'Heterolingualism in/and translation: How legitimate are the Other and his/her language? An introduction', *Target: International Journal on Translation Studies*, v. 18. no. 1 (2006), 1 -15 (3).

265 *ibid.*

266 Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries: Figures in Italian Migration Literature* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), pp.177-204 (p.189).

267 Comberiati, pp. 229-232.

In her discussion of the use of Italian language by translingual authors, especially by migrant authors, Jennifer Burns comments on how the use of Italian by many of these writers both falls within and exceeds a postcolonial model. According to Burns, the use of Italian on the part of many migrant writers cannot be said to be disruptive and politically loaded in the same ways in which the use of French or English by other postcolonial writers has been described, but it points instead to a more dialectic model and sets of relationships between the Italian language, culture and history and other languages, cultures and histories.<sup>268</sup> Burns identifies a model of ‘mutual ownership’<sup>269</sup> of both the primary language and culture and the acquired ones, which, although it is informed by a criticism of imperialism and its legacies, it is also informed by an attempt to re-situate the specificities of postcolonialism within a wider and more contemporary field of power-relations.

Much of the analysis I have developed here on *Il paese dove non si muore mai* demonstrates how Vorpsi’s text corroborates Burns’ idea of an ‘inclusive and largely non-resistant use of Italian’<sup>270</sup> on the part of translingual writers writing in Italian. In more than one interview given especially to an academic public, Vorpsi describes her use of Italian as dictated not by the drive to twist and experiment with the Italian language as a way to disrupt it, but rather as a medium through which she is able to exercise a form of distance from the subject matter of her stories and which allows her to narrate these stories.<sup>271</sup>

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268 Burns, pp.188-196.

269 Burns, p.190.

270 *ibid.*

271 ‘Intervista inedita a Ornella Vorpsi’, in *Il confine liquido: rapporti letterari e interculturali fra Italia e Albania*, ed. by Emma Bond and Daniele Comberiati (Nardó: Besa 2013), pp.202-221 (211-212); ‘Intervista a Ornella Vorpsi’, in *Letteratura e migrazioni in Italia: studi e dialoghi*, ed. by Silvia Camilotti and Stefano Zangrando (Trento: UniEdit 2010), pp.75-85 (p.83).



## Conclusion

The analysis developed in the discussion of the novels taken into consideration in this section demonstrates how these texts challenge the borders of the nation and the dovetailing of nation, language and culture by resorting to the imaginary related to southernness and/or foregrounding the interconnection between the Italian south and other souths. Santangelo's text confronts the representation of southern and in particular Sicilian identity as fixed and immune to change by focusing on mobility and on a deconstruction of the binary opposition 'andare/restare'. In order to blur the distinction and complicate the relationship between these two terms, Santangelo's text imagines the south as a heterotopia, an interstitial elsewhere where practices of solidarity open up alternative spaces that exist within and against the oppressive governance of the borders. This solidarity is nonetheless only predicated on the basis of an allegedly common marginality and the languages and cultures of the different souths that the novel engages with are not explored or made to interact in equal measure. Angioni's novel, on the other hand, reverses and confuses the usual hierarchy between north and south by setting his novel in a northern city that turns out to be a place of contamination between different southern cultures. Many facets of these cultures and languages are explored and made to interact in the text, with specific attention to those moments in history when they have come into contact. Using this strategy, Angioni's novel is able to bring to the fore the transnational dimension of Italian and southern Italian culture and history. Vorpsi's novel contrasts the suffocating nationalism of Enver Hoxha's regime with references to Albania's history of cross-cultural interactions and especially with references to a southern Mediterranean history and to the Mediterranean as a polyphonic, transcultural space.

In order to challenge a homogenous, monolingual and monocultural conception of the nation, the three novels taken into consideration employ different linguistic strategies: all these different uses of language considerably

expand the range of standard Italian in a way that is quite different from the modernist experimentalism of canonical Italian writers of the twentieth century in so far as they branch out towards other histories, cultures and languages. Santangelo employs Sicilian dialect in order to represent the cultural landscape of her characters and mixes it with German and standard Italian, referencing the history of emigration from the south. Nonetheless, in stark contrast to the localizing and precise linguistic strategies employed for the speech of her Italian characters, the references to Ali's language and culture are quite generic and canonical and do not refer to any strand of marginal history or to the interconnections and moments of contact between cultures. As we have seen, Angioni's incorporation of words, sentences and proverbs from Kikuyu and Swahili, as well as from Sardinian and from other dialects of Italy, puts these different languages and cultures in relation to each other and elaborates on both the differences and the similarities between them, making visible and exploring processes of cultural translation. This is also achieved through the use of a narrating voice that enacts the work of translation and actively employs the connections and disconnections of the different repertoires of these languages to express his own self and describe his own reality. Many of the uses of language in Angioni can be defined as translanguaging precisely because they bring to the fore the idea of language as a doing and they are not based on a conception of languages and cultures as discrete entities. Processes of self-translation can be seen with even more evidence in Vorpsi's *il paese dove non si muore mai*. The use of Italian as an acquired language allows an ironic distance from the subject matter of the text that is functional to the deconstruction of ideas of cultural purity and of a 'terra promessa' and to reflect on negotiations of identity across languages and cultures. Moreover, the Italian used in the text registers the interference of the other language, thus expanding the repertoire of Italian and challenging the myth of monolingualism.

All three texts engage with the connections between the local, the national and the global also through attention to the embodied dimension of experience. The imaginaries of bodies thus become central in the texts and entail an interrogation of gender and sexuality as non-fixed elements of identity that affect and are affected by mobility. In *Senzaterra*, queer desire is figured as the epitome

of the heterotopic dimension of the border; nonetheless, it is represented in idealized terms that are mostly functional to the development of the main storyline while remaining ultimately quite separate from it. Angioni strongly connects embodiment to language and to performance: the performativity of oppressive language is incorporated but can also be challenged and defused by the performativity of bodies. In Vorpsi's novel, a fluid conception of culture is paralleled with a fluid conception of bodies, gender and sexuality. Vorpsi's text explores the incorporation of the male gaze but also the agency that the subject gains from those aspects of sexuality that resist normalization and that can become the starting point for alternative processes of subjectivation. Both Angioni's and Vorpsi's novels demonstrate how attention to the embodied dimension of experience can shed new light on the lived experience of transnationalism, serving as correctives to abstract discussions of the phenomenon.



## **Part III**

### **New Representations of the Italian South in Contemporary Italian Transnational cinema**

There is a rather widespread consensus among those scholars who have addressed the issue of the representation of the Italian south in Italian cinema<sup>272</sup> that the so-called *meridione* or *mezzogiorno* starts to gain centre stage in Italian cinematic production only after the end of the Second World War. Notwithstanding the presence of an important school of Neapolitan cinema in the early twentieth century that, in contrast to the spectacular epic productions coming from Turin and Milan, anticipated many of the realist features of neorealist cinema,<sup>273</sup> attention to local and regional culture vanished after the advent of fascism. An explanation for this could be the fact that, in line with the fascist regime's attempt at fashioning a homogeneous and cohesive Italian identity, and in keeping with an idea of movies as pure and somehow escapist entertainment, cinema during the *ventennio fascista* tended to downplay internal differences and regional varieties.<sup>274</sup>

Even when animated by political commitment and by the intention to put under the spotlight the critical conditions in which the lower classes of the *meridione* found themselves after the war, the representation of southern Italy in Italian cinema from the period after the fall of fascism oscillates, according to many commentators,<sup>275</sup> between an image of a land particularly blessed with

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272 For a detailed bibliography on this topic see Italo Moscati, 'Produzione Sud: Cinema, Tv e Mezzogiorno', *Meridiana*, v.47-48 (2003), 117-129.

273 See for example Giuliana Bruno's monograph on the work of Elvira Notari, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

274 Fulvio Orsitto, 'Imagining the Mezzogiorno: Old and New Paradigms', in *A Companion to Italian Cinema*, ed by Frank Burke (Hoboken NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2017), pp.447-466 (p.450).

275 Orsitto, pp.450-458; Moscati, pp.120-124.

natural gifts and beauty and that of its inhabitants and of its social dimension, tainted by social inequalities, corruption, organised crime, and a backward mentality. It is, once again, the image of a ‘paradiso abitato da diavoli’, consistent with a whole repertoire of images that had accompanied the representation of southern Italy since the time of Unification and, even before that, since the time of the Grand Tour, when young northern European travellers journeyed through southern Italy as part of their formative trip across Europe.

A very interesting reflection on the image of the Italian south in movies is offered by Leonardo Sciascia, who was as passionate about cinema as he was about literature.<sup>276</sup> In an essay written in 1963, almost twenty years after the end of the war, Sciascia scrutinises the most important cinematic productions of the previous fifteen to twenty years that made Sicily an object of representation, offering many critical insights that can be said to be valid for the Italian south in general. According to Sciascia, who starts by comparing the representation of Sicily in Italian literature from the 1940s onwards to the representation that cinema has offered of it, cinema has represented Sicily by indulging, to a certain degree, in the usual forms of stereotypical representation. For Sciascia, cinema has represented the Italian south:

generalmente con quell’ingrossamento del quadro e della sintesi che Verga paventava, cogliendone i tratti più pesanti, i toni più accesi, riportando alla particolarità (al folklore, al costume singolare di una gente singolare e quindi con tanto di distinzione razziale) quegli elementi stessi che gli scrittori e gli artisti siciliani assumevano sotto specie di universalità, che astraevano dalla storia e nella storia dichiaravano.<sup>277</sup>

While, on one hand, trying to elicit sympathy in the spectator for Sicily and for its critical predicament after the end of the war, the movies Sciascia discusses also presented the problems of the Italian south as somehow a-historical, something akin to a metaphysical curse, and as something that could even be seen

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<sup>276</sup> On Sciascia and cinema see: Leonardo Sciascia, *Le maschere e i sogni: scritti di Leonardo Sciascia sul cinema*, ed by Sebastiano Gesù, (Catania: Maimone, 1992); Emiliano Morreale, ‘il cinema di Leonardo Sciascia’, *Segno*, 209 (1999), 185-200.

<sup>277</sup> Leonardo Sciascia, *La corda pazzo: scrittori e cose di Sicilia*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), pp.235-255.

as derived from a racialised idea of ‘Sicilianness’. Sciascia summarises the modalities of representation of southern Italy in contemporary cinema into three main categories - ‘Il “mondo offeso”; il teatro della commedia erotica; il luogo della bellezza e della verità’<sup>278</sup> - in ways that are strikingly similar to the descriptions of Orientalism offered by Edward Said in his founding study on the ways the East has been represented in the West,<sup>279</sup> and that corroborate the insights of many of the contemporary scholars discussed in the introduction who have used the lens of postcolonial theory to look at the ‘southern question’ anew.

Often taking their cues from Sciascia’s concise and illuminating discussion, scholars of contemporary cinema have noticed how, even when reaching important artistic levels, in the late forties and fifties, directors like Visconti, and later on Francesco Rosi (who started his career as a collaborator with Visconti), offered an image of the *meridione* that oscillates between the polarities represented by the two above-mentioned components.<sup>280</sup> In the sixties, with the exception of the influential movies by Pietro Germi and a handful of other titles, the *commedia all’italiana*, exploring the effects of the economic miracle and of the so-called Americanisation of society in Italy, is preferably set in Rome and does not pay particular attention to the southern part of the country. When it does, the image of the south is still confined to its rural dimension: a land of poor farmers almost untouched by the events of history and characterised by archaic laws and culture. As a result, pervasive phenomena induced by the fast-paced modernisation of the 1960s were largely ignored, such as the massive migration from the rural countryside to the major cities in the south and the consequent inordinate growth of the urban peripheries of the *mezzogiorno*. Moreover, the majority of the movies set in the *meridione* in the 1960s and 1970s were very commercial productions, quite far from the high standards offered by directors like Germi or Rosi. These movies started to fashion an image of the south that would please and appeal to a large international mass audience, thus

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278 Sciascia, *La corda pazza*, p.239.

279 See for example Said’s discussion of the accounts of the Orient given by British and French travellers in the nineteenth century in the chapter on ‘Pilgrims and Pilgrimages, British and French’: Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin 2003 [1978]), pp.166-201.

280 Mario Bolognari, ‘La Sicilia riflessa. Immagine e rappresentazione attraverso il cinema, la fotografia e la letteratura’, *Humanities*, III n. 6 (2014), 8-23; Moscati, p.121.



once again indulging in very stereotypical representations of the region in terms of either romanticisation, sexualisation or stigmatisation.<sup>281</sup>

It is interesting to note, as Moscati does, how the lack of deep engagement with the Italian south expressed by Italian cinema in the last two or three decades of the twentieth century coincides with the mutation of the public and wide-ranging debate started by *meridionalismo* at the beginning of the century into a rather narrow and specialised discussion conducted in purely economic terms. Those are the years of the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno*, a program of financial aid for the south that, because of a lack of clever management, turned out to be only an occasion for speculation and did not have a positive effect on igniting a virtuous mechanism of economic self-determination, let alone a cultural one.<sup>282</sup> The lack of self-awareness of the stereotypes that informed cinematic representations of the south in the post-war decades can also be said to be a characteristic of the productions of the eighties, when it is mostly television that takes the lead in representing the south in a series of television shows mostly dedicated to the mafia, such as the infamous *La piovra*.

In the early nineties, in line with a period of great social and political change<sup>283</sup> in Italy and in Europe in general, new representational trends start to emerge in Italian cinema that focused on issues of migration, transnational mobility, and cultural diversity. Many of the movies that can be said to belong to this trend have been able to cast a fresh look on the Italian south. Undoubtedly, since the nineties, Italian cinema has started to look at the south in new ways, focusing both on its history and on its new status as a border between ‘Fortress Europe’ and the global south, foregrounding the relationship between southerners and migrants and between internal and external forms of cultural and political marginalisation. In recent productions on and from the south, we see, for example, a profound engagement with themes related to the land, the homeland

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281 Moscati, p.123.

282 Moscati, p.124.

283 Besides the increase in the flows of migration to Italy, other factors that characterise the changing social and political landscape of the nineties are the birth and ascension to power of the openly xenophobic party the *Lega Nord*, the spread of a criminalising portrayal of migrants and migration in the Italian media, and the passing of discriminatory legislation to control the flows of migration with the introduction of *clandestinità* as a crime in the penal system.

and to internal and external borders, as well as to their role in the creation of a different Italian subjectivity.

A large group of scholars has approached this growing body of works from a variety of theoretical perspectives. According to Enrica Capussotti, contemporary representations of migration in Italy are very often marked by an attempt at connecting the past (the history of emigration and rural Italy) and the present (the new immigration to Italy) in ways that either reinforce traditional dichotomies (self-other, north-south, east-west) or challenge them. For Capussotti, movies that address the context of southern Italy are particularly apt to be innovative and blur binary thinking in their representations of southerners and migrants, because they very often tap into the specific history of the Italian south as ‘other’, by turning to the Mediterranean as a site of critique of partial and exclusionary conceptions of Italianness and Europeanness.<sup>284</sup> Nonetheless, with the analysis of her case studies, Capussotti underlines how the risk of essentialising (even if in a positive way) the other, of turning him/her into an idealised other, we could say using a formula that resonates with Sarah Ahmed’s discussion of ‘stranger fetishism’,<sup>285</sup> is always present and can reinforce ‘an idea of culture as static and homogeneous’,<sup>286</sup> saturating the space of expression in a way that hinders the self-expression and self-determination of difference. Moreover, in the case of contemporary southern Italian productions that deal with the issue of migration, a simple displacement, by way of analogy, of the subaltern position from the Italian emigrants of yesteryear to the new migrants attempting to reach the shores of Europe can actually conceal the differences between these two phenomena and downplay the importance of mutual interaction and inter-subjectivity. These are those processes of translation that take place at the border and that are indispensable for the creation of a new cultural paradigm.

In order to sharpen our understanding of how these movies challenge or reinforce codified ideas of self-other, and of the way in which they can foster new processes of identification, we would be better off looking at how they construct

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284 Enrica Capussotti, ‘Moveable Identities: Migration, Subjectivity and cinema in contemporary Italy’, *Modern Italy*, 14(1) (2009), 55–68.

285 Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.1-18.

286 Capussotti, p. 64.

race and gender at the intersection with Italianness and if and how they confront Italy's disavowed colonial past and post-colonial present. This is the attempt made by scholars like Derek Duncan and Áine O'Healy, who have analysed how contemporary Italian cinema deals with postcolonial questions and transnational issues, paying particular attention to gender and sexuality.

Derek Duncan has called for greater contextualization in the analysis of contemporary cinematic productions that explore the theme of migration to Italy, arguing that, very often, even when motivated by sympathetic intentions, contemporary cinematic representations of migrants construct migrant subjectivity as external to the nation. Like Capussotti, Duncan is wary of the potentially mystifying effects of any taken-for-granted analogy between past emigration from southern Italy and the new migration to Italy. He sees a focus on the bodily and embodied dimensions of experience as a strategy for understanding contemporary representations of inclusion/exclusion and for grounding the analysis of contemporary movies. Duncan highlights the problems with a too narrow and reifying conception of the nation that often informs traditional scholarship on Italian cinema and calls for a transnational turn that should be able to pay due attention to national and local histories of representation, while at the same time connecting them to forms of cinematic storytelling that are able to chart the changing landscape of Italian culture and identity.<sup>287</sup>

While pointing to the shortcomings of a national framework in analysing contemporary Italian cinema, Áine O'Healy also underlines the importance of considerations of the national as a necessary part of any sustained discussion of the transnational. Local contexts have traditions and histories of representations that come to bear on new efforts by contemporary directors, even when they tackle issues that are broader than the nation or when they aim for a hybridised aesthetic.<sup>288</sup> O'Healy also offers an insightful discussion of the valence and importance of the Mediterranean in contemporary cinematic representations of

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287 Derek Duncan, 'Italy's Postcolonial Cinema and its Histories of Representation', *Italian Studies*, 63(2) (2008), 195–211.

288 Áine O'Healy, 'Towards a Transnational Approach to the Study of Contemporary Italian Film', *The Italianist*, 34(2) (2014), 268–271 (269).

migration to Italy since the nineties, one that is worth summarising for the purposes of our discussion. O'Healy's methodology is particularly suitable for reading filmic texts 'against the grain', that is, going beyond the authorial intentions or the manifest content of the text, paying instead particular attention to what she calls the 'symptomaticity of cinematic representation'<sup>289</sup> that speaks to the underlying anxieties and fears accompanying the phenomenon of migration to Italy. Framing her discussion in historical terms, O'Healy sees in almost all of the movies she discusses an attempt at confronting this racist climate of the nineties by offering a sympathetic exploration of the hardships endured by migrants. In this attempt, some of the movies go as far as wanting to somehow incorporate the migrant's point of view as if telling the stories directly through their eyes. Even if animated by good intentions, this aesthetic choice can nonetheless lead to ethically shaky ground, oblivious as it is to the dangers inherent in any act of 'speaking for', something that Gayatri Spivak has cautioned us against in her powerful discussion of subalternity.<sup>290</sup> Such a danger is made even more present by the realistic codes employed in many of these movies; these are codes that tend to conceal, rather than thematise or make explicit, the act of representation. O'Healy further comments that it is somehow ironic in these movies that the southern part of Italy, which was the repository for massive waves of emigration from the late nineteenth century onwards and has been targeted throughout the history of the Italian nation as the backward part of the country, more akin to Africa than to Europe, the 'palla al piede' of Italy in the country's journey towards a full Europeanness, is now seen as the point of contact for migrants from the global south with 'fortress Europe', while southern Italians are very likely to be seen as white Europeans by migrants arriving in the south:

The racialization of southerners in the popular imagination [...] has been complicated by the recent influx of foreigners from distant points

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289 Áine O'Healy, 'Mediterranean Passages: Abjection and Belonging in Contemporary Italian Cinema', *California Italian Studies*, 1(1) (2010), 1-19 (p.2).

290 Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg eds, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 296-297.

of origin. In a changing global system where the West and the “rest” are mutually imbricated, fixed notions of identity have yielded to a more complex flow of identifications and exclusions.<sup>291</sup>

Although agreeing with O’Healy, I would be cautious in seeing this new ‘flow of identifications and exclusion’ as displacing entirely other frames of racialization. These can in fact be constantly reactivated, for example by xenophobic political groups, whenever the need and the political opportunity arises and for a variety of purposes, in so far as they have become part of the collective unconscious of the country. Certainly, southern Italy comes to inhabit a central position in the imaginary revolving around contemporary migration in Italy. In my view, this centrality can constitute an occasion for the re-emergence of the ‘questione meridionale’ at the forefront of the national consciousness after a period of being abandoned. As discussed earlier, the cultural aspects of the ‘southern question’ need to be kept alive as sites of debate in order for the question itself not to be completely disavowed in Italy’s collective memory and consciousness, a danger even more threatening in the face of the increasing diversity that constitutes the present of Italian multiculturalism. Analysing the contemporary cinematic production on or from the south that focuses on migration and mobility with the tools offered by contemporary critical theories can thus represent a new way to open up the ‘southern question’ once again and probe its contemporary dimension. Drawing on fields such as postcolonial studies, feminist and queer studies, and translation studies, I will try to understand in this chapter if and how the ‘transnational’ trend in Italian cinema offers a novel representation of southern Italy and, hence, if and how it can be said to forge new venues of subjectivation for individuals and groups differently positioned across lines of class, race, gender and sexuality.

In order to answer this research question, in the remaining part of this chapter, I will follow the leitmotif constituted by the representation of southern Italy, of southern Italians, or of migrants in the south in contemporary Italian cinema. My aim is to understand if and how the most recent Italian cinematic

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291 O’Healy, ‘Mediterranean Passages’, p.5.

production goes beyond the merely analogical comparison between older and more recent forms of migration and if it introduces significant innovation in the representation of the south when compared with the tradition of post-war Italian cinema. I will start my discussion with the analysis of a recent movie by the Sicilian director Emanuele Crialese, *Terraferma* (2011). In my reading, *Terraferma* can be said to appropriate the experience of the migrants in some ways, even as it tries to scrutinise the marginality experienced by southern Italians in the present. In the final section, I will discuss two movies that can be said instead to offer an alternative to the appropriation of difference: in *Via Castellana Bandiera*, directed by Emma Dante, and in *Mediterranea*, directed by Jonas Carpignano, we can identify more ethical and inclusive strategies for imagining and implementing the politics of a hybrid, multilingual, southern Italian subjectivity.

### **Race and Gender in Emanuele Crialese's *Terraferma* (2011)**

In Emanuele Crialese's third feature film, *Terraferma* (2011), the arrival of African migrants by boat on the shore of a small Sicilian island reminiscent of Lampedusa<sup>292</sup> causes social tensions already present in the island's society to escalate. The movie opens with an underwater shot of the fishing boat on which Filippo, the young boy who is the film's protagonist, and his grandfather, Ernesto, are preparing to cast the nets; the intricate web of the nets slowly fills the frame and seems at the same time to entangle the camera and to segment the vast body of water. Such a metaphorical introduction, functioning as a prologue to the story, can lead us to think that the movie intends to be an exploration of the complex mechanisms that regulate the differential mobility of people at the

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292 The film was actually shot in Linosa, not far from Lampedusa, but no explicit reference is made in the film's diegesis to a precise location.

southern border of Europe and of Italy. Such an attempt should take into consideration different elements of subjectivity, given the fact that, as Étienne Balibar reminds us, borders and frontiers have a multiple, polysemic and heterogeneous nature, since they perform a variety of functions of ‘demarcation and territorialisation’<sup>293</sup> that produce effects that are not experienced by individuals belonging to different social groups in the same way.<sup>294</sup>

The movie explores different tensions and difficulties facing the inhabitants of the small island. The traditional activity of fishing on which the economy of the society rested is now proving to be insufficient to support the community, and more and more people, including Ernesto’s son (Filippo’s uncle), Nino, have turned to tourism as a way of making their living, even if this means changing traditional lifestyles. Giulietta, Filippo’s mother, decides to repaint the family’s house and to rent it out to tourists for the summer. Filippo’s grandfather is urged by Nino to demolish the family’s trawler in order to cash in on a government prize, which the older man refuses to do. Giulietta considers going away from the island, to Sicily, and taking Filippo with her. In this volatile situation, the arrival of the African migrants, already somehow anticipated by the opening scene, seems to pit the community’s ethos against the laws of the Italian state. When Filippo and Ernesto, while fishing offshore, come across a boat of African migrants stranded in the sea, they contact the local police via radio and are told not to get close to them and not to take any of them on board. Disobeying the authorities, Ernesto and Filippo decide to take a few migrants on board, among them a pregnant woman and her young son. This decision will move the story forward, as different characters in the community react differently to the arrival of African migrants and employ different strategies to cope with the laws that prohibit them from helping the migrants.<sup>295</sup> Sara, the pregnant African woman whom Filippo and Ernesto have rescued, and her young son are offered

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293 Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. by Christine Jones, James Swenson and Chris Turner, (London: Verso, 2002), pp.75-86 (p.79).

294 *ibid.*

295 The law that regulated migration to Italy until 2013, the so called *legge Bossi-Fini*, from the names of the two ministers who had devised it, included sanctions against the Italian population if they helped migrants. The law introduced the crime of ‘immigrazione clandestina’, which transformed what was previously considered to be a minor offence (not carrying documents) into a penal crime. See Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-Persone: l’ esclusione dei migranti in una società globale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2006), pp.7-22.

shelter by Giulietta and Filippo. Giulietta helps Sara deliver her newborn child, a little girl, but is firm in urging the woman to leave their house after she has recovered and is also tempted to denounce her presence to the police. Ernesto, on the other hand, does not have any doubt about the fact that sheltering Sara and her children and helping them avoid getting caught by the police is the right thing to do. Nino is kept in the dark about Sara because of his vocal and unsympathetic views on helping migrants. Filippo is torn and uncertain until the very end of the movie, when he decides that helping Sara is the right thing to do.

Graziella Parati has looked at what she calls migrant writing in Italy as a locus of articulation of critical views on laws on migration that try to restrict the freedom of migrants to move and to settle. According to Parati, literature written by migrant authors in Italy offers a different image of migrants to the one fashioned by criminalising laws and uses the host language in order to create ‘representations that challenge the text of the law and its finality in shaping the limiting roles that the immigrant can embody’.<sup>296</sup> Parati interprets the presence in contemporary migration writing in Italian of migrant characters who are also criminals as a way of challenging the conditions of entrance and acceptance into Italian society that the Bossi-Fini law ratifies.<sup>297</sup> Similarly, *Terraferma* creates a representation that takes to task existing laws on migration and ‘talks back’ to the criminalisation of both migrants and of those Italians who decide to help them. Nonetheless, the representation of migrants in Italy is very different from the one found in the texts described by Parati, texts that ‘script the crime of breaking and entering into Italian culture’.<sup>298</sup> In *Terraferma*, in fact, entrance into Italy and into Italian culture seems to be only possible through the mediation of white Italians and seems to be dependent on the migrant subject occupying a position of weakness, victimhood and endurance. Moreover, the act of ‘talking back’ in Crialesse’s movie seems to follow a highly gendered pattern and to re-inforce normative conceptions of gender.

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296 Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2005), p.176.

297 Parati, p.177.

298 *ibid.*



In her recent discussion of Crialese's cinema, Elena Past employs the insights of materialist ecocriticism in order to show how the image of the Italian south in Crialese's movies does not reinforce picturesque representations of the *mezzogiorno*, but is rather a depiction where the Mediterranean region constitutes a 'generative space that participates in the very process of constituting the narratives'<sup>299</sup> of the movies in ways that undermine the centrality and exceptionalism of the human and thus challenge structures of racist, species-ist and sexist domination. Referring to the specific qualities of the Mediterranean landscape where ecosystems have been evolving together with humans in mutual interaction for almost ten centuries, Past sees in the concept of Mediterranean cinema a theoretical move that could help film criticism avoid the strictures of the national framework.<sup>300</sup> Undermining the opposition between nature and the human, the depiction of the southern border of Italy in Crialese's movie is, according to Past, able to go beyond the binary oppositions backwardness/progress, wild/cultivated, which very often accompany the imaginary of the frontiers, thus offering 'a polemical position regarding "frontiers" '.<sup>301</sup> According to Past, *Terraferma* accomplishes such a goal especially through its insistence on representing human characters in the midst of the natural landscape (especially underwater) but rarely occupying the centre of the frame, and by focusing on those natural borders where the sea and the land interweave as integrated spaces where human actions and stories also occur.<sup>302</sup> While Past's discussion of the movie offers an interesting analysis of how *Terraferma* manages to challenge 'fixed notions of [...] ecological identity',<sup>303</sup> I would take issue with her idea that Crialese's movie also challenges fixed notions of nation and selfhood. Since *Terraferma* is not in fact able to successfully de-centre the hegemonic gaze in its representation of race and gender, it becomes untenable to affirm that the movie can encapsulate a hybrid and non-homogeneous notion of nationhood and subjectivity. In my analysis of

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299 Elena Past, 'Island Hopping, Liquid Materiality, and the Mediterranean Cinema of Emanuele Crialese', *Ecozon@*, vol4. No.2, (2013), 49-66 (49).

300 Past, p.51.

301 Past, p.53.

302 Past, p.58-60.

303 Past, p.58.

*Terraferma*, I will show how the representation of gender and race in the movie re-inscribes sexual difference in a normative way, constructs a heteronormative representation of southern Italian masculinity via a problematic notion of ‘authenticity’, and apprehends race as a ‘testing ground’ for white masculinity, albeit a non-hegemonic one.<sup>304</sup>

How *Terraferma* reinforces traditional images of masculinity is evident if we analyse and compare the two characters of Ernesto and Nino. Ernesto and Nino offer two different models of masculinity and of southern Italian masculinity in particular and they are somehow contrasted and opposed in the film. They are in fact the two male role models that Filippo, whose father died at sea three years before the film is set, is able to follow on his journey of self-discovery and maturation. Indeed, *Terraferma* is also a coming-of-age story whose protagonist, Filippo, has to renounce his Oedipal attachment to the mother in order to access a position of full individuality, subjectivity and masculinity. Ernesto and Nino thus come to embody two very different models of masculinity on which Filippo will draw in his search for maturity and full manhood, and the movie seems to obviously present Ernesto as a far better model than Nino for Filippo. When we first see Ernesto and Nino meet, at the beginning of the movie, we see Ernesto speaking to Nino from on board his boat, which is aground offshore, lifted on a hoist, and dominating the scene. The large close-up of the two men talking, an upwards tilt shot, endows Ernesto with a sense of dignified authority and makes clear from the very beginning the different roles the two characters will have in the development of the story. Ernesto also embodies a model of masculinity that is presented as more generally fit for an ‘authentic’ southern Italian masculinity.<sup>305</sup> Ernesto's character is the epitome of the positive values of tradition and morality; he never doubts his decision to help Sara and such self-assured determination is presented as springing from his respect and knowledge of what the movie calls the ‘law of the sea’. This law prescribes that

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304 On the concept of hegemonic masculinity and for an analysis of the social organization of masculinity in specific western contexts see: Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

305 This feature can also be seen quite clearly if we take into consideration the extra-diegetic personality of the actor cast to play Ernesto. The member of a very well known family of artists of traditional Sicilian puppet theatre, Mimmo Cuticchio reinforces with his presence in the movie the link between traditions, authenticity and moral value.

fishermen never leave a man at sea, but it is also charged with general values of reciprocity, altruism and human fraternity in the film, which opposes it with the law of the state regarding migration. Past refers to this idea of the ‘law of the sea’ as an indicator of a post-humanist ethos in Crialesse’s movie, which acknowledges the inter-dependence and the simultaneous coming into being of ‘humans and more-than-humans’.<sup>306</sup> Ernesto's ability to tell right from wrong also comes from his connection to the land, the sea, the rhythms of nature and of human activities connected to nature, which, in the movie, is reminiscent of a pagan, pre-Christian form of spirituality. Later in the diegesis, Ernesto is, for example, shown fixing the propeller of the family's fishing trawler, which has been damaged by the collision with the wooden piece of the sunk migrants' boat, in a warehouse carved into the volcanic rocks of the island. Sparks and glints of fire surround him in a way that is reminiscent of the myth of the Roman God, Vulcan, the god of fire, volcanoes, and of metalworking, considered to be the forger of unbeatable weapons and to be living inside the Etna volcano.



Figure 1: Ernesto (Mimmo Cuticchio) in *Terraferma* (00.23.36)

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306 Past, p.59.

Notwithstanding the god-like status granted to the character in this scene, Ernesto is also very human; he in fact suffers from heart-related problems, the nature of which he should ascertain through a trip to a hospital on the mainland, a trip that Ernesto refuses to take, as he does not want to leave his island. Given these representational strategies, Ernesto's character embodies a type of southern Italian masculinity firmly rooted in a rather static view of tradition and based on a somewhat essentialist notion of 'authenticity'. As some contemporary debates in the field of anthropology suggest, the very act of laying claim to authenticity is fraught with problems and can potentially contribute to reifying the conception of a culture.<sup>307</sup> Authenticity as a synonym for 'true self', as transcendence in the interior realm is a key concept of western modernity, and it often goes hand in hand with the idea of discovering and perfecting one's authenticity in those parts of the globe untouched by modernity, among uncorrupted 'natives'.<sup>308</sup> As many anthropologists of tourism have pointed out, such an exoticised and romanticised notion of authenticity, immune to and unadulterated by modernity, rests at the core of much of today's mass tourism.<sup>309</sup> In making an appeal, through Ernesto's characterization, to such a notion of authenticity, of an 'authentic', original and clearly circumscribed culture, *Terraferma* ends up falling into those same mechanisms of reification of culture that, as is evident from the ironic and occasionally grotesque depictions of mass tourism in the film, it makes a point of criticizing. Moreover, the movie sets in place a series of binary oppositions in which authenticity, originality and tradition are endowed with a natural, essential and a-historical quality and, as we will see, they are aligned with masculinity and posited at the polar opposite of modernity.

Contrary to Ernesto, Nino is shown to be a negative role model for Filippo and for southern Italian masculinity. Nino is in fact eager to abandon the island's traditions in order to make profit from the fact that the island has become a tourist destination for two months a year. His suggestion that Ernesto sells the family's

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307 Dimitrios Thedossopoulos, 'Laying Claim to Authenticity: Five Anthropological Dilemmas', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 86 (2) (2013), 337-360.

308 Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

309 Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999 [1976]), Edward Bruner, *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

boat so they can receive a government prize and use it to start a more successful commercial venture catering to tourists is firmly and stubbornly opposed by Ernesto. Nino's unsympathetic stance towards the migrant comes to the foreground in a scene where the fishermen of the island are discussing a common strategy for resisting the law that prohibits them from helping migrants at sea. Affirming that the migrants' arrival is 'bad publicity' and it could have the effect of turning tourists away from the island, Nino makes clear his unsympathetic stance towards the suffering of the migrants and is promptly reprimanded by Ernesto. The kind of masculinity attributed to Nino is a way to alienate the audience's sympathies from him and to construct him as a negative role model for Filippo. Nino's masculinity is in fact characterised as hyper-masculine and feminized at the same time, through the use of clothing and objects (the motorcycle, the sunglasses, his tight and modern clothes, which stand in contrast to the other characters' more traditional clothing). Nino is without doubt the most overtly sexualised male character in the movie and this ambiguous sexualisation is a way of alienating him from the audience's sympathy and potential identification. The feminization of Nino's character reaches its highest point through nudity and displaying the character's naked body. This is evident in a scene where Nino is taking the tourists on a trip around the island. Standing on the bow of the boat with his back to the sea, he performs a dance for the entertainment of the tourists, wearing only a very small and quirky swimsuit with a stuffed toy cock's head sewn onto it. Filippo's nudity, his being at the same time sexualised and ridiculed, rendered both hyper-masculine and feminine, is associated in the movie with the self-objectification that southerners make of their own 'authentic' culture and of their land and territory for the benefit of tourists.



Figure 2: Nino (Giuseppe Fiorello) dances for the tourists in *Terraferma* (00.54.33)

In his analysis of Matteo Garrone's film *Gomorra*, based on the novel by Roberto Saviano, Marcello Messina suggests that the sexualisation of the male bodies of the young *camorristi* and the queer desires that it elicits serves the purpose of stigmatising these characters and their world-view for an audience that is imagined to be heterosexual, thus aligning queerness with immoral and illicit behaviour and preventing the identification of a queer (southern Italian) subject.<sup>310</sup> Being aware of the risks posed by those 'cheering fictions' to which Hanif Kureishi refers in the context of the creative self-representation of black experience in the United Kingdom,<sup>311</sup> I believe it necessary to keep an eye out for those positive identifications that lack complexity and engagement. Nonetheless, an argument similar to the one made by Messina for *Gomorra* can be also valid for *Terraferma*, where Nino's queerness, his ambiguous sexualisation, seems to be only a stigmatizing strategy and to align an 'authentic southernness' with the appropriate male heterosexuality embodied by Ernesto. Moreover, as I will try to show through an analysis of the portrayal of black

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310 Marcello Messina, 'Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra*. A Politically Incorrect Use of Neapolitan Identities and Queer Masculinities?', *gender\sexuality\italy*, 1 (2015), 179-187.

311 Quoted in Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *Race, Culture and Difference*, ed. by James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage, 1988), pp.252-260 (pp.259-260).

femininity, the movie also aligns southern Italianness with a sort of heroic heterosexual whiteness, albeit a non-hegemonic one.

In her analysis of how contemporary Italian cinema has represented black female migrant characters, Àine O'Healy sees blackness not as a self-evident physical fact but as the outcome of complex social and historical mechanisms with specific histories of representation that have to be retrieved in order to gain a nuanced understanding of today's images of black femininity.<sup>312</sup> In the case of Sara, the cipher of her character seems to be that of victimhood and suffering. While the aim of such a representation is without doubt to spur interest and emotional compassion towards the character and towards the phenomenon of migration, such a representation deprives her character of any form of agency and can reveal the presence of a patriarchal logic at work in *Terraferma's* Oedipal narrative. Using tools drawn from psychoanalysis and narratology, Teresa de Lauretis argues that the Oedipal narrative that subtends the majority of the texts of western culture includes women and female characters only as objects to be rescued, saved or protected by a male hero, who is thus able to prove his worth and secure a position of full subjecthood and manhood.<sup>313</sup> Contrary to the tradition of representation of African women in the Italian public sphere described by O'Healy, Sara's character is not sexualised in *Terraferma* in ways that are reminiscent of fascist colonial propaganda or of today's multicultural consumption of difference as a commodity; nonetheless, the exploration of the character is only limited to Sara's traumatic experiences of migration. Sara's position in the narrative as first and foremost a victim is evident in the numerous close-ups of her face with which the character is very often shot: her eyes always wet from tears and a despondent look on her face. The objective correlative seems to be one of Crialesse's favourite rhetorical devices: very often, the camera lingers on an object in long takes that aestheticise it and endow it with an evocative, almost metaphorical, quality. This is the case, for example, for the initial close-up of the cast nets, and, in the course of the movie, we see many objects being

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312 Àine O'Healy, '[Non] è una somala. Deconstructing African femininity in Italian film', *The Italianist*, 29 (2009), 175-198.

313 Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp.103-157.

included in the narration in a similar way (Ernesto's dilapidated boat, for example, or a plank of a sunk boat). The way Crialesi uses this rhetorical device shows all of its limitations when the object of the frame becomes the face of the African woman: the narrow close-up of Sara's anguished face, especially if put in relation to a different but similar framing of a statue of Mary at the bottom of the sea, imposes on her character a surplus of interpretation that makes her story almost co-extensive with something like 'universal sorrow', in a way obliterating the character's specific experience, which in fact finds very little space in the overall development of the story.



Figure 3: Sara (Timnit T.). The black woman's face as objective correlative (00.41.37)

In a scene where Sara, Giulietta and Filippo gather around a globe, Sara tells the two that she comes from Somalia, one of the African countries colonised by Italians; she then asks Giulietta to point to her on the globe the island where they are and Giulietta answers in dismay that 'they are not on the map'. While Sara is shown to be from a former Italian colony, the telling of her past experiences is only limited to the suffering she has endured, especially at the hands of African men, during her journey from Somalia to Libya and then in Libya where she was detained for years. Besides the fleeting reference to Somalia being Sara's country of origin, no reference is made to Italy's colonial rule or to the history and culture



of Somalia. In this scene, the possibility of mutual understanding between southern Italians and migrants seems to spring only from an alleged common marginality and not from a mutual engagement with each other's cultures and intertwined histories. The fact that Sara speaks Italian, for example, is not thematised and explained in the film in any way. As Áine O'Healy has noted, notwithstanding the presence in the movie of different social groups (including tourists from northern Italy), the focus of the narrative remains fixed on the problems, issues, and ethical challenges that the inhabitants of the island have to face.<sup>314</sup> Moreover, in line with a consolidated practice in many recent Italian movies on migration, where the migrant characters seem to fulfil a narrative function of 'catalyst for the transformation of Italian protagonists',<sup>315</sup> Sara's presence in the text seems to only serve the function of presenting the Italian protagonists with a chance for a personal journey of self-discovery.

In her classic essay 'Can the subaltern speak?', Gayatri Spivak coined the phrase 'white men saving brown women from brown men'<sup>316</sup> to describe one of the most common cultural narratives that underlie and justify relations of colonial domination, while at the same time silencing the voices of native women in the colonial context, women whose experiences are appropriated by different constituencies for different purposes that are distant from their own interests. By refusing to allow Sara more space in the film's narrative and refusing to connect her experiences of migration to the history of Italian colonial domination in any nuanced way, *Terraferma* fails to problematise Italy's relationship with its experience of colonialism. The movie thus subscribes to the kind of narrative delineated by Spivak and performs the kind of silencing embedded in it. Casting Sara only in the position of victim, her silencing is precisely what permits the Oedipal narrative to unfold: by rescuing the black woman at the end of the movie, Filippo is able to access a position of full subjecthood and proper masculinity.<sup>317</sup> Thus, southern Italian subjectivity is aligned with a certain paternalistic

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314 Áine O'Healy, 'Imagining Lampedusa', in *Italian Mobilities*, ed. by Ruth Behn-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom (London-New York: Routledge, 2016), pp.152-174 (p.159).

315 O'Healy, 'Imagining Lampedusa', p.159.

316 Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', p.296-297.

317 Moreover, Filippo is able to prove worthy of the love and attention of his love interest, a girl from northern Italy who has come to spend the summer on the island. What does this storyline say about the fraught relationship between southern and northern Italy?

whiteness. Moreover, by deploying queer desire and the sexualisation of the male body as a tool for stigmatizing unsympathetic views towards migration to Italy, the movie also aligns southern Italian subjectivity with heteronormative masculinity. Despite the film's well-intentioned attempt at sensitizing the audience to the sufferings endured by migrants, *Terraferma* fails at re-imagining southern Italy as a place where meaningful exchange and experimentation at the level of culture, gender and sexuality can take place.

Notwithstanding the attempt *Terraferma* makes to articulate a polemical position regarding frontiers, the movie does not succeed in elaborating a thorough and multi-layered criticism that would account for the heterogeneity and polysemic quality of the southern border and to be a text that 'crosses the frontiers between gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and class'.<sup>318</sup> The movie is not able to explore and to intercept the localization of complex mechanisms of change and hybridization that are already happening, and to initiate a dialogue with the processes of subjectivation of those 'new ethnicities' in the making that Stuart Hall has analysed in the context of the United Kingdom. As will become more evident in the discussion of the two next case studies, more decidedly non-realist aesthetic choices or collaborative practices at various levels of production can offer new tools for de-centring the hegemonic gaze on the southern border.

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318 Hall, 'New Ethnicities', p.260.

## **Queering the Southern Border: Challenges to Italian Homonationalism in Emma Dante's *Via Castellana Bandiera* (2013)**

Throughout the long history of the othering of the Italian south, notions about gender and sexuality have been instrumental and have served quite an important ideological and biopolitical function. As we have seen in the introduction, research on gender history and on the history of sexuality in Italy has contributed significantly towards gaining a more nuanced understanding of processes of 'othering' of the south in Europe and in Italy from the nineteenth century onwards. 'Perversions' and 'abnormal' sexual and gender behaviour were associated with those regions and parts of the world that were seen as inferior and backward. In the works of criminal anthropologists like Niceforo and Ferrero around the time of unification and in the following decades, 'perversion', 'effeminacy' and sexual immorality were increasingly associated with southern Italy and local gender and sexual identities and behaviours, like the *femminiella* in Naples or the idea, apparently quite common in some regions and social *milieux* of the south, that homosexuality was a normal part of male adolescents' sexual maturation into proper adult heterosexuality, were seen as proof of degeneracy and of a north-south difference.<sup>319</sup>

Ironically, later progressive historians of sexuality in the 1960s and 1970s also relied on a teleological view and linear model of sexuality in the construction of their accounts, usually positing a progression from sexual repression in the past to modern sexual liberation in the present. This is evident, for example, in Giovanni Dall'Orto's discussion of what he calls 'Mediterranean homosexuality';<sup>320</sup> Dall'Orto, a prominent gay activist, constructs the Mediterranean homosexual as a residual 'constitutive opposite' of the 'modern', northern gay man, who is to be the political subject of gay liberation. In setting

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319 Beccalossi, pp.190-191.

320 Dall'Orto, 'Mediterranean homosexuality', pp.796-798.

up this binary opposition, Dall'Orto reiterates the teleological, linear model of earlier commentators on southern sexuality, *de facto* excluding more local and less normative forms of expression of gender and sexuality from a political horizon.<sup>321</sup> It might very well be that there are in the south local forms of expression, codification and embodiments of gender and sexuality, but they are certainly not to be considered as a less developed stage of the modern homosexual. Even more recent and allegedly less partisan accounts of non-heterosexual subjectivities, such as the large sociological study by Marzio Barbagli and Asher Colombo, reproduce this teleological view and problematic idea of 'sexual modernity', by positing a complete break between the 'modern homosexual' of today and the homosexual of a recent and less recent past.<sup>322</sup> This framework sees sexuality as a single issue and constructs a backward/modern binary, which, as I have tried to show using the specific case of southern Italy, has a long genealogy.

Of course, this binary is probably felt with higher degrees of intensity today in discourses that oppose modern western secular society and what Jin Haritaworn calls the image of the 'homophobic Muslim'. Haritaworn underlines how the homophobic Muslim has become 'a new folk devil who joins an older archive of crime, violence, patriarchy',<sup>323</sup> in a context where 'the innocent and respectable queer subject who is worthy of intimacy, protection and safe space is born [...] against a backdrop of war, imperial rescue, violent borders, criminalization'.<sup>324</sup> This process is part of what Jasbir Puar and others after her have called homonationalism, a conceptual frame developed in order to understand 'the complexities of how "acceptance" and "tolerance" for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for

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321 For a more detailed discussion of Dall'Orto's exclusionary account of Mediterranean Homosexuality see Goffredo Polizzi, *Postcoloniality and the Italian South: Race, Gender, Sexuality, Literature*, (unpublished master's dissertation, Utrecht University - Granada University, 2013), pp.34-37.

322 This has also been noted by Derek Duncan, *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality, a case of possible difference* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p.72.

323 Jin Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p.3.

324 *ibid.*

national sovereignty is evaluated'.<sup>325</sup> When looking at the specificities of the Italian case, one could at first glance be quite doubtful of the convenience of speaking of homonationalism in Italy, in the absence of an institutional discourse that proclaims itself to be anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic and to want to defend LGBT subjects against sexism and homophobia, seen as forces external to the nation. Nonetheless, some scholars and activists have noticed in the Italian case, exactly *in absentia* of an institutional endorsement, a sort of drive towards a nationalist inclusion from below, that is, coming directly from LGBT subjects and from LGBT organisations and mainstream political groups.<sup>326</sup> On the occasion of the recent passing of the law on same-sex civil unions in Italy, the so called *legge Cirinnà*, the campaigns and rhetorical strategies put forward by the mainstream LGBT associations of the country have shown a subtle but evident degree of nationalism and racism.<sup>327</sup> This is consistent with a neoliberal strategy that tends to include LGBT subjects and to grant them some rights only in so far as they are willing to enter into a nationalist framework that can be easily used in order to legitimate long-standing ideas of 'advanced' versus 'backward' cultures and hence justify the implementation of political measures based on those assumptions, especially regarding migration and foreigners, but also the economy. Many recent movies and novels that focus on southern Italy, on southern and/or migrant characters, and on the south as the border of Europe in the context of global migration employ representations of queerness in ways that are quite pivotal, and that can be looked at in connection with these homonationalist discourses and with the long history of the sexual politics of the Othering of the Italian south and of the global south. As we have seen, *Terraferma* constructs a series of binary oppositions that re-inscribe sexual difference in a normative way and can be said to offer a heteronormative representation of southernness. In quite a different way, Emma Dante's film *Via Castellana Bandiera* (2013) explores the imaginary related to queerness and its connection to questions of migration

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325 Jasbir Puar, 'Rethinking Homonationalism', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 45 (2013), 336-339 (p.336).

326 Elisa Arfini ad others, 'Tempo di essere incivili. Una riflessione terrena sull'omonazionalismo in Italia al tempo dell'austerità', in *Il genere tra neoliberalismo e neofondamentalismo*, ed.by Federico Zappino (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2016), pp.61-73.

327 *ibid.*

and nationhood in order to offer a complex representation of southernness that takes into account the interaction of these multiple discourses at a subjective level.

*Via Castellana Bandiera* is the first feature film by the established theatre director Emma Dante. Born in Palermo and raised in Catania and Palermo, Dante first pursued a career as an actress, attending the Silvio D'Amico academy in Rome and working with renowned personalities of Italian theatre, such as Cesare Ronconi and Gabriele Vacis. At the end of the nineties, Dante made the decision to become a director in her own right and to move back to the south. In 1999, in Palermo, she founded the compagnia *Sud Costa Occidentale*, a name that makes clear the commitment to put 'In primo piano il Sud, la nostra lingua, le nostre storie, e poi, specificato, quale sud: la costa occidentale della Sicilia',<sup>328</sup> and hence the attempt to encompass both a general and a more localized notion of the south. The movie, produced by a variety of institutional and private partners, was adapted by Dante and the writers Giorgio Vasta and Licia Eminentissimi from a novel of the same name published by Dante in 2008. The action in the movie takes place in Palermo, mostly in the street that gives the movie its title, and in a temporal arch encompassing roughly half a day and a night. At the beginning, the movie follows two distinct sets of characters: Rosa and Clara, the 'modern' lesbian couple, and the Calafiore family. Rosa, a native of Palermo who left the city years earlier, and Clara, her non-Sicilian partner, who works as an illustrator, are travelling to Sicily by car on a hot summer's day, arriving in Palermo from Rome to attend a friend's wedding. While the two are having an argument and are almost on the verge of breaking up, they lose their way and find themselves in a narrow street in the north-western periphery of Palermo: via Castellana Bandiera. Here they find themselves head to head with another car, bursting at the seams with the Calafiore family, and driven by an older woman, Samira. Earlier in the film, Samira is shown tending to the tomb of her daughter, who has died of cancer at 36. After leaving the cemetery, Samira goes to a nearby beach to pick up the rest of the family, composed of her bossy son-in-law Saro, her grandson Nicolò, and the sons Saro had from his first marriage and their wives and children. They drive back to their home in via Castellana Bandiera, but when

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328 Andrea Porcheddu, *Palermo Dentro. Il teatro di Emma Dante* (Genova: Zona, 2006), p.42.

they have almost arrived at their destination, they are blocked by Rosa's car trying to pass through. At this point, neither Rosa nor Samira is willing to budge and to let the other car pass through the narrow road. They both turn off their engines and wait. Eyeing each other across their dusty windshields, the two women engage in a sort of duel to see who will give up first and give way to the other. While Saro and the Calafiore family get out of the car and go home, Samira decides to stay in the car waiting for Rosa to lose her patience and eventually let her pass. Similarly, Clara does not see the point of the stand-off and decides to go and look for food with Nicolò, who consents to going with her to the city while Rosa does not leave her car. Rosa and Samira spend the night challenging each other across the short distance that divides them, engaged in a silent dialogue: they both refuse, emphatically and defiantly, to eat and drink, and they both refuse to listen to the people around them and to their advice, completely absorbed by the duel taking place between them.

In the meantime, the men of the Calafiore family, together with the Neapolitan 'magliaro' Filippo Mangiapane, try to turn the situation to their profit by organizing a betting pool among the neighbours on who will back off first. They will convince their neighbours to bet on Samira resisting the longest, but will convince the old woman to eventually let Rosa pass through, so as to cash in on their bets. Their plan is destined to backfire, as Samira will stubbornly refuse to comply with what her family urges her to do. Eventually, both Rosa and Samira seem to be falling asleep in their cars. Shortly after Rosa wakes up, at the crack of dawn, it becomes clear that Samira is not sleeping. She is in fact dead in the car where she has locked herself in. Samira's death ends the stand-off: while the Calafiore family and other inhabitants of the street try to force open Samira's car, Clara and Rosa reverse their car and finally go away. Once their car is not there to hold it, Samira's vehicle, with the handbrake off, starts sliding down the road faster and faster, with Samira's body in it. The Calafiore family tries desperately but ineffectively to stop Samira's car. The last long scene consists of a still frame of the via Castellana Bandiera with the inhabitants of the street running through it and then exiting the frame as if chasing Samira's car, while a song by the composers Fratelli Macaluso, the only piece of music in the whole movie, is played in the background. How does the movie confront or complicate the

discourses of the south as backward through the exploration of ethnicity, sexuality and gender? How does it fit in the discourse that removes the queer subject from the political and cultural horizon of the south while dovetailing it with modernity, with ‘civiltà’ (this is the word most used in the campaigns at the time of the *legge Cirinnà*),<sup>329</sup> with Europe and the north? Rosa’s positioning in this regard is quite interesting. Rosa is in fact a native of Palermo, which she left many years before the start of the narrative and from which she has tried to distance herself physically and emotionally. The very fact of being back in her city of origin is for Rosa a reason for distress and emotional conflict. In the opening dialogue between Rosa and Clara, the movie foregrounds the unresolved nature of Rosa’s relationship with her city, her mother, whom she does not want to see (the movie hints at the fact that Rosa’s mother might be unaware or disapproving of her homosexuality), and her southern belonging in general. Rosa’s upward social mobility has followed a south to north physical trajectory that Rosa’s character is not willing to retrace in reverse. The motivations behind Rosa’s decision to engage in the duel with Samira once she finds herself in via Castellana Bandiera are not easy to make out in any straightforward way. The movie certainly suggests that the confrontation with Samira becomes for Rosa a confrontation with her own self. This is evident in the many points at which the camera, hand-held behind Rosa, giving the spectators the illusion of being somehow seated in the back, shows Samira, across the two windshields that divide the two, but it also shows, in the rear-view mirror, the reflection of Rosa’s eyes looking at Samira. The insistence on different versions of this shot suggests, through the symbolism of the mirror and the reflection, the theme of identity/alterity.

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329 Arfini and others, p.67.





Figures 4 and 5: Rosa (Emma Dante) and Samira (Elena Cotta) looking at each other (00.34.26; 00.59.30)

Certainly, the confrontation Rosa has with herself has a lot to do with her unresolved, complex and conflicted relationship with her southern origins. This comes to the fore in a scene later in the movie at the end of the night, when Rosa and Clara in the car have a moment of reconciliation and tenderness. Rosa tells Clara that she has already been in that part of the city: as a child, she used to wander off to what was then almost countryside, devoid of buildings and houses,

in order to calm herself when she was angry. The movie thus alludes to the history of the unruly growth of the peripheries of major southern cities like Palermo in the 1960s and 1970s, when the high amount of internal migration from the country and from smaller cities to the major urban centres determined the fast and unsatisfactorily planned creation of new neighbourhoods, which soon fell into urban decay and where a new urban proletariat in dire conditions was located.<sup>330</sup> This explanation serves as an illustration of Rosa's motivations in engaging in the duel with Samira and it bridges the private and the public, the individual and the collective, the centre and the periphery, by inserting the history of internal migration into the core of the individual's concerns. The present degradation of the western periphery of Palermo and the memory of how the place used to be, the sense of a commonality of a shared space, somehow prevents Rosa from letting go of what could be read only as a petty row over street precedence.



Figure 6: The view from the end of the narrow street in *Via Castellana Bandiera* (00.35.22)

This reawakened and conflictual sense of belonging to the south that Rosa's character has to come to terms with is signalled with even more force with the use of linguistic code-switching in what constitutes a veritable moment of

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330 Bevilacqua, pp.113-117.

denouement of the narrative of the duel. The inhabitants of the street call Rosa ‘Tischi-Toschi’, the derogatory term used in the dialect of Palermo to refer to people who speak Italian or to people who speak Italian without a southern accent; in one of the initial scenes, she is also shown addressing a man who is speaking to her in dialect saying in Italian that she ‘doesn’t understand a thing’. Later on, almost at the end of the night, Rosa looks at Samira, who has fallen asleep in the car in front of her. Rosa wakes Samira up by flashing her with her headlights and pushing her car with her front bumper. When Samira wakes up, Rosa, as if she was speaking to the older woman, says to herself ‘Io sugnu chiù corna dura di tia... capisti?’ , using the dialect from Palermo.

Rosa’s southern belonging is, then, a queering and troubling element, something that stands in the way of attaining and fashioning for herself a homosexual identity inflected by neoliberal values and thus defined by ‘a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption’, as Lisa Duggan describes one of the sexual politics of neoliberalism that she terms *new homonormativity*.<sup>331</sup> How the movie hints towards this queering element that southern belongings seem to be able to affect can also be seen in another scene where the use of translation is particularly revealing. Clara has decided to go looking for food and Nicolò, Samira’s nephew, has offered to take her to the city on his moped. The theme of translation is introduced at the beginning of the scene, when Nicolò starts speaking Palermitan to Clara and then switches to Italian when she says she does not understand. While waiting for their food to be prepared, Clara and Nicolò take a stroll on a street overlooking the city’s port and have a conversation where Clara reveals to Nicolò’s that she is Rosa’s girlfriend:

Nicolò: Sei fidanzata?

Clara: Sì.

Nicolò: È un bel ragazzo?

Clara: Belle gambe e bel culo ma soprattutto belle tette! Non ci rimanere così!  
(*she pushes him jokingly*). Sto con Rosa, la mia amica.

Nicolò: Ah!... sei un’arrusa...

Clara: Che sono?

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331 Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press Boston 2003), p.50.

Nicolò: Un' arrusa... una frocia...  
Clara: Più arrusa che frocia. (*they both laugh*)  
[50:20-50:51]

In a recent article that analyses the linguistic and cultural translation of the word queer in the Italian context, Michela Baldo underlines how many attempts at the 'rivendicazione dell'aspetto dispregiativo del termine "queer" ' <sup>332</sup> in Italy, especially in activist circles, have been made through 'termini con connotazioni simili presenti nel repertorio regionale italiano'.<sup>333</sup> Baldo reconstructs the history of this linguistic strategy in order to disprove the idea of the use of the term in the Italian context as simply an example of Anglophone cultural hegemonic domination. On the contrary, such a linguistic/cultural translation is for Baldo, who follows here Luis von Flutow's terminology, an example of a feminist translational strategy of hijacking and of translation as political action. In the dialogue between Clara and Nicolò, we can identify a similar strategy of appropriation/adaptation of the regional word 'arrusa', which, elsewhere in the movie, is openly used as an insult (by Saro against Samira). When presented with the Italian translation 'frocia', Clara decides to self-define and identify herself as 'arrusa' rather than frocia. Baldo's considerations in regard to the presence of the word queer in these activist translations, i.e. that the term indicates 'quel surplus che si accompagna alla soggettivazione, quell'eccedenza che interroga' more solidified and normative identities, can be here referred to Clara's choice to identify herself as 'arrusa' rather than 'frocia'. Moreover, Clara's character is not a southerner herself, hence the term can hardly be taken as signalling simply an identitarian, purely descriptive move but, rather, to indicate that 'surplus of subjectivation' to which Baldo refers, a way of distancing herself from the contemporary mechanisms of the neoliberal and nationalist valorization of LGBT subjects in contemporary Italy and transnationally that Haritaworn describes.

At the same time, the movie does not define southernness in terms of idealized and essentialized openness to diversity. Our attention is drawn to the

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<sup>332</sup> Michela Baldo, *Froce, femminielle, terrone, polentone e favolosità varie. Quando il queer è di casa* (2017), <http://www.queeritalia.com/blog/2017/5/13/frocie-femminielle-terrone-polentone-e-favolosita-varie-quando-il-queer-di-casa1>, [last accessed 10 December 2017].

<sup>333</sup> *ibid.*

gender hierarchy that informs the social structure of via Castellana Bandiera from the very beginning of the narrative and in many different ways after that. The authoritarian, violent and exploitative behaviour of many of the male characters towards women finds a powerful formulation in the idea of the betting pool organized by the men of the Calafiore family. We are also filled in on Samira's back story of exploitation and marginalization in a scene with comedic undertones, when, at the beginning of the stand-off, the ladies of via Castellana Bandiera sneak into Rosa's car to tell her her opponent's story and convince her to give up. Yet, Samira is without doubt not presented in any victimized way in this scene or in the movie. On the contrary, she is shown to be a woman who has an almost mythical reputation for stubbornness, a strong will and independence. Her role becomes almost an extended metaphor or an allegory. The movie chooses to have Samira almost never speak throughout the whole narrative. This choice amplifies her importance in the collective imagination of the street and the allegorical function of the character. More than once Samira is called 'cana ca un canusci patruni', a proverbial expression that seems to encapsulate her reputation and her cipher as a character. Such an association is reinforced when she is first introduced in the narrative: in the long initial sequence, Samira is shown feeding some stray dogs in the cemetery where her daughter is buried, letting them roam freely on her daughter's tomb and using the flowerbeds at the side of the grave as bowls for them to drink from; moreover, in this initial part of the movie, Samira is always shot from the back or from the side, with her hair covering her face, so as to conceal her face and her eyes. When she is first shot frontally, the camera takes the point of view of Saro who suddenly sees her up at the top of a high road overlooking the beach, standing on a wall that says 'forza palermo'.



Figure 7: Samira's first appearance in *Via Castellana Bandiera* (00.10.28)

Samira's is an allegory for the troubling effect of southern belonging, but she is also an allegory of foreignness and alterity. Samira's unruly nature is more than once explained by her being ethnically Albanian: as the audience is told first by Saro and later in the aforementioned scene with the ladies of the street in Rosa's car, Samira is an Arbëreshë woman from Piana degli Albanesi, a town not very far from Palermo, which was founded by Albanian emigrants fleeing Turkish invasion in the 15th century. Samira only seems to answer her grandson when he speaks to her in Arberesh and the few lines she pronounces, possibly as a ghost, are spoken in Arberesh. Like Medea, unpredictable, indomitable and identified by her place of origin, admired, feared and pitied by the chorus in Euripides' play, Samira seems to elicit the same reactions in the inhabitants of via Castellana Bandiera. Her exit from the narrative closely resembles Medea's flight from the Corinthian stage aboard the chariot of the sun. Like Medea, Samira is also a mother, and the movie aptly constructs a subtext that frames the relationship between Rosa, a daughter estranged from her mother, and Samira, a mother who has lost her only child, as a mother-daughter relationship. A feature that would easily and profitably lend itself to a sexual difference reading.

Samira's character can thus be read as an allegory for quite a vast, even vague, range of themes. While this characteristic is a way through which the

movie attains a high degree of complexity and multi-layered signification, it might, at the same time, take the text onto ethically shaky ground. As the more perceptive reviewers have noticed, in fact, despite the larger than life role attributed to Samira, the movie does not succeed in ‘getting under her skin’.<sup>334</sup> Elena Cotta herself, who won the Coppa Volpi at the Venice film festival for her interpretation of Samira, has said in an interview that she defines her role as ‘l’antagonista: l’antagonista è un pretesto’.<sup>335</sup> Samira can be read as a pretext for Rosa’s inner journey and transformation, for her battling and coming to terms with her southern belonging, with her mother, with her infancy. All in all, the film engages only very briefly with Samira’s ethnic background, with her history of internal migration or with an excavation of her motivations for engaging in the standoff, and it eliminates her at the end.

Similarly to *Terraferma*, then, *Via Castellana Bandiera* can be said to perform a certain silencing of the ‘different woman’, although Samira, due to being Arbereshe and Italian and Sicilian, complicates this distinction. However, her silencing, and an evocative and narrative reflection on subalternity, seems to be overtly thematised in *Via Castellana Bandiera*: this is one of the themes that the movie tries to explore. Differently from *Terraferma*, where the silence of the ‘different woman’ is contrived by the narrative structure and the realistic modes of the movie, in *Via Castellana Bandiera*, Samira’s silence is a deliberate choice of the character, a form of resistance, which Samira herself adopts for her own purposes and which creates a great deal of trouble for all of the other characters. If, in Spivak’s formulation, the subaltern woman’s experience is constantly appropriated by groups and constituencies whose interests and political purposes are quite distant from her own, in a way that nonetheless saturates her space of self-determination,<sup>336</sup> Samira’s silence can be legitimately read as a strategy to resist such appropriations and reclaim agency. Moreover, the non-realistic codes of representation the movie adopts especially in relation to Samira’s character,

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334 Jay Weissberg, *Venice Film Review: A Street in Palermo* (2013), <http://variety.com/2013/film/markets-festivals/a-street-in-palermo-review-venice-1200591845/>, [accessed 10 December 2017].

335 Televisionet Web TV, *Festival di Venezia 70 – Via Castellana Bandiera: Intervista a Elena Cotta* (2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhGqiqB0x9o>, [accessed 10 December 2017].

336 Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’.

her reappearance as a ghost and her evocative exit from the scene of the movie endow the character with elements of power and agency.

As is evident from the previous discussion, the movie foregrounds and explores various kinds of borders existing simultaneously and blurring the boundaries of different spatialities (north and south, centre and periphery, local, national and global, city and country), temporalities (modernity and tradition, past and present, the linear and progressive time of the neoliberal nation and the simultaneous temporalities of transnationalism) and of allegedly monolithic identities (class, gender, regional and national belonging, ethnicity, sexuality). These borders materialize and assemble themselves spatially in via Castellana Bandiera, at the periphery of one of the major southern Italian cities, where Rosa, the modern lesbian invested in a process of vertical class and ethnic mobility, and Samira, the ethnically marked and lower class older woman, come to stand one in front of the other: their opposition and the immobility they force on each other resonating with discourses and practices regulating various other kinds of mobility or congealing of identities. The movie constructs the south itself as a border-zone, a concept that, as Saskia Sassen writes, ‘entails opening up a line (represented or experienced as dividing two mutually exclusive zones) into a border zone that demands its own theorization and empirical specification’.<sup>337</sup> The first parts of the movie seem to be combined through a consistent use of practices of estrangement in all the different sections that introduce the main characters. Samira is first shown in the cemetery where her daughter is buried feeding some stray dogs: the familiar setting of the cemetery is rendered strangely unfamiliar by the decaying state of the tombs and graves, some of which seem to have been reduced to piles of rubble, and by the free and unhindered roaming of the dogs on the tombs and in the space of the cemetery. The already liminal space of the graveyard, a place inhabited by both the living and the dead, is presented in an even more defamiliarised way that calls into question hierarchies of human/animal, an impression confirmed at a later moment when Nicolò is seen eating a stolen bread roll, given to him by Samira, of the same kind she previously fed the dogs with. Moreover, the movie verges on the liminal poetic of the

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<sup>337</sup> Saskia Sassen, ‘Spatialities and Temporalities of the Global: Elements for Theorization’, *Public Culture*, 12(1) (2000), 215-232 (p.220).



gothic<sup>338</sup> in one of the final scenes when Samira, who has possibly already died in her car, reappears in the narrative as a ghost, entering her old house, carefully folding her nephew's clothes while gently reproaching him in Arberesh for his untidiness, and then lying on her bed to rest. A similar argument can be made on the way the text introduces Rosa's character. Rosa and Clara are first shown travelling on the highway approaching Palermo; the camera lingers on an old decaying church erected not far from the highway: the juxtaposition of the fast and modern highway on which Rosa and Clara's car is travelling and of the old church, a remnant from a past still present, creates a striking contrast blurring the boundaries of progressive temporality and of clear-cut, autonomous notions of past and present. This consistent and functionally diversified use of the estrangement effect all throughout this introductory part of the movie establishes the south as a liminal space from the very beginning of the narrative.

The status of the south as a frontier and a border is also central to the section of the narrative occupied by the duel between Rosa and Samira. The open citation the text makes of the spaghetti western genre in this part of the movie is geared towards a deterritorialisation of the 'spectacular masculinity'<sup>339</sup> that is a landmark of the genre. According to Maggie Günsberg, the spaghetti western 'is especially concerned with the borderline between different genders, sexualities and races. It both investigates and polices the boundaries of masculinity against the incursions of femininity and non-whiteness'.<sup>340</sup> *Via Castellana Bandiera* engages with and expands on the representational repertoire of the spaghetti western, which, according to Neale, is already marked by a fetishistic character that ambiguously reveals and at the same time conceals the eroticisation of the male body, in a subversive way that is in line with its attempt at queering the south as a border. In the central part of the narrative of the duel, Samira and Rosa are shown in their car eyeing each other with hostility; the camera goes from a close-up of Samira's face to one of Rosa's face. When one of the women of the

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338 Manuel Aguirre, 'Liminal Terror: The Poetics of Gothic Space', in *The Dynamics of the Threshold: Essays on Liminal Negotiations*, ed. by Jesús Benito & Ana M Manzanás (Madrid: The Gateway Press, 2007), pp.13-38.

339 Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle', *Screen*, 24.6 (1983), 2-17.

340 Maggie Günsberg, *Italian Cinema: Gender and Genre*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.214.

Calafiore family brings food to both of them, leaving a serving of pasta in each of their cars, first Samira and then Rosa get out of their cars and throw the food behind the wall that delimits the street. They then stand in front of each other, their legs open and their arms stiff, assuming the posture of the traditional western showdown. The text quotes the western movies very closely, first framing the two figures at a distance in their surrounding, then narrowing the frame progressively to a medium shot, to a close-up of their faces and then to the extreme close-ups of their eyes typical of the spaghetti western. But instead of drawing out their guns at the moment of maximum tension, Samira and Rosa resort to a different weapon: while standing immobile in front of Rosa and looking at her defiantly, Samira empties her bladder and lets her urine drip down her legs onto the floor, where it forms a pool. The camera follows the stream of urine and then enlarges its frame to show a squatting Rosa who, without breaking eye contact with Samira, is also urinating on the dirt. As scholars who have engaged with the representation of urine and urination in contemporary art have underlined, the use or representation of bodily fluids in art are often ways to 'oust or blank out patriarchal images'<sup>341</sup> by disrupting and subverting habits or expectations of a viewer or spectator who is familiar with the conventions of a certain genre.

As Neale explains, in the spaghetti western the fetishistic character of the eroticisation of the male body, although present, is ambiguously deflected by the narrative, which ensures that 'we see male bodies stylised and fragmented by close-ups, but our look is not direct, it is heavily mediated by the looks of the characters involved'<sup>342</sup> in the duel. In *Via Castellana Bandiera*, not only are the characters who look and are looked at both female, but their presentation is not eroticised in any classical way. Moreover, the surprising outcome of their confrontation, which substitutes the shoot-out with the urination, puts both the female characters in the diegesis and the extradiegetic spectator in the position of the fetishist, thus somehow circumventing a visual pleasure premised on identification with binary and complementary sexual difference, with both

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341 Gregory Minissale, 'The Invisible Within: Dispersing Masculinity in Art', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 20.1 (2015), 71-83 (p.71).

342 Neale, p.14.

patriarchal masculinity or normative femininity. Through this subversive reference to the spaghetti western, *Via Castellana Bandiera* redefines the space of the frontier, which in the spaghetti western is mostly constructed as an anxiously homosocial space, as a space for the exploration and playing out of female perversion and queer desire.

Although the movie does not engage directly with the theme of contemporary migration to Italy, its narrative revolves around questions of mobility and on the relationships among different social groups at the border: it thus creates a sort of frame of resonance with today's events and can be said to be preoccupied with it. This comes to the fore with great clarity at the end of the movie. Late at night, after the showdown between Rosa and Samira and shortly before Samira's death, a distant shot of via Castellana Bandiera with the two cars positioned one in front of the other reveals how the street, which was too narrow to allow the two cars to pass through at the same time, has actually become much larger. In the morning, the street has become even larger. Such a metaphorical conclusion prompts in the viewer a series of open-ended reflections on who can and cannot move, on how the mobility of certain social groups seems to be predicated on the immobility of other groups within discursive frameworks that posit these marginal groups one against the other and that depict them as homogenous and mutually exclusive. *Via Castellana Bandiera* thus effectively complicates mainstream ideas of migration, often seen only as immigration, and uses a different frame in which to raise questions about where and how cultures, languages, ethnicities, and identities meet. By connecting migration to questions of multiculturalism, multilingualism, southernness, and sexuality, the movie queers the imaginary related to the southern border and is able to explore the working of borders at many different levels.

## Jonas Carpignano's *Mediterranea* (2015): De-Centring the Hegemonic Gaze on the South

If *Terraferma* engages with the presence of black Africans in the south in ways that are mostly functional to the development of white southern Italian characters and *Via Castellana Bandiera* openly thematises the silencing of the non-Italian protagonist, Jonas Carpignano's first feature film, *Mediterranea*, can be said to de-centre the hegemonic white gaze on the south. The movie in fact centres on the Rosarno riots, which have been considered a topical moment for the political subjectivation of migrants in Italy,<sup>343</sup> and offers a representation of African migrants in the south that distances itself radically from the more current discursive frameworks that inform discussions on issues of migration in Italian media. Moreover, *Mediterranea* explores the transnational dimension of today's southern question especially in its representation of the relationship between migrants and locals in southern Italy, offering an interesting and unusual articulation of the issue of migration from and immigration to the south.

Since the early 1990s, Rosarno, like many other towns in the plain of Gioia Tauro, has been the destination for seasonal immigrants, mostly of sub-Saharan origin, coming from November to February to be employed in the harvesting of olives and citrus fruits. This is in line with what scholars have described as a 'Mediterranean migration model',<sup>344</sup> created after the restrictions on migration implemented by northern countries in the 1980s. Migrant workers employed in the agricultural sector in the Italian south are mostly irregular, asylum seekers waiting for a decision on their application or immigrants who have been rejected or whose residence permit has expired.<sup>345</sup> These migrants are often travelling from region to region following the harvesting season. In all the

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343 Federico Oliveri, 'Migrants as Activist Citizens in Italy: Understanding the New Cycle of Struggles', *Citizenship Studies*, 16.5-6 (2012), 793-806. Luca Cobbe and Giorgio Grappi, 'Primo marzo, percorsi di uno sciopero inatteso', in *La normale eccezione. Lotte migranti in Italia*, ed. by Maurizio Ricciardi and Felice Mometti, (Rome: Alegre, 2011), pp.55-90.

344 *The Mediterranean Passage: Migration and New Cultural Encounters in Southern Europe*, ed. by Russel King (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001).

345 Alessandra Corrado, 'Clandestini in the Orange Towns: Migrations and Racisms in Calabria's Agriculture', *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, 4.2 (2011), 191-201 (p.195).

different places where they go, migrants very often find themselves living in extremely unsafe conditions: in overcrowded squatted spaces, like abandoned factories or derelict country houses, with no running water, electricity or heating. Despite their young age - most of them are men in their twenties, although the number of women is also significant - their living and working conditions expose them to many health issues.<sup>346</sup> Migrants employed in the agricultural sector in the south are also heavily exploited by the mafia-controlled system of *caporalato*, the practice of illegally hiring day-labourers for extremely low wages through an intermediary, and, since the early 1990s, they have been the target of extreme acts of racism on the part of many local residents, some of whom may be tied to local criminal organizations. During the 1990s, at least six African migrant workers were murdered in or around Rosarno.

The migrant population has been organizing in order to improve its conditions and have its voice heard in various ways at least since 1999, when they sent a letter to the mayor of Rosarno, denouncing the continuous attack to which they were subjected and the extremely harsh conditions in which they were forced to live.<sup>347</sup> In December 2008, in the first demonstration autonomously organized by the migrants, hundreds of mostly African migrants marched through the streets of Rosarno. On January 7th 2010, after two Togolese migrants were seriously injured by three Italian local youngsters, migrants again took to the streets of the town: they destroyed shop windows, set cars on fire and engaged in clashes with the police.<sup>348</sup> Many among the local population responded violently against the rioters and migrants were beaten and shot during the night. In the following days, the police proceeded to move the migrant population away, officially in order to protect them from the rage of the Italians. In less than two days, almost 2,000 Africans left or were forcibly removed from Rosarno.<sup>349</sup>

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346 Carlo Colloca, 'De "ciudadanos" a "sujetos": los inmigrantes en el campo del sur de italia', *OBETS: revista de ciencias sociales*, 5.2 (2010), 221-241 (p 229).

347 Corrado, p.198.

348 'Rosarno. Altri 4 immigrati feriti. Spari e scontri in strada: e' battaglia', *Corriere della Sera*, 8 January 2010, [http://www.corriere.it/cronache/10\\_gennaio\\_08/rosarno-scontri-maroni\\_cef157a6-fc32-11de-98e4-00144f02aabe.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/cronache/10_gennaio_08/rosarno-scontri-maroni_cef157a6-fc32-11de-98e4-00144f02aabe.shtml), [accessed 10 December 2017].

349 John Hooper, 'Southern Italian town world's "only white town" after ethnic cleansing', *The Guardian*, 11 January 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/11/italy-rosarno-violence-immigrants>, [accessed 10 December 2017].

In her quantitative and qualitative study on the media coverage of the Rosarno riots in the two weeks following the events, Gabriela Jacomella notes the ‘almost overwhelming absence of migrant voices’<sup>350</sup> that characterizes the reports in the most important Italian daily newspapers, and the ‘lack of thoroughness and accuracy in providing background information and personal data’<sup>351</sup> about the migrant protagonists, while much larger space was given to politicians, officers, and in general to local residents. The representation of the migrants’ presence in Italy in the media coverage of the riots seems to follow more general stereotypical patterns according to which migrants in Italy are presented as either ‘a threat, a resource or victims of adverse circumstances’.<sup>352</sup>

In contrast to the media coverage of the events in Rosarno, but also to the ways in which migrants are often portrayed in contemporary Italian cinema, *Mediterranea* offers a description of the riots and of the larger context in which they took place, which restores the missing perspective from the narration by focusing on a main character who is a participant in the riots and whose journey is explored from its inception. Divided into two main parts, the movie follows the central character, Ayiva, first in his journey through the Sahara and the Mediterranean to Rosarno, and then documenting his life and the life of the other day-labourers in Rosarno and their involvement in the riots. Ayiva and his friend Abas are first shown in Algeria where Ayiva, originally from Burkina Faso, works for one of the people who organizes the smuggling of migrants through the Sahara. While in Algeria, Ayiva manages to find two places for himself and Abas on a boat that will transport them from Libya to Italy and, together with a group of other people, he himself risks the dangerous crossing of the desert during which the group is attacked by a band of armed men. Once in Libya, Abas and Ayiva, who have been robbed of their savings, have to ask Ayiva’s uncle, Ousman, who is waiting for them in Rosarno, to lend them some money in order

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350 Gabriela Jacomella, ‘The Silence of Migrants: The Underrepresentation of Migrant Voices in Italian Mainstream Media’, in *Destination Italy: Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative*, ed. by Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver and Federico Faloppa, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), pp.149-164 (p.158).

351 Jacomella, p.159.

352 Federico Oliveri, ‘La critica dei pregiudizi sui migranti come strategia contro le discriminazioni’, in *Lessico delle discriminazioni, tra società, diritto e istituzioni*, ed. by Thomas Casadei, (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2008), pp.73-94 (p.76).

to be able to pay for their places on the boat that will take them to Europe. The journey is risky and complicated: first, the man who was supposed to sail the raft refuses to do it, so Ayiva has to step in and sail himself, and then they are caught in a storm that threatens to overturn the boat. The group manages to save themselves and are rescued by a boat of the Italian navy. They are then taken to a CPT (*Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*) in Italy where Abas and Ayiva are given three months to find a regular work contract, which could allow them to obtain a residence permit.

Ayiva and Abas travel to Rosarno where they join Ousman and the rest of the African and Burkinabè community in the city. For both Ayiva and Abas, the realities of day-to-day life in Rosarno constitute quite a shocking realization: they have to adjust to living in the camp and come to terms with the difficulties of finding employment and with the fact that the Africans are the target of the locals' violence and racism. However, the movie does not indulge in the more depressing details of the Africans' lives in Rosarno; on the contrary, it follows Ayiva, closely chronicling the ways in which he manages to improve his situation, relying on the underground and informal economic networks of the camp, finding a job and a better place to live, and starting to send money to his sister Aseta and his daughter in Burkina who are cultivating the hope that they too can come to Europe one day. After having established a relationship of trust with Rocco, one of his employers, Ayiva ventures to ask him to employ him with a regular contract so as to allow him to get a residence permit and hence request a visa for his sister and daughter, but Rocco refuses to help him. This event, together with the escalation of violence against migrants, convinces Ayiva, who has, up to this moment, been shown to be quite hesitant to take an active role, to participate in the riots. After Abas is seriously injured during the riots, Ayiva starts considering the idea of going back to Africa; the ending of the movie does not dissipate the uncertainty about Ayiva's final decision, instead offering an evocative open-ended conclusion.

By choosing to explore Ayiva's life and journey prior to his arrival in Italy, and to adopt Ayiva's point of view on the events that take place in Italy, *Mediterranea* gives centre stage to the story behind the character and contributes to a more complex and nuanced understanding of the experience of migrants in

Italy, avoiding the pitfalls of the ways in which they are most commonly represented. Including but not indulging in the most depressing elements of Ayiva's life in Italy, the movie circumvents the danger of representing the migrants' experience as one of victimhood; it instead focuses on the ways in which they manage to establish networks of solidarity on which they can rely and on practices of community-making that allow them to carve out a place for themselves in a hostile and difficult environment. For example, the movie shows how Abas and Ayiva receive help and advice from the migrants who are already in Italy, and how they navigate the informal economic networks they have access to in order to slowly improve their material condition. In the scenes that focus on the arrival of the two friends in Rosarno, for instance, substantial space is given not just to the detailing of the aggressions that the Africans endure or of the very poor material conditions they find themselves in, but also to relating the playful moments the African migrants share and the ways they create communities. These communities include but are not limited to bonds based on nationality or on village or family ties and they encompass multiple places.

Considerable space is in fact given to showing how migrants cultivate a transnational sense of community through the use of communication technologies. Very often, Ayiva is shown talking to her sister and her daughter in Burkina through Skype; when in Algeria, Abas keeps informed on his friends' lives in Italy through Facebook, while pop music, usually played from a laptop or a phone as part of the diegesis, is a recurrent element. This emphasis on the use of digital technologies on the part of migrants seems to be in keeping with Arjun Appadurai's insight on mass migration and globalised media as two forces that could engender a rupture of modernity and of identities based on the nation-state, through their potential for influencing and changing the imagination.<sup>353</sup> *Mediterranea* points to the use of the mass media by migrants as an 'everyday cultural practice through which the work of the imagination is transformed'.<sup>354</sup> In a scene in which Ayiva, Abas and some of their friends are seen drinking together in a relaxed mood after a day of work, a young African woman uses a

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353 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp.1-23 (pp.3-11).

354 Appadurai, p.9.



laptop to play a song by the famous Barbadian pop singer Rhianna and starts dancing to the music proclaiming: 'Rhianna is my sister'. Abas answers by asking her if she knows Floby, a Burkinabè male singer, and the girl answers that she does not care for Floby, 'he is a motherfucking guy', while another girl chips in jokingly after she is shown a video on a phone of Floby singing saying 'Why are men from Burkina so sad?'. The scene points to the global circulation of pop music made possible through digital technologies not as something that produces a one-directional form of acculturation but as a form of appropriation and agency on the part of the receivers, users and consumers of technology and pop music. This is confirmed later in the movie, in a scene where Ayiva is shown talking to her sister and daughter on Skype. Ayiva has sent her daughter an Mp3 player as a gift and, as her sister tells him, the girl has not stopped playing and dancing to Rhianna's songs since she received the gift. The little girl then shows Ayiva how she dances to a Rhianna song, the same song the African girl in Italy dances to in the previous scene. Possibly with an inter-textual nod to Celine Sciamma's 2014 feature film *Bande de filles*, which includes a powerful sequence where a group of black French girls dance together in a hotel room to the tune of Rhianna's *Diamonds*, both of these scenes communicate, through the image of the dancing girl, a sense of freedom and joy, of possibility, female bonding and connection. The fact that both Ayiva's friend in Rosarno and Ayiva's daughter in Burkina dance to the same song acquires a poignant function in the diegesis, hinting at a de-territorialised form of connection and social bond that is able to transcend national boundaries and that is fostered by migration and technology. Although filtered through the gaze of the main male character, these scenes show how *Mediterranea* avoids the dangers posed by victimizing strategies of representation of women's experiences, which have become widespread in the mainstream media, but it also shows how it goes beyond the mere reflection on subalternity that is present, for example, in *Via Castellana Bandiera*.

The same trope of the dancing girl is also repeated mid-way through the movie when Ayiva, while delivering some crates of oranges at Rocco's house, sees his boss's daughter dancing by herself in front of the television and is possibly reminded of his own daughter amusing herself in quite a similar way. When considered together, the three scenes make evident the fact that

*Mediterranea* offers a comment on how flows of people through migration and mobility and of cultural content through globalised media can constitute multi-directional networks that redraw in new ways the boundaries of social groups and communities and allow for adaptation, agency, and points of rearticulation of identities at various points. In a significant way, the representation of the south that becomes evident in the scenes that foreground the use of digital technologies identifies the region precisely as one of the points where such rearticulations happen, a site where cross-cultural transfer and interaction occur. In a scene where Ayiva and one of his co-workers are invited to have dinner at Rocco's house, Rocco's little daughter shows Ayiva a video of a gathering of people, possibly a celebration, in what is most likely an African country (the narration does not provide further details) and she asks: 'È così al tuo paese?'; Ayiva answers: 'Non è così, ma più o meno così...', then she continues asking Ayiva questions about his country and what he likes about his country. Following a conversation in which the members of the family complain about how sensational the newscast that is being broadcast while they are having dinner is, this section of the narrative evokes the new potentialities of the use of digital technologies in contrast to older media and the possibilities it opens up for cross-cultural transfer, pointing to the south as the site of transcultural processes favoured by the use of these technologies and by the movement of people across borders.

The view of culture that emerges from the movie is, then, one of an entity constantly in the making, a site of open negotiation. The image of the Burkinabè community delineated by the movie, for example, is a multi-layered and complex one, as is evident from how *Mediterranea* represents the tension between Ayiva and his uncle Ousman. Ousman has been away from Africa for a long time and he is shown offering Ayiva and Abas help and support, albeit with a rather patronizing attitude, on more than one occasion. At the prospect of Ayiva's sister and daughter moving to Italy to join his nephew, Ousman has a rather negative reaction, stating that Rosarno, because of the life that most of the African migrants have there, is not a place for women. Ousman is probably also hinting at the idea that an African woman coming to Italy will most likely end up becoming a prostitute. Ayiva has a rather different view on the matter, ultimately asserting that Aseta should be able to choose for herself, to take risks if she wants

to, and that coming to Europe is ultimately her own desire. In contrast to Ousman's attitude, who thinks that he himself will be returning to Burkina at some point, Ayiva seems to be more open to the idea that he might instead stay in Italy and that Europe might become his home, while Ousman seems to see Italy and Europe as the place only for work.

Another way in which *Mediterranea* can be said to open up spaces of agency for the migrant subject in Italy comes to the fore when we take into consideration the movie's modes of production. In interviews at festivals or in newspapers, Carpignano describes how, after the riots in Rosarno, he decided to move to Calabria in order to better understand that reality and the context of the events.<sup>355</sup> In Rosarno, he met Koudous Sehion, the lead actor playing Ayiva, was very impressed by his character and charisma and tried to get him involved in the project. Notwithstanding Sehion's initial refusal, the two struck up a friendship. It was only after Carpignano and Sehion established a relationship of mutual trust that Sehion decided to collaborate in the movie and not just as an actor but providing material from his experience and working closely with Carpignano to decide on how to piece them together in a narrative structure. As Carpignano in fact makes a point of stressing in all of these interviews, *Mediterranea* is mostly based on Sehion's own story. Although some of the narrated events are entirely fictional, the majority of the situations in which Ayiva finds himself in the narration are based on Sehion's real experiences as a migrant both in Italy and in Africa. Before filming the movie, Carpignano travelled with Sehion to the actor's native town in Burkina Faso and from there to Libya through the desert route that is depicted in the movie in order to see for himself the places and the experiences of the people who were going to be a subject of the movie. Given this specific history and these features of *Mediterranea*'s production, the movie can be said to fall into the category of 'accented cinema', which Hamid Naficy has described

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355 See Carpignano's Q & A with the audience at the Lux Prize Award Ceremony in November 2015: Lux Film Prize, *Live Q&A With Jonas Carpignano* (2015), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qFRKRN-Xxw>> , [accessed 10 December 2017]; his interview at the Zurich Film Festival: Zurich Film Festival, *Jonas Carpignano talks about his film Mediterranea* (2015), <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vez4an5\\_7o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vez4an5_7o)> ; and the following interview in *La Repubblica*: Arianna Finos, 'Cannes e "Mediterranea": Carpignano racconta il viaggio dell'intergrazione', *La Repubblica*, 20 May 2015, [http://www.repubblica.it/speciali/cinema/cannes/festival2015/2015/05/19/news/cannes\\_jonas\\_carpignano-114767554/?ref=search](http://www.repubblica.it/speciali/cinema/cannes/festival2015/2015/05/19/news/cannes_jonas_carpignano-114767554/?ref=search) , [accessed 10 December 2017].

as based on ‘interstitial and collaborative’<sup>356</sup> forms of production. Like other movies discussed by Naficy under this rubric, *Mediterranea* cannot be said to be a marginal production; it has, after all, secured resources from important institutions and funding bodies, but it is rather an interstitial film, situated as it is between the margins and the centre of society and of the film industry. The collaborative nature of the production of *Mediterranea* stands out very much when compared to *Terraferma* and even to *Via Castellana Bandiera* and seems to corroborate the idea that a different mode of production is necessary in order to try to overcome the risks posed by the representation of cultural differences.

Some of the stylistic features adopted by the movie are geared exactly towards finding ways to allow the central character's point of view to emerge and his experiences to acquire centre stage without a surplus of interpretation coming from either an authorial voice or from the pressure exerted by a narrative development. The narrative plot in *Mediterranea* does not in fact assume a central role; rather, the movie adopts an almost documentary style that gives a lot of space to the description of everyday situations in which details acquire a revelatory and illuminating function, allowing the spectator to see things from a perspective that is rarely adopted in feature films on migration in Italy. Similarly to some texts by Italoophone African writers like Pap Khouma or Kossi Komla Ebri, many episodes recounted in *Mediterranea* are examples of ‘imbarazzismi’: the embarrassing situations into which many Italians sometimes put themselves when they interact with people whose background they are probably not very familiar with, and especially with black people. In these cases, a single line or a certain attitude can make evident the presence of deeply entrenched stereotypes and racist notions that manifest themselves even in civil interactions with well-meaning people. This is the case, for example, of the scene in which Rocco's little daughter, although in a playful and quite ‘innocent’ way, gratuitously insults Ayiva when she first meets him, or of the above-mentioned scene set at Rocco's house where, while sitting at the dinner table with Rocco's entire family, Ayiva becomes the object of casual and saucy remarks on the part of the grandmother of the family. Ayiva's character is often shown confronting these episodes with a

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356 Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p.40.

high dose of irony. Irony thus becomes in the movie a powerful strategy for denouncing, coping with, and resisting everyday episodes of subtle racism. The analysis of racism and anti-black racism is thus scutinised in the movie at both a macro, more systemic level, and at the micro, molecular level of everyday life.

The attention to everyday life and experience in *Mediterranea* is consistent with another feature that Naficy describes as characteristic of ‘accented cinema’, namely, what he calls ‘tactile optics’. Naficy describes how many exilic and diasporic filmmakers try to convey and creatively elaborate on the experience of migration by drawing attention to the various ways in which the body can feel and experience things, attempting at the same time to expand the language of movies, which has historically privileged sight over other senses.<sup>357</sup> One of the ways in which *Mediterranea* can be said to draw attention to the everyday experience of the body and to supplement the optic with the haptic is, for example, in the long take in which Ayiva is shown at night standing on the back of an open back truck, facing the direction the truck is driving in.



Figure 8: Ayiva (Koudous Seihon) on the back of the truck in *Mediterranea* (00.56.02)

The camera is held at the back and on the side of the character, and closely follows in close-ups the movements of his head turning right and left to look at

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<sup>357</sup> Naficy, pp.28-30.

the road and at the urban landscape. Ayiva's nape and profile in focus stand out against the blurry background where coloured indistinct lights move and sparkle. The long take allows the spectator to come to occupy Ayiva's embodied position in a way that is not coaxed by the plot or the narrative pressure, while the blurriness of the background contributes to moving the attention from sight to the other sensations Ayiva might be experiencing during the drive (the wind on his skin, for example). The soundtrack together with the shifting of the camera from moments when the background is in focus to moments when it goes out of focus renders the non-linear sense of 'tactile sensibilities'<sup>358</sup> and of the everydayness of embodied experience. This sequence can be put in relation with the final scene of the movie, which resembles the first one but has some important differences. After the riots and the aggression to Abas, Ayiva is in doubt whether to remain in Italy or return to Burkina. He is offered a job as a waiter at the birthday party of Rocco's daughter. At the end of the party, while Ayiva is finishing his shift, he is invited to go and drink with the guests of the party. Again, the camera frames Ayiva's head from the back facing the noisy room where blue and red lights and a popular Italian pop song from the eighties fill the space.

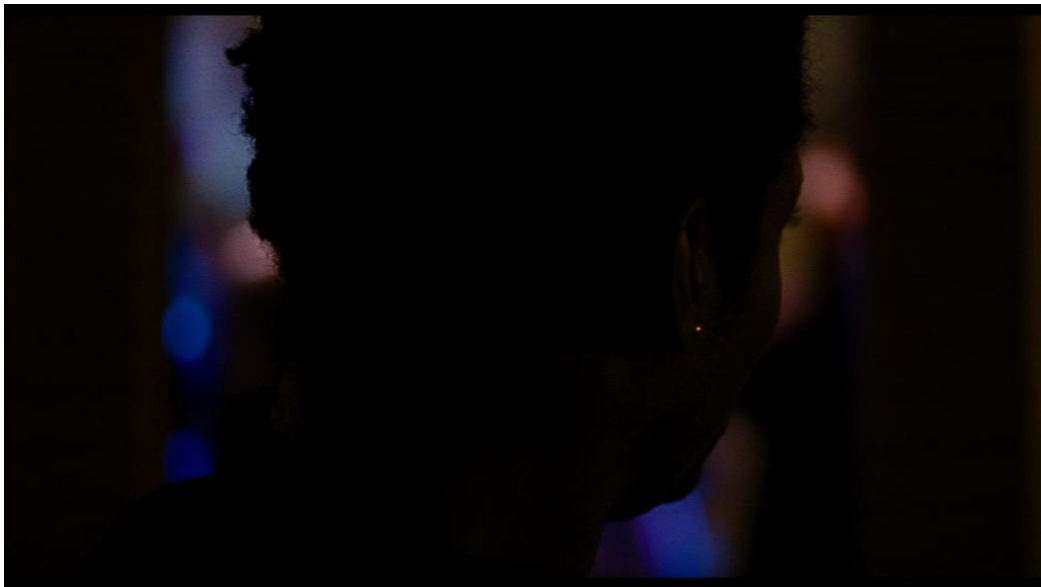


Figure 8: Ayiva at the party in the closing scene of *Mediterranea* (01.50.26)

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358 Naficy, p.28.

This time, the blurriness of the background and the insistent rhythm of the song seem to acquire a disturbing quality, while Ayiva's hesitation at joining the party in the adjacent room serves as a metaphor for the difficult decision he has to make on whether to stay in Italy or leave. In a still frame, the camera shows Ayiva's silhouette walking towards the music and the lights, progressively shifting out of focus and becoming part of the indistinct background. If the first scene seemed to evoke a feeling of *emplacement* in a new space experienced through the whole body, the final scene recombines the elements already present in the previous sequence in a rather different way, this time putting into relief the feeling and emotion of *displacement*, which can be said to be a cypher of the diasporic experience. Similarly to some of the narrative texts discussed in the first part of this work, attention to the embodied experience of migration in *Mediterranea* reveals itself to be a very effective strategy for exploring the connections between the local and the global and thus for illuminating the lived experience of transnationalism.

In its depiction of the relationship between Africans and locals, *Mediterranea* is able to explore various ways in which this relationship is inflected by racist and colonialist structures of thought and feeling. This is the case, of course, of the blatant episodes of racism against the Africans that the movie portrays, but *Mediterranea* is also able, as previously mentioned, to explore that 'grey zone' where racism and colonialism reproduce themselves even in the thoughts and behaviour of well-intentioned people. The scene when Ayiva first meets Rocco's daughter or the family dinner at Rocco's house are cases in point. Another interesting example is the depiction of the figure of Mamma Africa: not just a character but a real person and quite well known in Rosarno, Mamma Africa is a woman well into her sixties who runs a shelter where migrants can go and have a hot meal at the end of their long day of work. In *Mediterranea*, Mamma Africa is shown singing typical Calabrese songs, imparting lessons of good manners to the African migrants ('take your hat off while you eat,' she says to one of the boys in the scene set at her house), and explaining how, since the Africans have left their mothers at home, she wants to act towards them as a good mother would. The scene emphasizes the very

condescending attitude that Mamma Africa displays towards the African migrants, but, at the same time, it shows how the teasing response on the part of the Africans to the behaviour Mamma Africa has towards them seems to defuse what could be offensive in her attitude.

*Mediterranea* also shows how the locals' behaviour towards the Africans also seems to be dependent on, or influenced by, a certain narrative of the south and a specific interpretation of the region's history, especially its history of emigration. In a sequence situated shortly before the riots, Ayiva asks Rocco, who now trusts him and appreciates him for his qualities as a reliable worker, to help him with his legal status, asking him for a regular contract, which would allow Ayiva to apply for a residence permit and hence to obtain a visa for his daughter and sister. Rocco's answer is particularly revealing: he denies Ayiva help but with quite an interesting argumentation. Rocco starts by telling Ayiva that his grand father was a migrant in New York who had to work hard, and that he would never have made it without the help of his family and closer kin who had also migrated to the United States before him. Rocco seems to imply that Ayiva has to trust and rely only on his immediate family for help, just because that is how things work. Rocco's answer is interesting because it goes beyond any simple analogy or limiting comparison between Italians' emigration of yesteryear and today's migration to Italy, showing how recourse to the south's history of emigration can be made to serve quite a conservative and discriminating purpose. Such a formulation of an argument that links in this way emigration from and migration to Italy counters the idea that southern Italy, because of its history of emigration, is somehow vaccinated against or intrinsically immune to discrimination against migrants. Yet, on the other hand, it seems to resort to an explanation based on the sort of 'amoral familism'<sup>359</sup> that a prejudiced anthropology, now very much criticized,<sup>360</sup> has assigned to the Italian south as a defining 'cultural trait'. At other points, the narrative of *Mediterranea* indulges in superficial representations of complex phenomena like the pervasiveness of organized crime in the social fabric of the south: this is registered in the movie through the menacing and disruptive presence at various

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359 Edward C. Banfield, *Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, (Glencoe IL: Free Press, 1958).

360 Paul Ginsborg, *Stato dell'Italia* (Milano: Mondadori, 1994), pp.78-80.



points of the movie of a group of young locals belonging to the mafia in different spaces where the migrants interact. The same group of people is seen to attend the party thrown for Rocco's daughter in the final scene, thus hinting at the collusion with organized crime of various social sectors of the society of Rosarno. Even if the movie is keen to differentiate between members of organized crime and petty criminals through the sympathetic representation of the character of Pio, a young boy from a very poor neighbourhood in Rosarno who trades stolen goods with the migrants, its representation of organized crime and especially of collusion with the mafia remains fairly cursory and could lend itself to risky generalizations about southern society. If, then, the representation of the south in *Mediterranea* on one hand sheds new light on the region as a nodal point in networks of migration and as a site where migrants are able to carve out a space for themselves in a hostile environment, also participating in cross-cultural interactions with local communities, some features of the representation of the region remain quite perfunctory and seem to be informed by commonplace views on southern society.

## Conclusion

All of the three movies analysed in this section are preoccupied with the status of the Italian south as a border today and with the internal diversity of Italian and southern Italian society, but all of them refer to more long-standing discursive frameworks related to the south. *Terraferma*, while attempting to explore simultaneously the marginalization experienced by both southerners and migrants, is not able to achieve a balanced representation and to explore the connections between the two phenomena. Moreover, it participates in giving an idea of the culture of the south as somehow 'pure' and unchanging. *Via Castellana Bandiera* expands commonplace notions of migration through the

recovery of ancient experiences of mobility that have permanently altered the social fabric of the south, thus highlighting the history of the south as a cultural crossroad, and through references to internal migration. *Mediterranea* depicts southern Italy as a borderzone where cross-cultural transfer, facilitated by flows of people and by digital technologies, contributes to creating new venues of subjectivation for both migrants and locals. At the same time, the movie articulates the theme of emigration from the south and contemporary migration to the south in an original way.

The three visual texts explore with various degrees of success the differential working of borders and the way they have an impact on subjects differently positioned across lines of gender, race, sexuality and class. The idealized version of southern culture that *Terraferma* resorts to is represented through a normative view of sexual difference and an evident although subtle stigmatization of queer desire. Moreover, the movie falls into a victimizing representation of the migrant woman, which strips her of agency. On the contrary, *Via Castellana Bandiera* skillfully dramatizes the silencing of the ‘different woman’. In Dante’s movie, the exploration of the simultaneous articulation of queerness and southernness is a way to queer the traditional image of the frontier and to offer an evocative elaboration on how identities are shaped, mobilized and played against each other in the neoliberal context. Going beyond the reflection on subalternity, *Mediterranea* alludes to the possibilities of establishing connections among women across divides of nationality and culture. The movie decentres the hegemonic white gaze on the south by focusing on the ways in which migrants try to make a home for themselves in Italy. Differently from the other movies here analysed in conjunction with it, *Mediterranea* tests new ways of restoring migrants’ agency in the narration of the events of Rosarno, also making use of collaborative and interstitial strategies of production.

## Conclusion

As we have seen in the previous parts of this work, scholars in the fields of contemporary Italian literature and contemporary Italian cinema have noticed in the last thirty years an increasing centrality, in both novels and movies, of themes related to cultural interaction and intercultural exchange. This shift certainly reflects the changes that migration to Italy has brought about in the social fabric of the country. Migrant writing, postcolonial writing, and the increased visibility of some now well-known second generation writers are a clear sign of this transformation. As Jennifer Burns has noted in her study of the literary production of first-generation migrant writers, the fact that many ‘fully’ Italian writers gravitate towards themes of mobility and migration signals the fact that ‘migration, the postcolonial, and non-European cultures more broadly are an increasingly central, coherent, and historically situated figure of the Italian cultural imagination’.<sup>361</sup> Given the insights gained through the analysis of contemporary literary and filmic production on/from the south, or that make the imaginary related to the south one of their prominent features, we can see how an exploration of notions of southernness is also gaining a new centrality. The external other coming to the fore on the national stage evokes and brings back the memory of internal otherness and ignites processes of comparison, parallelism, and a consideration not only of resemblances and similarities but also of moments of contact and interaction between the Italian south and other souths.

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<sup>361</sup> Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries*, p.203.

Certainly, the various texts analysed in this work show a high degree of engagement with the historical marginalization of southerners in ways that go beyond the traditional meridionalistic stance: they in fact try to put at the centre of their interest the experiences of those directly marginalized by projects of modernization and of nation-building in the past and in the present with a renewed cultural awareness. Through the analysis of these different texts, we can see how the politics of these novels and movies differ in their assumptions on how to treat cultural differences. For example, Santangelo's novel tends to incorporate ethnic and sexual differences but without letting the focus of her text and the style of her language be shifted by these encounters on the page of the novel. On the contrary, Angioni's style explores the transcultural space that opens up between languages and cultures, thus challenging the homogenizing drive of the nation from a variety of points of view, as the speech of the text's omniscient narrator is profoundly changed by the main character's relationship with Warui. Ornela Vorpsi's highly 'impure' Italian and her deterritorialized narrative technique lend an original perspective to her exploration of the censored Mediterranean connections of Albania (including the one with Italy). In Vorpsi's and in Angioni's texts, we can see how the south-to-south link - which Mignolo refers to as a way to counter the hegemony of 'globalization from above' - eschews the dangers posed by falling back onto rhetorics of universality or equality. On the contrary, it fosters 'diversality' and produces new cultural configurations that are the product of an unusual interlinking.

Contemporary works from southern Italian writers and directors refer to the history of marginalization of the region and take to task the dominant representation of it; they especially do so through focusing on mobility and referencing the history of southern emigration. Santangelo's and Angioni's novels, as well as Crialese's and Dante's movies, focus on the experience of individuals whose sense of belonging is not necessarily tied to the Italian nation but is linked to a regional identity. This emphasis on local identities challenges any monolithic conception of Italianness and recovers the plurally diasporic dimension of Italian emigration that Donna Gabaccia has theorized. The 'transnationalism from below' that the novels and the movies explore sheds light on experiences of migration that exceed official discourses and defy attempts at

national re-appropriation by stressing the strongly local component of the cultural traits of the characters. At the same time, by focusing on the relationship between southern and migrant characters whose lives are similarly but differently marked by migration, these texts are able to bring to the fore, with varying degrees of prominence and of cultural and historical awareness, the complex postcoloniality of the contemporary south: a region marked as 'other' in the history of the nation, and which is today the entry point towards Europe and the West for an increasing number of people coming from various, more southern countries. A region moreover characterized by its own internal diversity and history of internal migration, which is referred to, for example, by Dante's movie in order to queer the imaginary of the southern frontier. A novel like *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, on the other hand, succeeds in illuminating the meaning and the contemporary effect that the experience of Italian colonialism has on the lives of postcolonial subjects, while at the same time deconstructing ideas of Italy as a 'terra promessa'. Moreover, Vorpsi's text posits both Albania and southern Italy as points on a common Mediterranean map in a way that lends credit to the discussion of a Mediterranean polyphonic culture offered by Chambers. All of these texts testify to the growing centrality that the various dimensions and meanings of the postcolonial is attaining in Italian cultural production. They demonstrate how the southern question today re-emerges at the forefront of the collective imagination as a phenomenon that goes beyond the tenets of the nation but that urges a re-examination of processes of regional and national identity formation *vis-à-vis* the nation itself. The simultaneous exploration in these texts of emigration, of immigration and of various forms of colonialism that engendered different forms of mobility displaces binary models of identity and singular forms of belonging with a space for the articulation of multiple identities and subjectivities.

The analysis of the texts also demonstrates how they consider simultaneously different phenomena of racialization and the mutual constructions of race, gender, and sexual identity. In Santangelo's novel, for example, the racist views expressed by some of the characters are often informed by considerations related to gender and sexuality. In Angioni's text, the different experiences of racialization of the southern Italian character and of the Kenyan

character are compared and brought to bear on their different experience of masculinity. Vorpsi's text constitutes a powerful exploration of how gender and sexuality are shaped by transnational dynamics. By looking at the intersections of race, gender and sexuality, we can see how these texts sometimes reiterate representations that are informed by colonialist attitudes. On the other hand, we can also see how they can illuminate complex experiences of racialized sexism and sexualized racism, or shed light on subjective tensions between sexual and ethnic belongings; descriptions of these experiences are very common in many of the texts. Carpignano's movie and Angioni's novel, for example, draw attention to the hyper-sexualization of the black male using different stylistic modes. While in Santangelo's novel the representation of queerness at the southern border seems to be quite idealized and unproblematized, Dante's *Via Castellana Bandiera* probes the strictures and the intricacies of such a subject position, offering simultaneously a comment on the relationship between modernity, sexuality and cooptation into processes of nation-building in the south.

By charting the ways in which contemporary writers and directors (both southerners and migrants) are re-imagining the south with a renewed intercultural awareness, this research has shown the emergence of a new subjectivity in the Italian south: a subjectivity that, when confronted with the phenomenon of international migration, is urged to re-interpret its own experience of migration and colonization, thus developing new modes of thinking about itself and its position in the national imaginary; but also a subjectivity that, in the process, opens up to re-envisioning and re-articulating its own identity informed by the interest in and knowledge about other cultures and parts of the world, other near or distant souths. By developing a transnational and intersectional framework to look at texts on or from the Italian south and on contemporary migration to the south, this research has offered a novel account of how the real-life experiences of transnationalism are encoded in contemporary movies and novels and how the encounter of southerners and migrants, the hybridization of these two categories into new configurations of culture and identity (and the difficulties of such processes), is put into figures in order to challenge monolithic and fixed notions of 'Italianness'.

If the mainstream strand of *Meridionalismo* has looked at the south always in comparison to the north and as a place of never accomplished modernity, as the opposite of progress and civility, as an anomaly to rectify, thus inventing both the north and the south, this recent artistic production on or from the south, in line with many new theoretical developments that were analysed in the first part of this work, show how these elements of conventional ‘knowledge’ of the region are displaced or reconfigured by much more pluralized and diverse perspectives. First and foremost, they do so by returning to an analysis of the history of the south, thus unearthing the historical reasons and the material causes for such an anomaly. Thus, the history and the legacy of both emigration and colonialism are recovered as the hidden side of the official history of the south, and they are juxtaposed with the present predicament of the region. The south is seen in these novels and movies as the site of transnational relationships that have profoundly altered the culture of the region and not just in a binary relation with its constitutive opposites: Italy and the north. This is a major epistemological shift in the conception of both the south and of Italy. Preciado writes that the invention of the south has followed a binary logic, where the south is the effect of ‘un’epistemologia binaria che oppone alto e basso, spirito e corpo, testa e piedi, razionalizzazione ed emozione, teoria e pratica.’<sup>362</sup> which makes of the region ‘un mito sessualizzato e razzializzato’<sup>363</sup> according to which ‘il sud è animale, femminile, infantile e poco virile’.<sup>364</sup> Many of the texts analyzed in this thesis, which are representative of a much larger corpus of works, are very aware of and actively challenge this binary codification of the south, and they do so from a variety of points of view. These texts thus demonstrate how, after the process of invention of the south, which, as Preciado’s discussion shows, has gone hand in hand with the invention of the north, a new material and cultural process of re-invention of the south premised on different tenets is under way. This re-imagining of the Italian south explores the south-to-south connections of the Italian south and in so doing contributes indispensably to an ever urgent re-

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<sup>362</sup> Preciado.

<sup>363</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*

imagining of Italy as a whole and to a reconfiguration of the relationship between the local, the national and the global.



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